

# Marketing matters

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## Log off, tune out

Many business services firms have to be pushed and cajoled into improving their websites to attract new clients. But they should think twice before adopting a fading fad of the internet - podcasting. Anyone holding a professional job and riding the bus or train to work, jogging in the park, or doing tai-chi on the beach, is a target for a business podcast. But is anyone listening? Most of the joggers seem to be grunting in time to some new hip hop beat. And most of the public transport commuters seem to be doing the same thing.

Podcasts are gaining in popularity and are quickly becoming Australia's new marketing strategy, along with YouTube and MySpace. Surprisingly, this "popular" new medium is not drawing the anticipated listeners. According to Thomson Financial, less than 3 per cent of their global customers (more than 4000) have subscribed to use its podcasts or downloadable audio files. Their research finds that consumers don't want to listen to financial and other technical podcasts outside of work.

In the business services sector, podcasts seem to miss the mark. Information technology companies no longer charge fees per user hit. The norm is now to charge a flat rate.

Since its arrival in 2004, podcasting has plundered its way into the Australian market, gaining increasing popularity among corporate organisations. Businesses were quick to favour this new medium of communication and the trend has continued. With advances in technology, podcasts are fairly easy to record and transmit and are hosted on a website for accessibility. It's a simple, cost-effective process. Businesses see this as a new marketing strategy worth investing in.

While it is possible to see the benefits of it being an easily accessible medium, where target audiences can log on at their convenience and download information onto their computers and MP3 players, how many people are doing it?

When podcasts were introduced to Australia, listeners were curious and tuned in. But as more businesses decided to embrace this new medium, somehow listeners dwindled. Research by companies such as Thomson Financial report increasing numbers of companies signing up for them. But is there a yardstick by which to measure who is out there tuning in?

Businesses do themselves a disservice by continuing with a trend that shows little return from the clients they are meant to attract. Clever marketing strategies are not effective unless they yield results. Being "with it" or "cool" isn't enough for professional services firms. In a world of excessive information, there are few opportunities to get the message across and every one of those must be harnessed for maximum results.

Podcasts might find their value when they are offered to members of associations or students. Podcasts can be transmitted to remote geographic areas and can support continuing education. Where information is required for a specific purpose and consumers have to fulfil obligations or education needs, the likelihood of participation is higher.

Meanwhile, business services firms should look to the future and evaluate other online mediums for marketing themselves, such as slivercasting and the popular YouTube.

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