

## Podcasts, blogs reaching customers

By Harley Richards - Red Deer Advocate - February 12, 2008

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Most business people probably consider podcasts and blogs to be sources of entertainment and information — if they consider them at all.

Some recognize them as valuable marketing tools.

Dean Owen, who operates BRASSmedia, falls into the latter group. And the Penhold resident is working to convert others to his way of thinking.

The medium Owen is promoting is known as web 2.0. A step up from read-only websites, it includes podcasts and blogs, as well as other online communication vehicles.

How can it help businesses?

Owen tells the story of a craft store owner who began churning out podcasts full of tips and product information. These helped establish her as an expert and drew consumers to her retail operations.

Podcasts and blogs are particularly effective for service-based businesses like legal, accounting and financial planning firms, said Owen. But other businesses can capitalize on web 2.0 as well.

For instance, it can be used to deliver messages from company officials to existing and prospective customers, describe how products are used, or provide information about new merchandise or evolving trends. And unlike most other marketing tools, it is generally inexpensive and easy to use.

"It doesn't cost a lot of money to do a podcast, compared to a full-blown radio or TV or newspaper or magazine campaign," said Owen.

That enables companies to target smaller, niche markets — like the craft store owner did.

A former client services co-ordinator at Red Deer College, Owen managed the operations side of the college's IT department. He became interested in podcasting as a means of teaching and learning, but soon saw its potential for businesses.

After leaving the college last January, Owen decided to focus on web 2.0's business applications.

"That's what BRASSmedia's main goal in life is, to guide and consult and aid and assist small and medium enterprises into the world of web 2.0."

In addition to providing organizations with information about online communication options, BRASSmedia can help clients plan, produce and disseminate their messages.

That extends beyond marketing to customers and clients. Web 2.0 can also be an effective means of communication within organizations, said Owen.

Podcasts can be used to communicate with employees, deliver training when and where it's convenient for staff, and even motivate sales people on the road, he said. Company officials in different locations can also be connected via webinars.

So far, demand for web 2.0 support by Central Alberta businesses has been limited, acknowledged Owen.

He recently determined that there were only about 61 podcasts emanating from Alberta, with many of these originating with non-profit organizations or having musical or religious themes.

By contrast, there were about 125,000 podcast shows listed on iTunes.

"Down in the States and parts of Europe, this is huge," said Owen.

"We're still in the infancy. The first thing that I'm doing now is educating people."

He's scheduled to conduct a videoconferenced presentation across the province on podcasting for businesses through The Business Link on May 6, and is hoping to partner with the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce to do something similar locally.

Owen said he's noticed that people's awareness of web 2.0 has increased since he launched BRASSmedia in June. He's optimistic this trend will continue, and eventually business podcasts and blogs will be commonplace in Alberta.

"With any luck, I'll be riding the wave."

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Dean Owen of BRASSmedia records a podcast at his home office in Penhold. He's promoting web 2.0 as a business tool.  
by RANDY FIEDLER/Advocate staff



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