

An Interview with Evo Terra Author of Podcasting For Dummies

Lon Safko: Hello, my name is Lon Safko, co-author of the John Wiley & Sons' *The Social Media Bible*, the largest book ever written on the subject of social media. Today we are here with Evo Terra, co-author of *Podcasting for Dummies*, also published by John Wiley & Sons. We will be speaking about audio and podcasting. So, let's get started.

So Evo, please tell our listeners a little bit about your background and why you co-authored the book, *Podcasting for Dummies*.



Evo Terra: Sure thing, Lon. By the way, thanks for inviting me here on the show and to give some knowledge back out to the readers of the book, and listeners of the show, if it comes out, too.

So the reason I wrote *Podcasting for Dummies* is that I am one of the “old men” of podcasting, because I’ve been doing my audio podcasts since October 14, 2004, and according to the one directory we had at the time, *Podcast Alley*, I had the 40th podcast on the planet. So, that means I got in on the ground floor, with lots of other really [01:14.0 tape skipped] on the ground floor. But I was fortunate enough to have, as one of my connections, a fellow author who had written a lot of fiction books, who had an agent, who heard about podcasting, and said, “Can you write this book?”

Well, he knew he could write a book, but he knew he could not write a book about podcasting, but he knew me. So, together (his name was Tee Morris, by the way) we hashed out the necessary plans to get together and craft the most basic podcasting how-to book, *Podcasting for Dummies*, which I am happy to say is about to go into its second edition; all updated new contents.

Lon Safko: Congratulations!

Evo Terra: It is the most popular, #1 selling how-to, or dummies, or podcasting book, on the market.

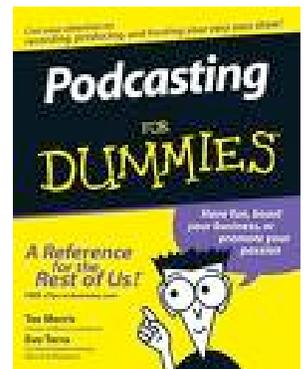
Lon Safko: Well, congratulations. That’s really cool!

Evo Terra: Thanks.

Lon Safko: Geez, wow! We have a star here. This is cool.

Evo Terra: Lol, lol.

Lon Safko: The first question everyone seems to ask when we talk about technical subjects is, “What insights have you learned from your background in doing podcasting?” What tips would you give to the beginner? How do they start?



Evo Terra: Well, there is a lot of information out there about starting a podcast, and the most common word that is given out is, “Just start and figure it out as you go along.” And that is not bad advice for some hobbyist that just wants to play in the media. But for business people and for people who really want to get in to make a splash, I suggest they take a different route.

I didn’t start...podcasting was not my first introduction to audio production. I’ve done...we took an internet radio show in 2002 that I was co-hosting, and turned that into a terrestrial syndicated radio show, which also managed to get into satellite syndication back in 2003. So, my audio experience is a little longer than just simply podcasting. And that’s enabled me to take a look at this new...oh, this new milieu, if you will...and say, “You know, your audience may be looking for something a little different than what a podcaster is thinking about right away.”

And the very first thing I would suggest people do that are interested in this is, do your home work. You know, find out if there are other people in the space that you are getting into. Most business people are not going to say, “I want to open up an ice cream stand”, with out having some understanding of the ice cream market. You have to know what you are getting yourself into, even if you have no idea how to run an ice cream stand; you can, at least, what the business is.

The same thing goes for podcasting. You can figure out what the competition...if you want to think about it as competition. I don’t. I use the word because we all understand it. But at least understand what is competing for people’s time inside of the type of topic you would like to discuss inside of your podcast. But also, other sorts of media that are doing the same thing, just not in a podcast form. Whether that’s radio, or whether it’s an audio book, you know, understand what your listeners are likely to want to listen to. Do your diligence.

Lon Safko: I hear two really good points in there, and of course, the first one is to get out there and do a little bit of research and understand what’s going on before you actually doing it. And then the second thing I heard was, again, kind of like the sports shoe slogan, “Just do it!”

Evo Terra: Yeah. That’s exactly right. “Just do it”, is a fine way to go through it. But just do it with a little bit of understanding of what the marketplace looks like.

Lon Safko: That’s great. That’s really good advising, of course. And the second question always is, especially for the beginners, what do they need to kind of watch out for? What are the misconceptions? What kind of pitfalls; what are the warnings?

