

Podcasting opens doors

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Pounds, young people have always used music as a form of expression and a method of generating finance.

"Music is so accessible that they would rather use that as a way of making money," said the 23-year-old college student.

Podcasting as a business alternative allows anyone with an entrepreneur spirit to launch shows without traditional broadcasting avenues. With podcasts anyone can broadcast their own version of the nightly news.

Weiner said there are six points to keep in mind when launching a podcast. Be acquainted with the software, invest in a decent microphone, have a good idea, have an idea that is repeatable, focus and stay on track with the idea, know how to get into the podcast directories, and know how to market yourself.

"All you are required to have is a microphone and a computer," Weiner said. "But advertisers are only going to go to podcasts that they like."

Wal-Mart goes for organic

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Americans are increasingly interested in," Peterson said.

Wal-Mart's Lee Scott is not the first chief executive to advocate sustainability, a term for the corporate ethos of doing business in a way that benefits the environment. Industrial giant General Electric Co., for example, last year launched a program called "Ecomagination" to bring green technologies like wind power to market.

What makes Wal-Mart's efforts unique, sustainability experts say, is the retailer's sheer size and the power that gives it in relations with suppliers. Wal-Mart works close-

ly with suppliers to shape their goods, if they want them on the shelves of Wal-Mart's nearly 4,000 U.S. stores and over 2,200 international.

"They have huge potential because it's not just Wal-Mart we're talking about, it's their entire supply chain," said Jeff Erikson, U.S. director of London-based consultancy and research group SustainAbility. The group says it does not do any consulting work for Wal-Mart.

Erikson said Wal-Mart could bring the same pressure it has exerted over the years on prices and apply that to pushing manufacturers and competitors to adopt

more sustainable business practices and larger organic offerings.

"We love to see companies like Wal-Mart taking a big step and making pronouncements as they have, because their tentacles are so large," Erikson said.

Wal-Mart plans to double its organic grocery offerings in the next month and continue looking for more products to offer in areas such as grocery, apparel, paper and electronics.

Stephen Quinn, vice president of marketing, told an analysts' conference this month that Wal-Mart would have 400 organic food items in stores this summer "at the

Post-hurricane New Orleans economy still a question mark

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back and sponsoring the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage festival, one of the city's major tourist draws. And ChevronTexaco returned 700 white-collar workers, helping to alleviate fears that Katrina had done away with New Orleans' remaining oil business.

With billions of dollars in reconstruction work facing the city and not enough skilled craftsmen to go around, the construction business will be "like gold mining in the gold rush days," said Loren Scott, a retired economics professor at Louisiana State University who tracks the state's employment picture.

On the down side, the state's only Fortune 500 company, utility holding firm Entergy Corp., says its New Orleans headquarters will be scaled down. And Hibernia National Bank, acquired last year by Capital One Financial Corp., is moving 350 to 400 jobs from its 3,100 pre-storm payroll to Dallas, citing the lack of housing.

Scores of small retail businesses and restaurants aren't sure how long they can remain viable with so few workers and a housing shortage that grows worse. Baldwin said the monthly rent on his family's home will jump from \$900 to \$1,550 in October.

The housing crunch has created a problem - and, for some, a big expense - for businesses too. Shell spent \$33 million to acquire about 120 residential units in the New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas to lease back to their workers at cost.

The suburban commute for many now reaches as far away as Baton Rouge, 65 miles northwest of New Orleans.

Jason Williams, who's self-employed, drives at least an hour and 10 minutes in each direction on a work day that starts early in the morning. "On a bad day, it can take anywhere from two hours and up," he said.

Williams and his family plan to return to their rental house in New Orleans next month. They're lucky - their longtime landlord isn't hiking the rent.

Others will never return.

RAND Corp., a private think tank, projects the city's population will reach only 272,000 by September 2008, three years after Katrina. Greg Rigamer, head of GCR & Associates Inc., a New Orleans consulting firm, said RAND is too conservative. He projects a population of 250,000 to 275,000 by the end of 2006, followed by an extreme

slowdown as housing fills up.

Renee Baldwin, who's home-schooling her 12-year-old daughter in addition to keeping a job in the petroleum support industry, said she believes the housing scenario could put the city's middle class in jeopardy.

"The area is going to be people with a lot of money or people without any money," she said. "They're pushing the middle class out. Not everyone can afford to pay \$1,500 a month for rent."

