

The id of iPod ... and what is podcasting?



By Rob Laird

According to Freud, the id resides in the unconscious and is driven by the pleasure principle. It is the most primitive, passionate, and irrational psychic force. Is it the 'id' that perhaps explains the massive iPod wave, making it the world's most technical fashion accessory?

Do we need as much as 80Gb (80,000 million bytes) of storage strapped to our sides as we kick down the stepping machine at the gym?

It appears that we do, because the iPod is currently the world's best selling portable digital audio player, and as a result has probably been a big contributor to the turnaround of Apple Computer's fortunes.

For the uninitiated, here are a few definitions:

- iPod = Internet Portable Open Database or Internet Performance On Demand
 - Podcast – Performance On Demand broadcast
- None the wiser? Understandable. I don't think anyone really knows for sure what the acronyms actually mean.

So what is needed to participate in this iPod craze? You need an iPod (or something similar from another vendor that plays MP3 files). You need some media management software (more on this) and you need a computer to run the media management software. You can't truly experience the iPod phenomenon without all three, at least for the immediate and foreseeable future.

iTunes

Let's start with the media management software. In the case of the iPod, you will need a copy of some software called



Photo courtesy of Apple Computer Inc

iTunes – this comes with the iPod when you purchase it, and can be freely downloaded from Apple's website.

iTunes is best described as a combined 'digital jukebox' and 'music download shop'. In a nutshell, you store all your favourite music tracks, radio programs, singing lesson recordings, and even movie and video clips using the iTunes software on your computer. You can then play these media files on your computer. If you have no need for pocket-sized portability,

then an iPod may not be for you. You can happily cart your laptop computer around and still get the same quality sound, and even better quality video – iPods have very small screens.

Using the iTunes software, you can also purchase music via the iTunes online store, and access the world of 'podcasting' – see below.

THE IPOD

The iPod itself is an amazing little device. I have mentioned in previous articles how powerful small computers are these days – an 80s super computer on your desktop today. The iPod device has enormous computing and storage 'grunt' – currently up to 80Gb!!!

I recall a statistician claiming that 100Gb would equal the sum total of all computer storage devices ever built up until about 1970, and at the time, would have needed 300 football fields of floor space. So being able to walk around with all that in your pocket is impressive stuff.

The iPod is a very 'neat' little device. Most iPod models



Photo courtesy of Apple Computer Inc

store media on a built-in hard drive, while the smaller iPod shuffle and iPod nano use flash memory. One of its biggest features is the simple navigation wheel. Menus appear on the screen and you scroll through them by literally drawing little circles with your finger on the 'scroll-wheel' – clockwise to scroll forward/down, anti to scroll back/up. This even works when you have a plastic protection cover in place – it is truly amazing.

Even if you have something like 28 days of continuous music (9,026 'tracks') loaded on to your iPod, you can scroll through such a massive number of titles very quickly and find the one you want to play. I don't know how I lived without it.

Some of the current iPods have colour screens and can store and play movies and video clips. I'm not sure if I'd sit down and watch the whole of *Quo Vadis* on the tiny iPod screen, but there are some 'talking head'-type programs that are OK to watch (mainly listen) at a pinch – newsclips, reviews, and the like are fine in small doses.

iPods can also record – by attaching a recording device to your iPod you can record up to 28 days (depending on the model) of continuous conversation. For lawyers, dictation is something to consider, or those situations where a recording of testimony is of benefit. You often see journalists poking an iPod into the face of politicians these days – bringing a new meaning to the phrase, 'here - would you like an Apple?'

THE PODCAST

According to Wikipedia, 'podcasting' is a portmanteau coined in 2004, combining two words, 'iPod' and 'broadcasting'. The term 'podcast', like 'radio', can mean both the content and the method of delivery. The host or author of a podcast is often referred to as a 'podcaster'.

Performance-on-demand broadcasting is a way to download content (music and video) to be played at your

convenience – in the car on the way to work, sitting by the pool, in the hotel room while away from home. The point is that you don't have to miss your favourite radio program or educational tool if it is available for download as a podcast. Simply download it, move it to your iPod, and take it with you!

You can also start your own radio show! Pick a subject, record your show, and upload it to any of the podcast providers, and away you go! Wikipedia lists another 20 uses for podcasting, including education, advocacy, politics, religion, sport, and even law enforcement.

So is anyone interesting providing podcasts? How about Radio National – most of its programs are available as podcasts, and I have downloaded the *Law Report* on more than one occasion. I won't even begin to name the others – there are so many...

CONCLUSION

There has been a lot of hype, but these little plastic and metal tins are genuinely popular, and probably bigger than just another fad. Personally, however, I don't get much out of the iPod as a fashion accessory – I keep it out of sight because the white on chrome clashes with my dull grey suit!

But there is something about having your entire music collection with you at all times that is appealing. Perhaps Apple had Freud's id in mind when it devised the iPod – who knows, but there is certainly something alluring about it. ■

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References: www.abc.com.au/rn/, www.apple.com/ipod/, www.wikipedia.org