Production and Editing Practices in The Sweet Roll Gaming Podcast

by Joanne Davaz

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Abstract approved: _______________________________________

Sara Jameson

The Sweet Roll is a podcast centered around discussion of the latest video and
tabletop games. It includes news briefs, game reviews, and interviews with industry
professionals and gaming celebrities. The target audience is men and women aged 14-35
who play virtual and tabletop games as a hobby. This audience values quality production,
objective news writing, and a host with a sense of humor.

This thesis discusses the process of creating a podcast from the production
standpoint. When an audience listens to a podcast, they are knowingly consuming the
information that is presented by the host(s). They are also unknowingly consuming
auditory information engineered by the podcast’s producer. The producer chooses how
content is presented and how audio gets the message across. This includes the equipment
that provides the foundation for a recording, the very deliberate delivery of a message,
and the process of post-producing a clean and listenable show.

Another thesis written by Kenneth L. Wallace will explore the development of
content for the podcast and the process of developing review criteria for video games.

Keywords: gaming, podcasts, media, audio production

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Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Digital Communication Arts project of Joanne E. Davaz
presented on May 29, 2015.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon
State University Honors College. My signature below authorizes the release of this
project to any reader upon request.

_________________________________________
Joanne E. Davaz, Author
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Great thanks to Kate Willson and Bill Gross for their support as I learned and explored my way through KBVR-FM. I also appreciate the opportunities I’ve had to shadow Steven Sandberg and Eve Epstein in the creation of their podcast and hourly news update, respectively.

Thank you to the friends and family who have listened to my work on live radio and in podcasts. Your feedback has made me a better content creator and helped me to strengthen my game for the professional world.

Lastly, the biggest thanks to Kenny Wallace, co-creator of The Sweet Roll and my partner in this project. I’m excited to see where your gaming future takes you.
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I. Introduction

It was a very exciting time in my life. I was a senior at a high school in Idaho who had just completed a preliminary visit to her dream college in Oregon. I had just realized that the impact I wanted to make in the world was by being a media producer. And on the car trip back, my mom and I spent hour after quiet hour listening to podcasted episodes of This American Life and A Prairie Home Companion.

This format, I thought, was perfect.

I loved stories -- this was evident from my prior interest in being an English teacher -- but I wanted to use my voice and perspective to share community stories with others. Podcasting, in that moment, became my dream.

This thesis, therefore, is a result of a college career spent studying the execution of an excellent radio news show. The first step was learning to write a good story; the second step was learning to record that story in sound waves; and the third step, expressed in this paper, is adjusting the recorded sound to augment the story.
II. Inspiration

This chapter overviews the many aspects that have inspired me and this thesis. In addition to the broad concepts of audio story which show why podcasts are a natural outcome, we will look at some recommended podcasts which are excellent aspirational models and the criteria that make them so good.

a. Story augmentation through audio

    I spend a small piece of each day -- on the bus, at work, cooking dinner, winding down before bed -- listening to podcasts. At first I was engrossed in hearing how a story was crafted. I internally visualized the podcast as text script and admired turns of phrase and presentation.

    But as I commenced my education in my writing minor, I realized that it's one thing to write something excellent, and another thing entirely to express the excellent writing in sound.

    Radio programming is powerful because, in most cases, a storyteller is reading his or her own work (although other times a news announcer might be reading briefs written by others). Within that, a listener can experience intonation. A somber story sounds different in the ear than it looks on paper, for instance. A conversation between two people can be easily distinguished with two voices full of personality, rather than a collection of words which must be interpreted by a reader. And a physical environment can be created in audio; for example, a story of a person's adventure in the woods can include the sounds of birds chirping or a creek bubbling, rather than the storyteller having to detail these experiences in his or her exposition.
b. History of podcasts

I2Go, an early MP3 player manufacturer, was the first to develop a system that enabled the selection, automatic downloading and storage of regular audio content on PCs and portable MP3 players. The system was developed in 2000, and at the time there were very few web audio shows that this system could service. I2Go introduced MyAudio2Go, which hosted a new selection of shows in many genres. The service did not last long, folding in the dot-com crash, but it set an example of what could be possible with what would later become podcasting (Credeur).

