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Elizabeth Conley / The Detroit News

**Craig Plesco works on his podcast, East Detroit Radio, out of his St. Clair Shores home. With just a computer, microphone and podcasting software, anyone can create radio on their own terms.**

## iPods offer radio with no rules

Downloadable broadcasts skirt federal rules and let anyone be a DJ.

By Susan Whittall / The Detroit News

Computer on -- check. Microphone plugged in -- check. Lava lamp going -- check. East Detroit Radio is on the air, with Craig Plesco podcasting from his "treehouse bedroom" in St. Clair Shores.

A voice heavy with reverb intones: "Hello, this is Spiderman ... when I'm not off saving the world, I listen to East Detroit Radio ... " After a funky instrumental intro, Plesco plays a song by indie rockers Thirteen Black that you'll never hear on commercial radio.

This is podcasting, the



Al Goldis / Associated Press

**Michigan State sophomore Kevin Smith, 19, of Rochester Hills keeps up with Spartan football through podcasts.**

## What is a podcast?

A podcast is an audio file that someone

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### Technology

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- Buyouts of AT&T and MCI just another sign of long distance's steady demise
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democratic expression. There's no FCC regulation, no station manager, no ads and no paychecks. It isn't broadcasting but narrowcasting to those who choose to download the audio file from the Internet onto their iPods.

It may sound like a fringe, geek hobby, but podcasting is actually the latest way entertainment is morphing into an on-demand, Tivo style of delivery.

While it's a grassroots communication tool now, big corporations like General Motors are testing the waters.

"The neatest thing about podcasting is that it takes you back to the pamphlet days of 1776 when Patrick Henry and those guys were doing all that 'Give me liberty or give me death' stuff," said Scott Westerman.

His day job is region vice president for Mediacom Communications in Illinois, but at night the Ann Arbor native and radio veteran programs two weekly podcasts, one for Michigan State alumni and another on 1960s Detroit radio station WKNR.

"In the 1770s, anyone could write a pamphlet," Westerman said. "Blogging is the modern version of that.

"But podcasting is better than blogging, because the spoken word conveys much more emotion than the written word."

Podcasters like Plesco love the fact that they can podcast with no intervention from a boss or the FCC.

"Here in Detroit, there's not a lot of exposure for indie rock," Plesco said. "A lot of the stations are owned by Clear Channel, with a 20-song playlist. So a lot of people want

posts online. Listeners download the podcast onto an iPod or MP3 player, then listen to it whenever they please.

## The world of podcasting

Here's where you can find some interesting podcasts:

- Podcastalley.com lists top 50 podcasts. You can also search for topics.
- East Detroit Radio, a Wayne State student spins indie rock, much of it from Detroit: [www.eastdetroitradio.com](http://www.eastdetroitradio.com)
- General Motors' debut podcast: <http://fastlane.gmblogs.com>
- Podcasting pioneer Adam Curry's daily show: [www.dailysourcecode.com](http://www.dailysourcecode.com)
- The Dawn and Drew Show. Ranks as the top podcast, probably because Dawn uses any topic to drone on about sex: [www.dawnanddrew.com/dnds.php](http://www.dawnanddrew.com/dnds.php)
- The Spartan Podcast: Several MSU telecommunications/radio vets chatter about news of interest to Michigan State alumni: [www.spartanpodcast.com](http://www.spartanpodcast.com)
- NPR show "On the Media" offered as a podcast by originating station WNYC: [www.wnyc.org](http://www.wnyc.org)
- The Vinyl Podcast, on which a fan plays "fair use of forgotten music," all old vinyl records: <http://vinylpodcast.com>
- Keener13.com: Music and talk about the '60s Detroit radio station.
- The Enlightened Spartan. Sorry Wolverines, we looked in vain for a U-M podcast. Here an anonymous Spartan rants and raves on the (so far) only college football podcast in the country: <http://enlightenedspartan.com>

## Podcasting 101

### To listen to a podcast

- If an MP3 audio file is available, you can listen from your computer simply by clicking and playing on your media player. Podcastalley.com lists the top 50 podcasts and offers a search option.
- To listen to a podcast on an iPod, you have to move the podcast from the Internet onto your iPod or portable MP3 device. For that you'll need an aggregator. Some of the major ones are iPodder, iPodderX or Doppler. Go to [ipodder.org](http://ipodder.org) for information on how to download those programs.

### To podcast

- To podcast your own program, you need a computer, an Internet connection and a microphone that you plug into the computer.
- Download the recording/mixing software. If you have a Mac, you can podcast with the GarageBand program

conference

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## Sections for this date

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and share what they like."

The appeal of many podcasts is the raw, real-life quality -- like banal marital chatter between a couple living in rural Wisconsin (the "Dawn and Drew Show").

But the landscape is changing daily, and those podcasting wearing slippers, sitting in their bedrooms, are watching warily as big business steps in.

General Motors, whose 70-something design chief Bob Lutz writes an online blog from his Blackberry, is the first major corporation to get involved, posting its debut podcast two weeks ago.

WNYC New York Public Radio is the first radio programmer to podcast, posting its National Public Radio-distributed show "On the Media."

Phil Redo, WNYC's vice president of operations, thought podcasting was a way to reach the many subway commuters he saw plugged into their iPods or MP3 players on the way to work.

"Radio's a funny thing, a very linear format," Redo said. "You can only hear a show if you tune in at the same time we broadcast it. The future is, 'I like this show, but I am busy at the time it's on. I'll listen to it when I want to.'"

Redo doesn't see podcasting as a geek hobby.

