Podcasting 101

The new podcast listener's guide.

by Ken Underwood from Parrott Talks.

Your first question may very well be, "What is podcasting?" The New Oxford American Dictionary definition is "a digital recording of a radio broadcast or similar program, made available on the internet for downloading to a personal audio player." The truth is you don't need a personal audio player to enjoy podcasting. All you need is a computer and some free software. The software will automatically download and store the media files for you so all you have to do is find programs that you want to listen to and the computer will do the rest.
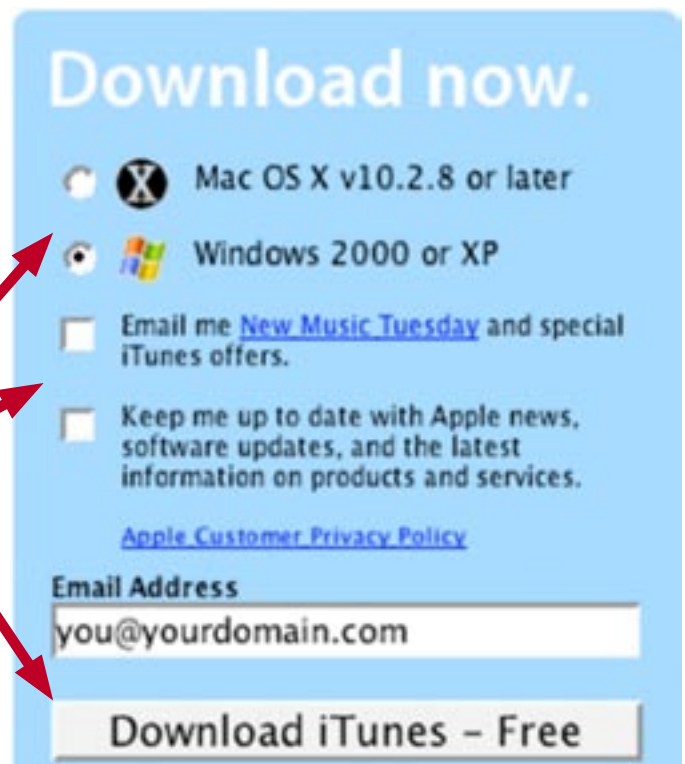
Step 1

The first thing you need is software. Software designed to download and to listen to podcasts is called a 'podcatching client', 'podcatcher' or 'aggrigator'. For the beginner, I recommend Apple's iTunes. It's free, works on both Mac and PC and is easy to use. If you don't already have it on your computer you can download it at:

http://www.apple.com/itunes/download/

Choose your operating system, uncheck the email buttons so you won't get any unwanted email, put in your email address and click the "Download iTunes - Free" button. Follow the installation instructions and you'll be good to go in no time.

There are several 'podcatchers' available online. After you have some experience with podcasting, you can search online and see if there is a different program that you like better.

Download now.

- Mac OS X v10.2.8 or later
- Windows 2000 or XP
- Email me New Music Tuesday and special iTunes offers.
- Keep me up to date with Apple news, software updates, and the latest information on products and services.

Apple Customer Privacy Policy

Email Address
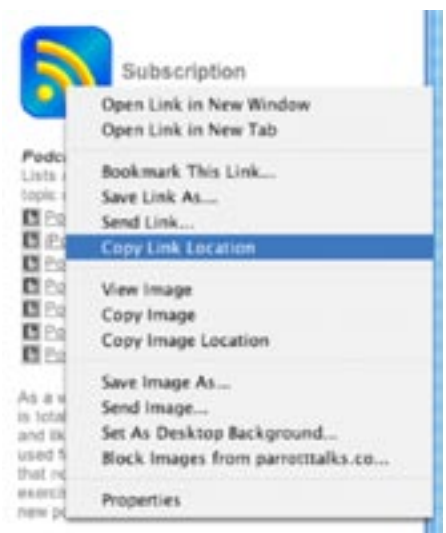you@yourdomain.com

Download iTunes – Free

Step 2

Every podcast has a special URL that leads to their "feed" file. This file tells your podcatcher software when there is a new episode and where to download it from. The URL will usually end in ".rss" or ".xml" and most podcasters embed the link under a button or logo, like those on the right. Some are even customized, like in the example.

Right click the button (control click on Mac) and copy the link. (Choose 'Copy Link', 'Copy Target' or 'Copy Link Location' depending on your OS and browser configuration.)

