



TECH b.e.a.t

Dedicated to Reporting Developments in Technology for Law Enforcement, Corrections, and Forensic Sciences

PODCAST How To

In years past, mass communications was limited to print media: books, newspapers, and magazines. Later it came to include electronic media: radio and television. Today, mass communications also encompasses social media: a set of Internet tools, such as blogs, message boards, podcasts, wikis, and vlogs, that employ text, images, audio, and video.

Earlier in 2007, the District of Columbia Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA), a Federal executive branch agency that provides parole and probation services in Washington, D.C., decided to take advantage of this new media wave and add podcasts to its website, thus becoming the first Federal criminal justice agency to podcast.

“Before, commercial media controlled everything that consumers heard,” says Leonard A. Sipes, Jr., senior public affairs specialist with CSOSA. “Now you have this explosion of social media that allows people to creatively express their own opinions and even produce their own show. All of this never really existed before. Set up a microphone, a computer, and some inexpensive or even free recording software, and you’ve got a podcast. It can be that easy.”

For those individuals who need proof that it can be that easy, or who want to get their own public safety agency started in the podcasting arena, Sipes has written a primer called “So You Want to Podcast?” (visit: www.csosa.gov/Olipa/pubs/-podcast_article.pdf). A year ago, however, Sipes was among those who needed such a primer.

No stranger to community outreach, CSOSA was producing, and continues to produce, both a monthly radio show and a monthly television show called “DC Public Safety.” Sipes, however, wanted to exercise as many options as possible to share his agency’s information. That is when CSOSA’s enterprise director, Tim Barnes, suggested the agency look into podcasting.

“We were 95 percent finished with the new version of our website, and Tim said ‘If you’re going to do audio, why not do podcasts?’ and I said ‘what’s a podcast?’” Sipes says. “Once Tim introduced me to the concept, it

immediately became very exciting, because the possibilities are endless in terms of using it to educate the public, policymakers, the media, and so on.”

According to Sipes, since it went live there have been more than 80,000 hits on the podcast site, and in terms of key search items (i.e., public safety, criminal justice, criminal offenders), it rates as one of the highest ranked “shows” for the criminal justice system based on searches of major search engines. He says this indicates that the criminal justice community can develop shows and immediately have an impact with the listening or viewing public.

Although there appears to be a common misconception that podcasts are “something you listen to on your iPod® [portable media player],” Sipes says, they are really just a form of storing audio and video messages on a server for people to download to their computers or other electronic devices at their convenience. Podcasts do not

SURFING SOCIAL MEDIA

According to Wikipedia®, an online, free encyclopedia, the term social media describes online technologies that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives. A few prominent examples of social media applications include the following:

- Wikipedia (reference), wikipedia.org
- MySpace (social networking), myspace.com
- Gather.com (social networking), gather.com
- YouTube (video sharing), youtube.com
- Second Life (virtual reality), secondlife.com
- Digg (news sharing), digg.com
- Flickr (photo sharing), flickr.com
- Miniclip (game sharing), miniclip.com

require a great deal of technology or a huge monetary investment to produce.

“We get to control the message and say what we want to say, when we want to say it,” Sipes says. “It also mandates honesty. We don’t just talk about the good points, we also talk about the negatives. If you’re going to do this, you should be a responsible producer of shows.”

CSOSA gives microphone time not just to administrators, but to rank-and-file employees, current and former inmates, and the public. The podcasts are unedited and give all of these individuals the chance to say what is on their minds, although the agency would remove profanity or slanderous remarks. Topics are selected based on recent inquiries received from the media and the public.

To listen to or view podcasts produced by the District of Columbia Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, visit <http://media.csosa.gov> or www.csosa.org. For additional information, contact Leonard A. Sipes, Jr., Senior Public Affairs Specialist, 202-220-5616 or e-mail leonard.sipes@csosa.gov.

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