"We're being pragmatic about this," Redo said. "We need to look down the road and say, what is the future? A lot of younger people won't use radio the way the current generations do. Podcasting will extend our reach and potentially deepen relationships by allowing people to listen when we're not transmitting."

## Diverse voices

Michigan State sophomore Kevin Smith, 19, of Rochester Hills is one of those younger consumers. The telecommunications major is rarely apart from his iPod, on which he listens to WNYC's "On the Media," the "Enlightened Spartan" MSU football podcast, and many others.



Al Goldis / Associated Press  
**Joseph Johnson, aka Maryland podcaster "DJ JJ": "Podcasting is still a little tech-y ... But**

"It's going to have a huge impact," Smith said of podcasting. "There are huge barriers to getting into radio. You've got FCC licensing that could take a long time and cost thousands of dollars to even start broadcasting. A lot of groups or opinions that are considered too controversial aren't allowed on the radio. Now anyone with a microphone, a computer and an Internet connection can disseminate information. It allows for a lot of different voices to be heard in the media landscape."

Podcasting got a jump-start last summer when Adam Curry, a former MTV veejay, with the aid of an army of computer geeks, developed the software that enables people to podcast or listen to podcasts, available at ipodder.org.

The London-based Curry produces a daily podcast

that's on your machine. For PCs, you can download audacity free at <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>.

- Next, you need to teach yourself how to create a feed using RSS or XML, which enable people to download their podcast onto a device.

- For instructions on how to do that and other podcasting issues go to [ipodder.org](http://ipodder.org), [podcastingnews.com](http://podcastingnews.com) or [www.podcasting-101.com](http://www.podcasting-101.com).

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it, creating a podcast was very simple." from Monday through Friday ([www.dailysourcecode.com](http://www.dailysourcecode.com)) on which he touts new podcasts, plays songs and rails against the music establishment.

As a TV and radio veteran, Curry's presentation is polished and crisp. But many more podcasts are done by nonprofessionals, on the fly, in bedrooms and basements across the U.S.

Since December, Joseph Johnson, a Maryland government employee, has produced a podcast called Urban Soul Nation. As "DJ JJ," he plays R&B and hip-hop and leads lively discussions on topics of the day.

Johnson already had a microphone and a computer, but he had to teach himself how to encode podcasts and put them online,

"Podcasting is still a little tech-y," Johnson said. "You have to be -- I don't want to say geekish -- but you have to know how to write hypertext and markup language. That was the hardest hurdle, to understand what the heck RSS encoding is. But once I read up on it, creating a podcast was very simple."

## **GM joins in**

Because podcasting still has a somewhat outlaw, anti-corporate aura, GM's entry into the podosphere is an interesting development.

According to Michael Wiley, GM's director of new media, after it started Web-streaming auto show announcements last year and posting Lutz's blog in October, making podcasts was a natural evolution for the automaker.

"The feedback I've gotten from the blog pundits is that no one else of our stature has done one," Wiley said.

But GM caught some flak for its bare-bones approach. Its podcast consists of the audio of some of its Chicago Auto Show vehicle introductions, complete with applause from the press.

"Even though it's still an emerging medium, people are extremely protective of the sanctity of podcasting," Wiley said with a laugh. "But enthusiasts appreciated hearing our vehicle introductions. To think it's etched in stone how you do a podcast is limiting. We're learning just as everyone else is."

For GM, podcasting is tantalizing because it offers the automaker direct communication with consumers. "It's grassroots communication, having these one-on-one conversations," Wiley said.

The new media director foresees someday having a podcast for Corvette enthusiasts and other niche interests. So far GM has just one podcast up and running, but executives met last week to discuss their next step.

For the moment, podcasting is largely unmonitored, but organizations such as ASCAP (the American Society of Composers and Publishers) and BMI (Broadcast Music International) are sniffing around.

ASCAP and BMI, which collect money on behalf of musicians and songwriters, already will negotiate podcasting licenses to those who want to be "legal" when they play music.

Westerman has a podcasting license to play music on [keener13.com](http://keener13.com), but many podcasters like Plesco of East Detroit Radio and Johnson of Urban Soul Nation get around the regulators by using only independently released or unreleased music submitted to them by the acts.

"I put fliers around at Wayne State soliciting music," Plesco said.

The podcaster said it would still add up to too much money for him,

about \$700 he estimates, between ASCAP and BMI, so he's sticking with indie music.

For better or worse, most broadcast radio programmers aren't losing any sleep over podcasting.

"I can't compare it to what radio does," said Carol Lawrence Dobrusin, vice-president and general manager of Radio One in Detroit, which owns WDMK (102.7 Kiss FM), WCHB-AM (1200) and WDTJ-FM (105.9). "For someone to do their own thing, it's not the same as us producing a morning show.

"Our sound is so highly refined and it's a science. So it's a long way off before the audience, who has a trained ear, will choose Billy's iPod site to listen to over radio."

But most podcasters relish the fact that their medium is still dominated by amateurs, rather like broadcast radio back in the early 1920s.

Thus, when GM podcasts, even clumsily, it sends a shiver through the podcasting world, although apparently many podcasters weren't too pure to hit up the automaker for sponsorship dollars, according to Wiley.

East Detroit Radio's Plesco fears that corporations will squeeze the amateurs out of podcasting, as they did with the broadcast airwaves.

But it's the democratic quality of the medium that most delights Wiley, GM's director of new media.

"People had such fear about the concentration of media ownership, with just a few major corporations owning much of the media," Wiley said. "But all of a sudden these two new ways of communicating, blogging and podcasting, have emerged. And it's more democratic than the media has ever been."

*You can reach Susan Whitall at (313) 222-2156 or [swhitall@detnews.com](mailto:swhitall@detnews.com).*

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