In 2000 and 2001, the idea of using enclosures in RSS feeds was developed, making it possible to pass web addresses along to media aggregators so users could view their favorite content in one location (Louis). Enclosures were used in weblogging product Radio Userland, which had a built-in aggregator that would both send and receive components of audioblogging (Curry). The step that turned audioblogging into mobile podcasting was a way to synchronize audioblog files with a device that could play them. This became possible in 2003 when a script was developed to transfer MP3 files from Userland to a user’s iPod. User interfaces for podcasting like Transistr, Juice, and CastPodder appeared in 2004. That same year, Ben Hammersley of the Guardian suggested “podcasting” as the official name of the technology (Hammersley).

In June 2005, podcasts appeared in the iTunes Music Store. iTunes was able to manage user subscriptions, as well as download and organize podcasts that would be synced to a user’s iPod. This ease of access to everyday users launched podcasts into the mainstream popularity they enjoy today (“Apple Takes Podcasting Mainstream”).
c. Recommended podcasts

Podcasts and broadcasted radio shows are similar, but not identical. Podcasts are modeled off of the storytelling dynamics of a radio show, but instead of running live, they are produced, edited, and then run as a packages on air with breaks for commercials or underwriters. Podcasts like *This American Life* will run on the radio and then post the episode online. The online episode may have slightly different characteristics than the version that broadcasted; for example, the podcast version of *This American Life* is un-bleeped, revealing the curse words that are not clean for broadcast.

When folks have ideas for a radio-style show but no radio station to support their program, they’ll make a podcast. Some people will record their podcasts in one take, similar to a live radio show, and post that recording online. Others will do a lot of production and editing like some of the nationally syndicated radio shows. Podcasts and radio shows run on the same premises, but are then distributed differently.

I recommend listening to the following podcasts to understand what I mean by using audio to augment a story. Enjoy the stories, but also pay attention to the sounds that make the experience different than reading a book or news article.

- *Serial* - http://serialpodcast.org/
- *This American Life* - http://thisamericanlife.org
III. What makes a good podcast?

Having listed five podcasts that I recommend as high quality, what are the aspects that make them such good examples? In this chapter we will look at clarity, brevity, and audience consideration, along with how we have kept these criteria in mind when creating The Sweet Roll.

Clarity: As tempting as it is to add in as many sound effects, natural sound, and musical pieces as I can find, overdoing it can interrupt the flow of the finished piece and ultimately detract from the story I'm trying to tell or news I'm trying to deliver. First use clean, direct language to make a story easy to understand. Then, be choosy about the effects to add in. The Sweet Roll will accomplish clarity by generating a loose script before the recording of the show and rerecording awkward sentences. I will be attentive to noise reduction and only add effects or bed music as necessary.

Brevity: There's a reason why This American Life or Snap Judgment is usually divided into three 20-minute acts, and why NPR's top-of-the-hour news feed is just five minutes long. A listener has only so much patience to hear about a given topic, though some topics are listenable for longer periods of time (Harter).

For The Sweet Roll, we decided that we would follow the NPR News model for our news updates -- five minutes to deliver a slew of headlines. Our game reviews, on the other hand, can run a little longer because a person who wants to hear an in-depth review is willing to buckle in for perhaps 10 minutes.

Audience consideration: This point especially I would impart to college radio DJs. In my time as radio station manager I have heard many students pitch the following
idea: "Me and my friend have super funny conversations. We want a talk show so that people can laugh along with us!" I have yet to see an example of this working well. A person commuting in his or her car is not likely to want to hear about a college kid's week on the radio. Likewise, a gamer looking for gaming news specifically may not want a long, extended opinion on the week's news -- he or she just wants to hear it straight. *The Sweet Roll* is what it is because we considered what the audience wants to hear, not because my partner and I wanted to have a vanity show (Harter).

In order to consider what the audience wants to hear, we must now define the audience in the next chapter.
IV. Audience

For any medium to succeed, it’s essential to target the content to the audience to know what they want. To do that, we first had to determine factors about our audience. We have decided to create *The Sweet Roll* for an audience of men and women aged 14-35 who play virtual and tabletop games as a hobby. This audience values quality production, objective news writing, and a host with a sense of humor.

We chose podcasting as a venue for this crowd because we think the pod listening world deserves a better gaming news and review podcast than what is currently available. Our target audience merges the audiences of people who play games with the audiences of typical podcast listeners.

