

## Exert Your Inner Expert

By **Catherine Baird**

### **My ipod changed my life.**

The iPod is a key character in the story I'm about to tell, so I want to give it due credit, but while I do have some music on my little player, the main event as far as I'm concerned is loading it up with the latest and greatest podcasts on topics ranging from current events to arts and culture and technology to movie reviews.

However, this article isn't about iPods and libraries. It's not even about podcasting and libraries. I'm sure someone else has already written those articles much more eloquently than I ever could.

### **So what does my iPod have to do with a column on library marketing and communications?**

The thing I've been noticing lately is that ne'er a podcast goes by that doesn't touch on topics such as digitization, search, publishing, social networking, access to information, copyright ... the list goes on and on, many of them topics that you see on the bill at your annual library conference. So you might expect that I regularly hear my library colleagues chatting with a pseudo- celebrity podcast host, bringing their expertise to bear on the issues of the day.

**Not so much.**

In my hours and hours as a devoted podcast listener, I've heard from doctors and lawyers, journalists and media experts, musicians and actors, authors and politicians, bloggers and tweeters. But not a single time, not once since I became a hardcore consumer of the podcast, have I heard a library professional comment on the key issues that we claim as integral to our profession and our future.

It's an understatement to say that this is a public relations problem. This is a public relations ***vacuum!***

I could devote a paragraph or two here to why I think this is – we're an introverted profession, we're consumed with day-to-day tasks, we're focusing our energies on our key stakeholders to ensure next year's funding is equivalent to this year's – but whatever the prevailing reason may be, it's a problem that needs addressing.

In order to insert ourselves into the conversation, we need to begin by listening to the conversation. It's great to pore over the library literature and read library-related blogs, but we also want to make sure we're tuning in to the world at large as well as into our local community conversations.

I'm sure we all have RSS readers chock full of feeds that we at one time or another signed up for with great enthusiasm. Assuredly, we had the best of intentions to keep up and read them all regularly. Now's the time to make sure

we're actually setting aside some time each week to read some of these feeds, and let's not feel guilty if we decide to cull our lists back a little bit.

Subscribe to a couple of podcasts and listen to them during the walk you take during your regular morning break (and, yes, take a break!). And like the information literacy expert you know you are, listen to/read a balanced assortment of sources – some library-centric, media-centric, tech-centric, etc.

Next, practice being an expert. Clearly, library professionals are already out there, developing expert voices in available arenas through regular contributions to personal or group blogs, professional publications, and conference presentations. But you don't even always have to write it down to practice your expert voice. Try driving the conversation at your next dinner party towards mainstream issues that you feel have been missing a library voice. Test out your point of view on friends and family.

Finally and most importantly, exert your inner expert. This is the step that I think we often miss. It's arguably the most daunting, but also the most rewarding. Don't wait for someone to ask you for your opinion; seek out opportunities to share your expert comments wherever you can. Whether it be by phoning in to a radio or television program, participating in a Twitter conversation with said programs, commenting on blogs, writing opinion pieces for a newspaper or other media outlets – assert your relevance and the relevance of your profession by becoming an active participant in the many conversations going on around you.

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