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TECHNOLOGY

Have I Got An Earful For You!

Column: Final Thoughts

Jun. 01, 2007

Now that tax season 2007 is but a dim memory, I thought it might be a good time to review some of the tricks that I've learned from some of our Productivity Survey high-scorers (www.CPATechAdvisor.com/Productivity). You'll recall that we've previously demonstrated an almost direct correlation between a high score on the Productivity Survey and the likelihood of that firm being in the upper quartile of annual per-partner compensation. You'll no doubt also recall that while these upper quartile firm partners actually work 3 percent fewer hours per year (approximately one week), they also earn over 60 percent more!

As I travel the country visiting with practitioners, I am struck by the unanimity in which they declare a preference to remain in, or a desire to join, that group. (As Gomer Pyle was fond of saying, "Surprise, surprise, surprise!") But back to my point: In conversation with these high-scorers, I'm consistently struck by their devotion to best practices and their relentless pursuit of increased productivity. Earlier this year, I asked a group of these high-scorers to share some of the wisdom that's obviously helping them to achieve their professional (i.e., financial) success. Specifically, I asked each for a top productivity tip. In reviewing their generous answers, I was struck by not only their similarity but also their simplicity. Anecdotally (eventually we'll be able to report this phenomenon empirically), I'm excited to report that many of them listed podcasts as an emerging favorite for how they choose to receive

professional and technical information. Many reported enjoying a podcast in “multi-tasking” mode, much like talk radio. Others reported listening while they commute or during exercise sessions. But nearly all who “tried it” said they “liked it.” This information, coupled with comments forwarded to me regarding our podcast channel (Intersection Live), led me to the decision that I’d discuss “podcasts” in this issue’s column.

First, a definition: What is a podcast? Wikipedia.org (www.en.Wikipedia.org) defines podcast as follows:

“a digital media file ... shared over the web using syndication feeds, for playback on portable media players or personal computers. Like ‘radio,’ it can mean either the content itself or the method by which it is syndicated; the latter is also termed podcasting. The host or author of a podcast is often called a podcaster. The term ‘podcast’ is a fusion of the name of Apple’s portable music player, the iPod, and broadcast. Though podcasters’ web sites may also offer direct download or streaming of their content, a podcast is distinguished from other digital media formats by its ability to be downloaded automatically, using software capable of reading feed formats such as RSS, mostly [90%+] via Apple’s iTunes software.”

That definition is simple and comprehensive. But there’s a funny thing about simple definitions — people tend to misunderstand them! My experience indicates a fairly wide misunderstanding so I thought it prudent to “slay a few dragons” here, Q&A style.

Q: Do I have to have an iPod to listen to a podcast?

A: No. If you do (and over 100 million of us DO!), it’s very handy, but it’s absolutely NOT necessary. Many people download Apple’s free iTunes program and use it to manage their music and podcasts on their computer. An iPod simply makes the process portable. (Other portable devices also work with most podcasts.)

Q: What’s a “subscription?”

A: A distinguishing characteristic of a podcast is that it can be downloaded automatically. This is “pull” technology (you choose what you want to PULL from the Internet rather than someone PUSHING what they think you might want), and it puts YOU in control. It utilizes RSS feeds, with which you’re probably familiar from the blog world.

Q: Do I have to subscribe?

A: No. You can pull podcasts “one at a time.” It’s rather like buying the newspaper at the corner store rather than having it delivered.

Q: What’s the benefit of downloading rather than simply listening directly from the podcaster’s website?

A: Control. Both iTunes and the iPod keep track of what you’ve listened to and where you stopped. When you have an interruption, just pause and the system will automatically start you there when you come back, whether it’s in a few minutes, a few days or a few months!

Q: Some podcasts seem to be “stand-alone” while others are part of a series. What’s up with that?

A: It’s just like television: Some shows are specials and others are part of a series that runs every week.

Q: What about video podcasts?

A: While there are many “video podcasts” (think of television as compared to radio), the vast majority of podcasts are audio only. And yes, I have heard that I have a “face for radio.”

Q: How popular are podcasts?

A: It’s definitely an emerging medium. Two years ago, there were NO podcasts. And by the end of 2007, it’s predicted there’ll be nearly 100,000! Now that’s a growth curve even an accountant can love!

Q: What podcasts does The CPA Technology Advisor offer?

A: Our podcast content is by far the most robust available to the profession. We have over 50 individual programs on our site. You can subscribe to them as a series (don’t worry, you don’t HAVE to listen to all of them!) on our site (www.cpatechadvisor.com/intersection) or in iTunes by searching for Intersection Live under the podcast tab of the iTunes Store.

Q: What is Tech2Go?

A: We're very excited about this new, monthly recurring podcast that features me and three of our regular columnists, Brent Goodfellow, Randy Johnston and Dave McClure in an hour (or so) long discussion covering what's hot in accounting technology. We encourage listener feedback and take questions whenever we can. Plus, we offer "show notes" covering the items we discussed, so there's no need to try to hurriedly scrawl down a website. Just calmly go to www.CPATechAdvisor.com/tech2go, and there you'll find the websites, correct spellings, synopsis, etc., for each episode of Tech2Go.

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