*a. Who plays video games?*

As of 2015, 155 million Americans play video games. Four of every five households own at least one dedicated game console (XBox, PlayStation, or Nintendo/Wii, for example), PC, or smartphone. Of those households that have a device to play games, 68% have a console, but smartphones and wireless devices are increasing in gaming use dramatically, going from 22% in 2012 to 66% in 2014 (Entertainment Software Association).

Think the 14-35 age range is too broad? The stereotype is that gamers are white men age 12-24, but the mean age of gamers is actually 35 years old. There are actually fewer gamers under 18 (26% of all) than there are over 36 (44% of all). And the idea that video gamers are typically men? Not true at all -- women make up 44% of gamers (Entertainment Software Association).
b. Who listens to podcasts? Or, who are pod listeners?

According to a study by Edison Research in early 2014, close to half of all Americans age 12 and older -- that’s 124 million -- have listened to online radio (AM/FM radio online or web-only audio content) in the last month. This includes wildly popular music streaming services Pandora and Spotify. Seventy-five percent of these listeners are aged 12-24 (“The Infinite Playlist 2014”).

Podcasts specifically are dramatically increasing in popularity. In 2006, 11% of Americans age 12 and older had ever listened to a podcast. In 2014, that number climbed to 30%. In the last month, about 39 million Americans have listened to a podcast. People who listen to podcasts listen to multiple podcasts in a week; 37% of podcast listeners listen to four or more podcasts weekly (“The Infinite Playlist 2014”).

Recently, when making an 8-hour car trip to visit family, I indulged in a *Serial* marathon by streaming through my cell phone rather than using the ample radio stations available to me along the journey. This behavior is becoming more and more normal. In 2010, 6% of cell phone owners listened to online radio in their car using their cell phones hooked up to their car’s audio system. In 2014, that number increased to 26%. (“The Infinite Playlist 2014”).

This might have something to do with the perception of online radio quality. According to “The Infinite Playlist 2014,” about 59% of listeners think that online streaming has better sound quality than AM/FM radio. This article did not mention whether the responding listeners had access to a good AM/FM signal or a good 3G or 4G connection where they live. If they did have access to both, then the statistic holds. It is
possible, however, that some people prefer online streaming to AM/FM because their commute is too far from the radio tower of a station they enjoy, so the sound is fuzzy. It’s possible as well that others might prefer AM/FM radio because the radio signal is more consistent than patchy or bad 3G or 4G connectivity that would allow them to stream online content successfully. This information is needed in order to fully understand not only who listens to online radio, but why they prefer or do not prefer it.

Now that it’s clear who is the audience for a podcast such as The Sweet Roll, we need to look at the sound production experience to create it.
V. Prior Experience

From my prior experience, I have the ability to produce quality sound for our podcast. I have more than three years of live broadcast experience with the Oregon State University radio station, KBVR-FM, making music and news shows. On average, I spend 2-5 hours a week preparing for my various shows. I have been a host of seven different shows, including two news shows. Each show has demanded different amounts of time for preparation and pre-production, and some of the shows have demanded extra time for post-production for podcasting. Those podcasted shows have been released within a couple days of airing live.

I trained on KBVR-FM’s radio equipment for a total of about 8 hours before I was permitted to operate on my own. Once I knew how to operate the equipment, then I was ready to start producing shows. For me, a music show required about one hour of preparation and one hour of air time per week. The two news shows have been a more intense time commitment; I worked for about 15 hours a week for my first news show and about three hours a week for my second. Here is an overview of my music and news shows.

\textit{a. Music shows}

Five of the show series I’ve hosted during my time working with KBVR-FM are music shows. These take about one hour of preparation per week, followed by the one hour of air time. Music shows are somewhat straightforward -- play music, talk, and run public service announcements. The most complicated part about running a music show is consistently staying up to date on new music to share. It involves a lot of listening to new
artists and curating a playlist that flows smoothly, just as one would decide the order of poems in a collection or articles of a magazine. Pacing and mood come in to play.

In my time as station manager of KBVR-FM, my team worked to make a standardized training system. This system reduced the time it took to learn the system from about eight hours to about four. This makes it easier than ever for a new student to run a music show.