Evo Terra: Well, you know, they are legion. I could go on for days on what *not* to do. As I am often reminded myself, you know, there is no one right way to do things, but there are lots of wrong ways. There are lots of tip and advise books out there that will give you some suggestions, but one of the things I think I would caution people about is that, since we’re talking about this user-generated content of podcasting, amateur people are getting into the space who have not had a lot of experience using the tools.

There are a lot of people out there advising that it’s the content that’s the most important, and I don’t disagree with them. Content is *king*. You have to have something that is worth talking about that is interesting to people. However, I think that oftentimes comes at the expense of quality. In fact, I have heard more than one person suggest that you ought to not worry about the quality of the show, because it’s content that matters, and other reasons why quality does not matter. And I just...I have to disagree! And I have to disagree for one

reason. I know how easy it is to make your podcast sound professional.

The tools that are out there today, that everybody has access to...you don't need a \$50,000 microphone and studio set-up to make yourself sound fantastic. You don't need to go out and buy \$6,000 pieces of software so that you can edit things properly. You can do it all with the basic tools, and the only thing you have to invest to make your podcast sound better than it does today is time. Whether that's an extra 30 minutes, or two hours, that's up to you. But it reaches a point where you can go back to that document, or that audio file you have recorded, and you can make it better. You can do the tip and tricks to actually improve the quality, so that while you've got stellar content, you've also got stellar quality. And it just makes it so easy for new people to adopt what you're saying into their normal, every-day life.

Lon Safko: Can you mentioned some of the tools that we talked about when we got together last?

Evo Terra: Yeah, sure. There're quite a few tools out there. I recommend anyone starting out new in podcasting, that they don't go out and spend crazy amounts of dollars. In fact, you should spend as little as possible. Download *Audacity*. It is a free software audio recording program. It works on both PC's and Macintosh systems, and it is what I would estimate, 50% of the podcasters still use today. I still use *Audacity*. It's free and it's simple and it does just about everything you are going to want to do at your level.

Now, if you're an audio engineer that's a different situation. You will want a different tool set from that, but *Audacity* is wonderful

Let's see...that's your #1 tool to do most of your work. There's another piece of equipment that I like to use called *The Levelator*. It is free software that you run your spoken-word audio through, and it magically (I don't mind using the word, because I have seen this tool work and I use it every day myself) brings up you audio level to a fantastic level. It is not a perfect tool. There are plenty of engineers who don't like to use it. But my recommendation to all new people and all podcasters today is...if you are not using *The Levelator* and you don't have a good excuse why you're not using *The Levelator*...then you should be using *The Levelator*. It is amazing what it can do to your sound.

Lon Safko: Those are pretty good tools, and again the wonderful thing about Social Media is that almost everything is completely free. The only investment you really have to make is time.

Evo Terra: That's exactly right. A base recording of you, maybe a partner...you can get away with little, or no, investment. Definitely for an individual podcaster, it's really simple.

Now there are some specialty tools which come into play if you want to record telephone conversations. Or maybe you want to buy a library of pre-licensed music, so that you don't sound like everybody else discovering the free stuff. There are those investments to make. But if it is your first time doing it...don't! Don't invest any additional money. Your computer already has set up what, probably, you need to do to get started...even with a cheap, \$5.00 microphone that it came with. I know many people that started out that way, but once they figured out what they wanted to do, eventually graduate to bigger and better equipment.

But start off with spending next to nothing.

Lon Safko: And the other point that you made in there that was really awesome, (and I didn't even realize it,

you corrected me last time that we were together) and that is, most people are under the impression that Social Media productions, whether it's podcasting or video, needs to have that home-brew feel to it. Otherwise, it's implied that there is a corporate sponsor hiding some kind of a corporate message. And maybe that was true early on, but I think you are absolutely right. I agree that people are also getting to a level of sophistication that they're expecting a certain quality, even in the home-brew versions.

Evo Terra: That's very true. You know, quality has become very important even though people don't recognize or realize it. I think what is becoming more easily to discern from the podcast listeners as they have matured over the last four years, is the issue of authenticity. And I think you maybe right. Early on in the process, if something sounded really slick and polished, you started wondering, "What's the underlying agenda? What corporate underwriting sponsorship is happening here?"

