

The Use of Podcasts in a Marketing Campaign

Podcasts are short radio-style audio programs that users of online audio, mobile audio and iPods (or other portable digital audio players) can download and listen to whenever and wherever they like. The Pod cast medium is still in its infancy as a marketing medium.

The most effective use in these early days of marketing with Podcasts involves subjects that appeal to tech-savvy listeners. Obviously, that includes topics in computing, multimedia, and high technology.

Another smart approach is to match Podcast marketing with the lifestyle of the target audience. For example: skiers. The target market for a typical ski resort includes young professionals in the 20s and 30s, with an adventure-loving attitude to recreation, and plenty of disposable income so that they can afford the sport. That's right on target for the core market that buys iPods and other high-tech gadgets.

Marketing Sherpa reports that New England ski area Killington Ski Resorts recently tapped into this useful convergence of market niches to create a Podcast-driven marketing campaign.

The challenge was to reach the ideal demographic of young urban professionals, who are typically hard to get at through traditional ski industry marketing media such as radio, TV and magazines. Their lives are cluttered with a blizzard of conflicting media, their attention fragmented and hard to hold.

Killington Resorts communications manager Tom Horrocks recognized that one unifying factor of this demographic is their almost cultish love of iPods and portable digital audio. He decided that Podcasts would be an ideal way to connect with them on their own terms.

Here's how he put the campaign together:

- 1) bought software and digital microphones that his team could use right in the office to create Podcasts.
- 2) hired a "snow reporter / media writer" to act as a personable and enthusiastic character, to become identified as the Podcast voice of the resort.
- 3) developed and produced 3 separate Podcasts: a 3-minute "Snowcast" of daily weather and snow condition reports; a 12-minute weekly "Driftcast" that delivered interviews, tips and stories from the mountain; and a 3-hour weekly music production, more like and FM radio segment, with music appealing to the target demographic.
- 4) delivered the Podcasts regularly, on schedule, through popular distribution services including Apple's iTunes online music service, Podcast Alley, and Yahoo!, as well as through the Resorts' own Web site.

The results were impressive. Over a period of 2 months at the beginning of 2006, the Podcasts were downloaded nearly 30,000 times. The downside of Podcast marketing is that it is hard to track results. Once the audio is downloaded, there's no built-in way to measure how the listener responds or takes action.

However, Tom Horrocks is sure the Podcasts delivered a good return on investment. He credits the campaign's success to the flair of the resort's Podcast personality, known as Anna of the Mountain. "She epitomizes Killington: young, passionate, crazy about skiing."

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