As long as I keep my transitions between music and talk smooth, I have no trouble with dead air. Music shows are judged against standards set by commercial radio, which has tight transitions between songs, ads, and on-air talent. Once people know how a mixing board operates, they can learn to be a DJ within maybe four hours of training.

b. News shows

A news show is much more difficult than a music show. Here we will hear about two news shows, Orange Report and Cover Story.

**Orange Report:** My first news show, *The Orange Report*, came to be because of my job as KBVR-FM’s news director my sophomore year, and I did *Orange Report* for a full year. It was a 10-minute-a-day, 5 days-a-week live show that featured two anchors (me and my co-host), two to three news packages, and an event calendar. *Orange Report* included significantly more moving parts that the music shows. In addition to writing the news stories, I also read them aloud and then did the audio production afterwards. I used
more bed music, intros/outros, and news packages in the forms of sound clips on the array. Orange Report also involved coordination with my co-host; we had to be in sync, because we both had scripted speaking parts that needed to run smoothly. We recorded the show as we ran it, so after an episode of the Orange Report, I sometimes edited it in post-production to get rid of some vocal or timing mistakes. At that point, we would post the edited podcast to our social media pages and our radio station’s website.

Cover Story: Now, in my senior year, I currently run a weekly hour-long news show called Cover Story, in fall, winter, and spring term, which means 10 shows per term. The time has changed every term, but it has consistently been on a weekday afternoon. It's produced in conjunction with the work I do as the editor-in-chief of Beaver's Digest (BD). BD comes out once a term, but the staff of writers, photographers, designers and promoters work hard on it all term. We'll attend multiple events a week to document and photograph them for the end product. But in order to turn out a more frequent product, we will invite a representative from each group whose event we cover for BD to come on our weekly radio show. We record this and release the podcast on social media; this way, BD fans can get a preview of what we are up to. It also reminds them that the next term’s issue of BD is on the way.

Cover Story is much less formal than Orange Report was. We divide the show into three or four 15- to 20-minute segments, depending on how much material we have to cover in a day. I prefer to do this because, though each guest is very interesting to me, I can't bank on a commuter in a car being interested in an hour-long talk with any one guest. It is true that one of KBVR-FM's most popular shows, Inspiration Dissemination,
does spend a whole hour talking with one guest about his or her graduate-level research, but that it is aimed at a different audience who will focus on science for a longer time.

When our guests are unavailable to attend the live airing of the show, I'll record an interview in advance and edit it down to be interesting for radio. We'll usually play those pre-recorded interviews first while we get our live guests acquainted with the on-air room and rules of the radio station. Then, I'll conduct off-the-cuff interviews with the people who are there live. I never have a list of questions to ask in front of me because I have prepared in advance and I know some of the questions I may want to ask. I also like to go wherever a conversation takes me. When I have a list of questions in front of me I tend to focus on the pre-prepared questions; when I do not, I find it easier to hone in on the story that wants to be told.

My strategy as an interviewer for Cover Story is to treat the situation not as a formal interview, but instead as a casual conversation. I take the role of a friendly acquaintance of the guests -- someone who's very, very curious about the work they do. I ask the guests about their experiences as college students, how they got involved in the group or event, what went into planning the event, and how they anticipate the event will go or how it went. I'll also ask a bit about the history of the group and what it takes to get involved. Finally, I'll ask what people can look forward to regarding the group -- future events, meetings, and involvement opportunities.

Using this general framework, I pay careful attention to what my guests are saying and make notes as they are talking. I'll ask the guests to expand on just about every relevant point. In this way, I can get the whole story that the guests are able to tell
and stretch the interview to about 15 or 20 minutes. Sometimes guests are nervous to be live on-air, but usually when I explain that it's just a conversation and they get acquainted with the intimate space of the on-air room, they feel much better.

