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# TECHNOLOGY

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## Invasion of the podcasting people?

By Christine Boese  
CNN Headline News  
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**(CNN) -- If you've seen the classic camp remake "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," you know what "pod people" do when they find a human who has not been replaced with an identical alien born of a pod: point and screech open-mouthed at the non-pod person.**



That may be how some are feeling these days with the infiltration of MP3 players into mainstream consumer culture -- like outsiders as iPod people walk around with their earbuds, apparently hearing voices from some alien mothership.

Podcasts are like radio broadcasts for MP3 players, but that's about where the similarity ends.

So let me say right off that I'm not trying to "sell" anything. "Podcasting" is becoming a bit of an overused buzzword in some circles, while others haven't heard the first thing about it. It is a movement worth watching, but I'm more of a critical early adopter than a "trend of the week" bandwagon-type.

Podcasting gets its hipster name from the Apple iPod, but it has no direct connection to Apple. You can get podcasts on any player, or just through your computer, if you are set up for it.

The idea was a gleam in the eye of the former 1980s MTV veejay Adam Curry, who worked out the technical details with Dave Winer, a co-creator of RSS, the Web feed syndication system that launched a gazillion blogs. (See my two previous columns on [blogs](#) and [news feed readers](#) for background)

Curry and Winer fixed blogs to feed audio and video files as well. They first called it audio blogging, until the cool name came along and stuck.

Curry's podcasts, most from his homes in

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Amsterdam or now near London, or from conference hotel rooms, feel a lot like radio from back in the day when I could still tolerate radio, before the ads became screechy and annoying. Curry runs musical interludes and segues, and talks in his professional DJ style. I imagine him sitting in a studio with a big fuzzy mike and slider board like I learned on in college, but he probably just uses a laptop with its little mike. I prefer the image in my mind's eye.

As podcasting gained momentum, online visionaries began seeing a grassroots opportunity for homegrown talk radio.

But they added a twist. They emphasize that free podcasts can be heard on the subscriber's schedule, the same way people with digital video recorders time-shift television programming.

They say podcasting does for audio what TiVo did for video, with more diverse, grassroots programming you build yourself by subscribing to RSS feeds.

I used something like podcasting before it was cool, at a fee-based site, Audible.com.

Audible is an audio bookstore, and I've been hooked on audio books for years. They download seamlessly into iTunes and on most MP3 players and computers, unlike the setup for podcasting, which can be technology-intensive for some newbies.

You can pay to get some daily NPR programs such as "All Things Considered" at Audible. Sure, I can listen to "All Things Considered" free at the NPR.org web site (time-shifted), but Audible kicks it right into my music software. I had a free promotion for a month of a New York Times audio reader at Audible, but the reader's voice put me to sleep. At least podcasters are living out their DJ and talk radio fantasies with energy and enthusiasm.

I can see other uses for podcasting as well. Teachers could use it for sharing class recordings as audio lessons, for instance. Audio distance learning is cheaper than video-conferencing with an entire classroom, as is done at some universities.

In the end, if MP3 players become so ubiquitous that we are invaded by ear-bud-wearing podcasting people, they will probably be too pre-occupied with choosing from all these programming options to screech and point at those not connected to the mothership.

- David Slusher's 'Evil Genius Chronicles'  
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