But I think consumers are becoming a lot more educated in that now. They're a little more sophisticated and they are really able to get down to the message. If your goal is to try and sound like the guy who does the 10 o'clock news, that's going to fail miserably. You know why? That's a terrible delivery. They have to do that in a certain way because they have a certain amount of time to get to people before they get to bed, and they drag you along and put the weather at the end.

You don't have to do that kind of stuff, but what you should be doing is going through with a tool like *Audacity*, cutting out the "umms" and the "ahhhs" and the really long dead space, and the place where your cell phone rang, and the dogs barking in the background. There is no reason not to stop, back up, and just make that sound better. Don't sound fake. Be authentic, but make it sound great.

Lon Safko: That's really good advice. And again, with the tools you just described, there is no reason why you cannot make it sound professional.

Evo Terra: Very true...very true.

Lon Safko: One other question that always comes up is, again, based on your experience, what success stories can you share with us to inspire the beginner podcaster that has kind of a business slant.

Evo Terra: Sure. I've got a few stories. The majority of my experience in podcasting over the last few years has been with podcast authors. I started a website called, *Podiobooks.com*, mixing audio books and podcasting together. And over the last three, almost four years now we have managed to grow to like 235 titles, I believe, today...which are audio books that are either complete or in the process of being completed, that are released out in serial form. And my biggest success story is that a friend of mine inside of that whose name was Scott Sigler. And Scott was an author on a part-time basis. Many of us find ourselves to be authors in their off-season. I luckily have no desire to write fiction, which is great because I have no gift for plot. So, that's a good thing for me.

For many people, it is a burning desire to write fiction and be the great American novelist. Well, that describes Scott Sigler all the way through his growing up. He wrote a couple of books in the 90's and the 2000's and he had a tough time getting some people interested in him. The book industry, the publishing industry, has developed over the last couple of centuries, a process by which they allow certain things to come through and get rid of the other ones. There is nothing wrong with gate-keepers, but sometimes you find yourself on the other side of that gate, and you just cannot break in. That's where Scott found himself.

So in early 2005 he made the decision to start releasing his book as a podcast. He was one of the very first authors to do so, and slowly grew his audience; and with the idea of, “I want to become a successful published author.” Let’s fast-forward to about a year ago. Scott nailed a publishing contract with Crown Publishing, (one of the largest ones, they are a division of Random House, they are a division of Random House, one of the largest on the planet) for a deal that not only just let Scott quit his day job to eke out a living, but quit his day job to live extremely comfortably while he writes these next three novels. He did it by using podcasting to get out into the market and to grow an audience, and to prove to a big company like Crown Publishing that he was the “real deal”, that his people would actually flock to his stuff and buy his stuff that was put out.

It’s a great success story. But he didn’t just do it with podcasting. That’s one of the misconceptions. I have a lot of other authors that say, “Well then, I will just release my book once a week, one chapter every week, and I will be successful, too.” Right? Not at all. Scott is doggedly tireless on his relentlessness as he goes through the Social Media sphere and connects with his audience. He is constantly on Twitter sending out updates. He has gotten on the “most motivational” list, his Facebook page is ridiculous with the number of followers he has. He keeps his website maintained, you know, three or four times a day. He is putting up webposts. He is really working the total sphere of the new media to really energize his troops behind him, which got him to that success level. That’s what’s required. Not a “one-click” fix thing.

Lon Safko: See, and that’s another really good point that you are bringing up. I mean, you do have to do the podcasts. You have to have a certain level of quality, and you have to have good content. But probably more important is getting out there, is building your social network, is using all the tools in Social Media to build a following.

Evo Terra: Yeah, that’s true. I know a very few people who have had success by doing just one thing. If anything, people have had success because they have had a fantastic and amazing experience that they were delivering in podcast form. And then their fans pretty much dragged them, kicking and screaming, into other aspects of the new media. And that’s when their careers literally take off. That’s really required. So if the thought is, “I just want to do this one thing and be done with it”, that’s okay. But understand it’s not going to be as great a success as it could be if you really worked all of the different angles and started energizing your user base, where your user base wants to be.

Lon Safko: That’s incredible advice. Hence, the need for something like the Social Media Bible. And not that that’s a blatant plug, which it is. That’s one of the things that I noticed when I started getting involved with Social Media, is that really it is kind of pulling it all together and building that trust in networking and building that following, to accomplish anything that you are setting out to do.