Example subscription logos below.

RSS SUBSCRIBE

XML RSS 2.0

Subscription
- Open Link in New Window
- Open Link in New Tab
- Bookmark This Link...
- Save Link As...
- Send Link...
- Copy Link Location
- View Image
- Copy Image
- Copy Image Location
- Save Image As...
- Send Image...
- Set As Desktop Background...
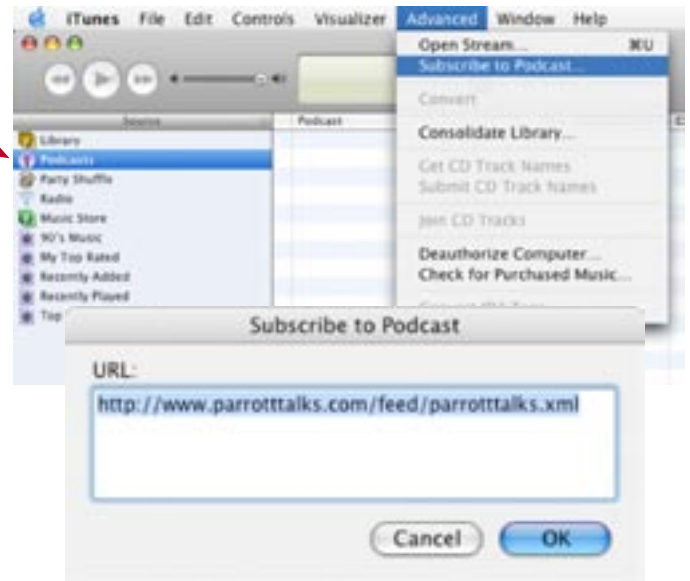- Block Images from parrotttalks.co...
- Properties

Step 3

Go to iTunes and click once on the "Podcasts" line in the "Source" pane. All your podcasts will be listed and updated in the window to the right.

Next, select "Subscribe to Podcast..." from the "Advanced" menu. Paste the URL you copied into the dialog window.
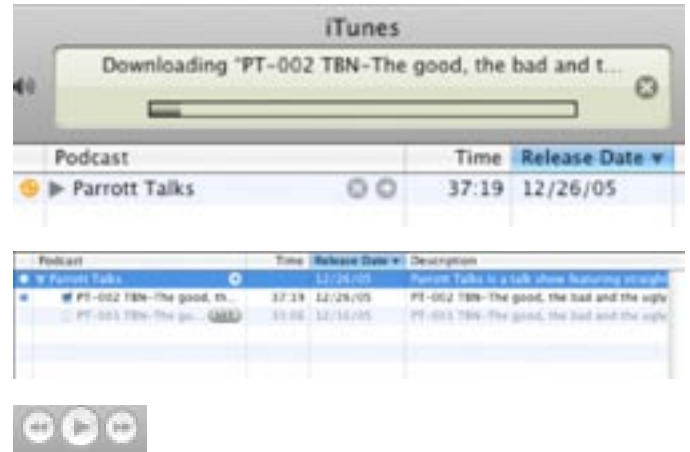
(Alternatively, you can type the URL in the window if you have it written down or found it someplace that you can't easily copy the link. You can see that our example URL ends in ".xml".)

Click the "OK" button. You are now subscribed and your computer will automatically download each new episode as it is released.

Step 4

After you click "OK" the podcast will appear and your computer will automatically go and check the podcast feed to see if there are episodes available. If there are, your download will begin. You can click the little triangle next to the podcast name to see a list of all available episodes. Episodes that are completely downloaded have a blue dot next to them. You can also get additional episodes by clicking the "Get" button. To play an episode, click on the name of the episode and then click on the play triangle (or spacebar).

Step 5

You can set up your preferences by choosing "Preferences..." from the "iTunes" menu and then clicking on the "Podcasts" tab. You can choose how often you want iTunes to check for new episodes of your subscribed podcasts, how many you want to download at one time and how many episodes you want to keep. If you have an iPod, you can also select which podcasts get automatically copied to your iPod.

You can search for podcasts that might interest you by clicking on the "Music Store" line in the "Source" pane. Don't worry, podcasts are free. Just pick "Podcasts" from the "Choose Genre" pull down menu and you'll find tons of interesting things to listen to. You can also find many podcast directories on the internet, so happy listening.