Mike Pendley, who works in the oilfield service business in New Orleans, chose to live in Baton Rouge and commute when he transferred from Houston three years ago. He believes many New Orleans workers will decide to become permanent Baton Rouge residents.

"It will be the safety factor for the their families, the levee factor," Pendley said. "They won't have to worry about flooding. The schools are better, and the area is perhaps safer."

Scott, the retired economist, said more commuting workers bodes ill for New Orleans, which has faced a dwindling tax base since the school desegregation flight of the 1960s and 1970s, the oil price crash of the 1980s and corporate consolidation and crime fears in the 1990s.

"The tax base will shift more to where they have their residences, instead of where they work," Scott said. "That's where they will pay their property taxes, buy their groceries, buy their cars."

Scott said the recovery likely will speed up if New Orleans escapes a major storm this year - or could be stopped stone-cold by another.

"If it happens again, you're going to have people giving up on coming back, businesses giving up on coming back and taxpayers in the other 49 states questioning sending billions (of dollars) into the area," he said.

The uncertainty makes no difference to Manheim, who says more tourist-oriented advertising is needed to convince the rest of the country that New Orleans is ready to host them.

Indeed, the RAND study said businesses and industries that rely on their New Orleans roots - petroleum, shipbuilding and, of course, tourism - will recover the quickest.

"Without the help of tourism, it's going to take us a lot longer to get back," she said. "We need everyone in the United States to come visit us."

Racial income gap persists

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Owning a home is the way most Americans accumulate wealth, writes Lance Freeman, a Columbia University urban planning professor in one essay. In 2004, 49.1 percent of blacks owned homes, the highest rate ever.

Still, that was 25 percentage points lower than for whites, and blacks' homes were worth less, Freeman writes. Census data in 2000 showed blacks had barely one-tenth the net worth of whites.

Another essay analyzes

causes and effects of the nation's ballooning prison rolls. George Curry, an editor at the National Newspapers Publisher's Association, writes that harsher laws for drug offenders helped to almost double prison and jail populations in the 1990s.

Curry cites a Justice Policy study which found that, by 2000, there were more African-American men in prison and jail (791,600) than college (603,000).

"When we send (students) to college instead of prison," Curry writes, "we strengthen them, their families and

our country in the process."

Morial, a former mayor of New Orleans, writes that the nation's attention was turned to the plight of poor Americans during Hurricane Katrina. He called the storm and flood that hit the Gulf Coast last August "this generation's Bloody Sunday," referring to the March 1965 civil rights march in Alabama that focused the nation's attention on racial segregation in the South.

On the Net:
National Urban League:
<http://www.nul.org>



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When many of us think about success, we may not give much thought to the surroundings in which we try to create this success. We may not take into consideration that the extent to which we can enjoy our success will depend on how healthy our environment is.

In the past, there were those who focused only on creating financial success without regard to how it may have affected the environment. As a result, our world has been damaged by pollutants. These in turn lead to people contracting various health conditions that have a negative effect on their ability to enjoy life. We need only think of the air pollution and ozone warnings provide daily to help us avoid breathing air that has become dirty.

Manufacturers that dumped toxic wastes into our waterways and streams have now polluted drinking waters to such a degree that people now buy bottled water in an effort to avoid drinking water that may contain compounds that cause cancer and other health problems. It is an ongoing concern for our food as well.

However, there are steps that we can take to make a difference. We can support legislation that seeks to reduce pollution in our environments. On an even more personal level, we can begin to use products that are environmentally friendly and will not harm the environment or us.

In the past, there were companies that sought to make safer and more naturally based products. However, for many they were not as effective in cleaning as the more harmful products. It would be pointless to have safer products if they could not perform the task for which they were designed. To accomplish this would cost too much for most companies. Consequently, we are left with the dangerous products that are found in the grocery stores. Household poisonings are actually one of the main causes of harm to children in our country today.

However, there is a solution to this dilemma. There are some companies that can provide safer, naturally based household products. One company in particular has formulated products that are actually more effective and actually costs less to use than their more dangerous counterparts found in discount stores.

The wisest move would be to eliminate as many toxic products in your home as possible as a first step in creating the Third Pillar of Success—Environmental Wellness. For more details, feel free to call or send an email.

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