I also do a bit of post-production work for *Cover Story*. It's really simple -- I'll edit out the songs played on the automation before and after the show. I'll decide whether or not to keep the public service announcements I played. They're required to play on the radio, and if they're relevant in the podcast form I might keep them, but if they are not relevant, I'll delete them from the podcast. I also have music transitions between guest segments, and I will edit a fade in and out of 30 seconds of each song per Fair Use policy (rather than leave the whole song in).

c. What I've learned

From making these music and news shows live, I have learned a great deal about producing quality sound, experience that will help with *The Sweet Roll*. During most of my radio career, the Oregon State University radio station was situated in Snell Hall, a hub of student extracurricular activities. My music and news shows played on speakers throughout the building where the staff in the different Orange News Media work, and I got instant feedback from anyone who has been listening about what was interesting and what was not interesting. Since the radio station moved across the street to the top floor of the new Student Experience Center, my show is only heard online and on the radio. With less immediate feedback, I ask friends and family to tune in live from their computers and give me feedback afterward.
*Orange Report* taught me to write a script in a strictly news format. I got feedback and guidance from fellow media students as well as the Orange Media Network professional staff. *Cover Story*, being unscripted, is not nearly so professional, but according to feedback from those who have heard both, it is more interesting because it is more personal and in-depth. Listeners have also casually mentioned that they prefer listening to *Cover Story* because it is more consistent in sound quality.

Since *Orange Report* was directed and hosted by me, but much of the content was produced by radio news reporters-in-training, the *Orange Report* podcasts sounded inconsistent. The portions of me hosting live sounded clean because there was an experienced host speaking and I was speaking from a fairly well sound-isolated room. But when we cut to news packages, the quality varied widely. Sometimes a reporter used his cell phone to record a conversation and the recording was full of noise artifacts that the reporter did not know how to remove. Other times, a reporter only spoke to one person by way of interview and did not include information like the person’s year and major. Between issues like audio quality and inconsistency in information provided, *Orange Report* sometimes sounded more patchy than professional.

*Cover Story*, however, was constructed by me and one other volunteer who was an experienced podcaster. When we did interviews outside of the studio, we were always prepared with our portable AT2020 microphones (described in the “Equipment and Tools” chapter) and knowledge of how to edit in post-production to remove background noise and any “um”s or other awkward pauses (discussed further in the “Post-Production Process” chapter). The rest of the interviews were recorded as we did them live in the
sound-isolated studio and had clean audio, so no sound-related factors distracted from the content of the podcast.

I am pretty proud of my experience in recording and doing post-production on my work. I think that the sound quality of what I produce is acceptable based on my criteria. I've become adept at picking apart individual sounds within a soundwave, which allows me to get rid of awkward words, phrases, sounds, and ticks. I also am able to produce interesting transitions, intros, and outros that are relevant to my topics.

This was not always the case. My first radio news story that I created as a freshman was pretty bad. I was an inexperienced writer and wrote from a first-person perspective, which is generally frowned upon in news writing. The interviews I recorded were with my cell phone and of poor quality, and I did not know how to edit to make it sound better. I was nervous when recording and narrated too fast. The end product was rushed and awkward. I kept practicing keeping my voice smooth and level. I developed good interview habits by practicing on my friends and asking for their feedback. I learned how to use recording hardware and editing software on my own time so the sound quality was elevated. Finally, I spent many hours listening to good podcasts (mentioned earlier in the “Inspiration” chapter) and taking note of what I liked. This helped me to develop a good ear and a good voice. I believe that this, like most other skills, can be developed by most people who are enthusiastic and willing to put in the time.

In order to create and produce shows like Orange Report and Cover Story, it’s important to know what kind of equipment is needed. We will discuss this in the next chapter.
VI. Equipment and Tools

The barest-bones podcasts require the use of an audio capture device, an audio storage device, an Internet connection, and a hosting service. More or better equipment and tools increase the production value and create a better-sounding, more professional podcast. My goal as the director and editor of The Sweet Roll is to create a podcast that is clean-sounding and pleasant aurally without buying or renting a professional studio. To evaluate my current quality level and search for areas of improvement, I interviewed Finn John of Offbeat Oregon History and Steven Sandberg of Sandberg On Sports. I chose them because they produce a podcast of similar quality as I wish to have for The Sweet Roll. Following is a comparison of their experiences, equipment, and tools against my own.

a. Overview of Offbeat Oregon History

Offbeat Oregon History is the brainchild of Finn J.D. John, who is a media instructor at OSU since 2010. He has a graduate degree in Literary Nonfiction from the University of Oregon. As a history enthusiast, he has written regular Offbeat Oregon History columns since 2008 that appear in about a dozen Oregon community papers. John turned Offbeat Oregon History into a transmedia project by creating podcasts, a website, a handful of social media pages, and a calendar of live history “saloon lectures.” His podcasts draw from his column’s archives and also include some podcast-only content. As of May 2015, he has published 211 episodes on iTunes. John has also combined his columns and media into a book called Wicked Portland, published in 2012 (John).
As an instructor, John is dedicated to helping students develop their media writing skills. Courses he has taught include Writing for the Media Professional, Media Spin Detecting, and a capstone course in novel writing and transmedia franchise creation. He is also the faculty adviser for the OSU Novelists’ Club, providing support and workshops for student novelists (John).