Evo Terra: That’s right.

Lon Safko: And so, lastly, is there anything else you would like to tell our listeners about your experiences with podcasting that might be helpful.

Evo Terra: You bet. How about I give you a few more things to watch out for.

Lon Safko: Yeah, please.

Evo Terra: Some tactical advice. I spoke a lot on strategies now, by people who are just starting out, they start by using podcasts. So let's get to some tactics for a quick second.

The very first thing that I suggest that you do, new podcaster, is to ask yourself how long your podcast should be. This is a very common question. I flip that on its head when it's asked of me and I say, "How short can you make it"? Because if you arbitrarily pick a time... "I'm going to make a 40 minute-long podcast"... you'll find yourself "filling", putting in stuff that doesn't need to be there, when could have said all you need to say in about 10 minutes. And honestly, I don't know of anybody who has ever unsubscribed to a podcast because it was too short; but I can tell you hundreds of times I have personally unsubscribed to podcasts because they're too long.

Lon Safko: Good point.

Evo Terra: Shorter...sweeter...is better, because there's lots of stuff out there. Bite-sized content is better. It doesn't always work, but if you can, keep it nice and short. Umm, second thing; when you are doing your editing of you show (not necessarily when you are recording it, although that's how I do it) but when you are editing your show please use headphones. If at all possible, go buy a good quality pair of headphones. But editing with headphones is imperative because it gives you a nice, isolated sound so you can catch everything that's going on inside of it.

All too many people edit with the speakers on their computer or on a monitor system. That's not how most people listen. Most of them listen with their headphones, or their ear buds plugged inside of their ears. I know I do, and I do it a lot of times when I am commuting somewhere. And once you start figuring this out, these nice little teases of audio change you put in there, are going to be completely lost when somebody's on a subway trying to listen to what you have to say, or driving on the road with their car tops open.

So make sure it is nice and loud, but definitely edit with your headphones on.

A final piece of advice, Lon. Validation! Not personal validation, which I am sure you can find, but validate your content. All too many people think, "All I need to do is get an MP3 file, stick it through something like [17:48.8] burner, and everything is fine and good. It's not. If you are going to go through the effort and truly want to grab an audience, then you owe it to yourself to make sure that your MP3 file, itself, is perfect all the way through, that all of your ID3 tagging, that it describes the MP3 files to people's podcatchers and audioplayers on their site. Make sure those are filled out, and you understand why you are filling things out that way. The most important piece of that is for your RSS speed, which distributes your audio file out to the masses who subscribe to you; you have to make sure that that is perfectly validated.

There are free tools out there; www.feedvalidator.org is one of them. Drop your feed in. Make sure that there's no problem, because you may have the best product out there and wonder why nobody is listening. Maybe it's because they do not know what it is, or they cannot find it, or it breaks their podcatcher iTunes when they plug it inside of there.

Lon Safko: That's a really good point, because the first time I podcasted I generated all these different podcasts, and I started getting emails from people saying that they couldn't listen to it on their iPod, they couldn't transfer it in, and it pretty much rendered it useless.

Evo Terra: That's a lot of effort to go through to have somebody go, you know, "I cannot listen." So, back in the wild, Wild West times of '04, we figured all this stuff out. It's readily available information on exactly how you should encode, exactly how you should tag and exactly what the format of your X-No, at that speed, should be. Follow those directions to the letter.

Lon Safko: Is some of that information in *Podcasting for Dummies*?

Evo Terra: You bet it is!

Lon Safko: Ahh...that's what I like. One-stop shop.

Listen, Evo, thank you so very much for being here today and sharing those tips. Every time I talk to you I learn something new. I really appreciate it.

Evo Terra: I try to help, Lon. Thanks for having me on.

Lon Safko: That's totally cool. I would really like to thank you again, Evo, author of *Podcasting for Dummies* by John Wiley & Sons, and for being here today and sharing those valuable insights with us all.

This has been Lon Safko, the author of *The Social Media Bible*. Be sure to check out other valuable social media tactics, tools and strategies that can be found at *The Social Media Bible* book, and the companion website, www.thesocialmediabible.com. More information me, Ron Safko, or learn how I can speak at your company or your next event, please visit my website at www.lonsafko.com. And again, Evo, thank you and than everyone for being with us here today.