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## Three Tips to Help Put Wikis, Blogs, RRS and Podcasts into Perspective

*New York Times writer sounds off about new communications methods*

“Podcasting is simply a system for downloading and playing audio files in a mobile context,” says New York Times scribe John Markoff, who recently interviewed Steve Jobs when Apple tweaked iTunes to enable podcast subscriptions. “It’s basically [audio-blogging], but it’s more about the platform being used. You’ve been able to download files forever — it’s just easier now using less expensive, mobile players.” So what does this mean to media consumers in general, and PR practitioners in particular? Markoff offers this quick take:

**1. Podcasts and new mediums challenge traditional media’s monopoly.** “One thing Steve Jobs said to me that didn’t make it into my [June 28] story was that he’s getting interest from corporations about creating podcasts to reach customers and others directly — without going through [traditional media],” offers Markoff. “An example might include something like Adobe wanting a podcast for Photoshop users.”

His point: “All of this breaks down old traditions — everybody is getting dis-aggregated by new technologies,” Markoff says. “That includes old-line reporters and PR people. I guess you could use a podcast to reach a reporter like me, but the last thing most reporters need in this world is yet another PR channel between them and the companies they cover. I already get enough [bytes] from these companies, primarily via email — which is a chosen medium for most [journalists].” The lesson for PR practitioners, according to Markoff, is “to recognize that things are changing in the media. More people are trying to reach [audiences directly].”

**2. Master the basics before adding PR bells and whistles.** “For the time being, what reporters really

want is complete and accurate contact information,” Markoff says. “We want directory information on the Web that we can go to when we need it. Some do a good job of this. Microsoft and Sun come to mind. They provide alternate and cell numbers on their sites. But the real point is not to [focus on things like podcasting] until you take care of basic stuff like putting [contact information] online. That’s the most useful place to start.”

**3. Give blogs and wikis a rest — zero in on building better media relations.** “Blogging is clearly a force in the world,” says Markoff. “But I am still skeptical of it. For starters, it affects me only indirectly. [Similarly], I think corporate CEO blogs are really just new marketing tools for outreach. That’s fine, but when everybody does it then people like Sun Microsystems’ COO Jonathan Schwartz lose their competitive advantage.”

His advice: “Life is short — go to the beach. Don’t worry about starting a blog unless you’re dying to have a hobby that feeds your ego by telling people what happened to you in the day. They’re not that valuable a tool when it comes to media [relations],” Markoff asserts. “Reporters really don’t find that much use in [them]. Their real value is in being a direct channel to the public,” he reiterates.

Similarly: “Wikis, which are Web pages that can be freely edited by [visitors], are also timely. But from my perspective, a well-written and comprehensive FAQ on your site would be a more valuable PR [tool]. I don’t give advice to PR people, but the most useful thing to me is access — a PR person who can get me to corporate officers in a timely manner.”

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