



Parents get together via iPod 'radio'

By Steve Friess, Special to USA TODAY

Aaron Johnson's wife went into labor a week early, so he was a bit taken by surprise as he ushered her out to the car to head to the hospital. Even so, he remembered to grab a few essential items: a satchel of clothes, a car seat, his iPod and an iPod recording attachment.



Paige Heninger, left, and Gretchen Vogelzang record *Mommymcast*.

By H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY

His iPod? Well, sure. How else was he going to capture audio of the birth of their first child, Brooklyn, to play on his podcast?

Two days later, in mid-November, the audience of his weekly *Who's Your Daddy?* program received a special three-minute dispatch recorded the night of his daughter's birth. The exhausted and audibly awestruck new suburban Seattle father reported: "She's got lots of hair and she's really cute. ... So it all begins!"

And, indeed, such recordings reflect another sort of birth: that of an era in which parents are creating free radio-style shows known as podcasts for other parents, using a few simple, cheap pieces of equipment.

Dozens of homemade — literally mom-and-pop — programs like Johnson's have emerged in the past year and are available via the Internet for playing on any portable MP3 player or directly through the computer. The catalyst was new technology that began catching on in late 2004 that enables users to subscribe to programs and have new episodes automatically delivered to their computers when the episodes are released.

Parenting podcasts

A podcast is a free radio-style program available for download on the Internet. Podcasts can be heard directly through the computer or on portable MP3 players such as iPods, the device that gave the format its name.

Mommymcast

Hosts: Gretchen Vogelzang and Paige Heninger of suburban Washington, D.C.

Website: www.mommymcast.com

The SG Show

Hosts: Steve Gershik and his 8-year-old son, Sam, of Menlo Park, Calif.

Website: sgshow.blogspot.com

101 Ways to Use Baby Wipes

Host: Dennis Gray of San Luis Obispo, Calif.

Website: www.101usesforbabywipes.blogspot.com

Mom Talk Radio

Host: Maria Bailey of Pompano Beach, Fla.

Website: www.momtalkradio.com

Who's Your Daddy?

Hosts: Aaron Johnson and Cliff Knopik of suburban Seattle
Website: www.wydpodcast.com

Gay Parenting Podcast

Hosts: Scott Sherman, Burlington, Vt.
Website: gayparenting.thepodcastnetwork.com

Two Boobs and a Baby

Hosts: Dave and Heather Delaney of Toronto
Website: www.davemadethis.com/two boobs

tune in whenever their busy schedules permit, be it on the car stereo en route to soccer practice or on headphones while folding laundry.

"When my husband described podcasts to me, I immediately thought, 'Well, that would be really good for moms because we can't be in a certain place at a certain time to listen to a radio show and, even if we were, our kids would be constantly interrupting us,'" says Gretchen Vogelzang, 42, the suburban Washington, D.C. co-host of 8-month-old parenting podcast *Mommycast*.

Vogelzang and Paige Heninger combine coffee-klatch banter about their families and interviews with parenting experts. Vogelzang estimates the show attracts more than 300,000 downloads a week.

In March, the twice-a-week *Mommycast* begins a one-year, \$100,000 sponsorship deal with Dixie, making the paper-goods company the first major corporate advertiser of an independently produced podcast that's not about technology, says radio industry researcher Tom Webster of Edison Research in New Jersey.

Many listeners are drawn in to hear someone else's tactics for discussing sex with kids, dealing with food allergies, choosing a day-care center or setting a bedtime. But far from simply crowning themselves parenting experts and dispensing advice from on high, most podcasters admit they learn from their audience, too.

Two Boobs and a Baby co-host Dave Delaney of Toronto, for instance, says one listener heard his complaint about their car's rearview mirror and recommended a different brand better able to help him keep an eye on his newborn son while driving.

"There already was a substantial support network online that parents created pretty early on in the development of the Internet," Webster says. "So it's just sort of an evolution that parents would find podcasting another way to commune."

Another draw is hearing hosts speak frankly from personal experience.

Scott Sherman of *The Gay Parenting Podcast*, based in Burlington, Vt., not only shared the trauma of having an adopted child taken away when the birth mother changed her mind but also brought on a grief counselor to console him on the air.

But sometimes the openness causes problems on the home front. After *Mom Talk Radio* host Maria Bailey of Pompano Beach, Fla., discussed her tween daughter's first crush on her show, her daughter lashed out about the violation of privacy.

Similarly, Aaron Johnson's wife wouldn't allow him to record audio during the birth itself because she didn't want her labor screams exposed to the world.

Johnson obeyed her wishes. It was enough, he says, to record his thoughts after the birth — and to place his iPod in the bassinet of his newborn for a photo. That image, of course, is on the show's website.

"Someday, she'll see that and laugh and say, 'Look at how big that thing (the iPod) was,'" Johnson says.

"I don't know what she's going to think of the show itself, but I'm looking forward to finding out."

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