b. Overview of Sandberg On Sports

When Steven Sandberg graduated from Gonzaga University with a degree in Broadcast Journalism, he knew what it took to be a multimedia producer. He was the sports editor and editor-in-chief of the Gonzaga Bulletin, but didn’t stop at print. He also worked extensively as a reporter, anchor, sports anchor and announcer at GUTV, the college TV station. His sports media enthusiasm went beyond college products; he spent a summer as a radio play-by-play announcer for a summer-league baseball team in Spokane, calling every home and away game on 1510 KGA and calling in for a weekly segment on a local sports radio show. After graduation, he decided to keep his sports coverage skills active to stay marketable for media career positions by creating his own sports commentary blog. His podcast, *Sandberg On Sports*, grew out of that blog (Sandberg).

The content of *Sandberg On Sports* is mostly interview-based. He said in an email, “I would come up with a topic that interested me, and typically find the right person to talk to” (Sandberg email). During the World Cup 2014, for example, he did a show with a German sports writer and another with a writer for the Portland Timbers. He included friends in his podcast, too, inviting on friends passionate about basketball during
the NBA playoffs. When he didn’t have guests booked, he did his show as a monologue (Sandberg).

Sandberg covered a wide variety of sports teams and topics he was interested in on Sandberg On Sports, including the Blazers, Chicago Cubs, the World Cup, video games, journalism, and TV reporting. He said, “In retrospect, it’s harder to find your niche audience when you have such a broad format” (Sandberg email).

Sandberg On Sports has been on hiatus since Sandberg began work at Oregon State University. As the Journalism Coordinator for Orange Media Network, he now helps students develop their voices as multimedia journalists.

c. Equipment comparison

This chart in Figure 1 below compares all of the equipment, tools, and assets used by each podcast. The information was gathered by interview and by observation. Each category will be described in detail.
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<th>Offbeat Oregon History</th>
<th>Sandberg on Sports</th>
<th>The Sweet Roll</th>
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<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>RV/camper filled with “soft stuff”</td>
<td>The floor of a clothes-filled closet</td>
<td>At a desk under a blanket surrounded by pillows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Microphones</td>
<td>Sennheiser e935</td>
<td>Blue Yeti with adapter</td>
<td>AT2020</td>
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<td>Desktop computer</td>
<td>iPad</td>
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<td>Hosting/Distribution</td>
<td>iTunes, Stitcher</td>
<td>Spreaker</td>
<td>Soundcloud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1: comparison of equipment and tools used by three different podcasts*

**Recording space:** None of the three podcasts are recorded in a professional sound-isolated recording space, but for the purposes of *The Sweet Roll*, a recording studio is not necessary. We are all in consensus that podcasts sound the best when recorded in and among “soft stuff” like clothing or blankets. John records his podcasts early in the morning in his vehicle so he does not disturb the other occupants of his home. He occasionally encounters difficulty when an airplane roars past, but if he waits a minute for it to pass through the sky, he can resume his recording easily. Sandberg and I both record in our homes. Because Sandberg records into an iPad, he is more flexible in recording locations and is able to take his setup into a large closet where hanging clothes
can muffle any noises. I record on to my large computer, so I opt to surround Kenny and myself with blankets and pillows to dampen the sound. This is not an ideal recording situation. Ideally we will move to a location where we will have a dedicated room with thick doors and walls, several carpets, and sound foam on the walls.

**Microphones:** Sandberg uses a Blue Yeti microphone. These are high-end USB microphones that are good for home use, costing about $150. They’re nice because they’re able to switch between cardioid, bidirectional, omnidirectional, and stereo patterns. These different patterns indicate how a microphone picks up sound. One pattern might pick up sound from directly in front of the microphone, which is good for recording a single speaker and omitting noise from other parts of the room. Another pattern picks up noise from all over the microphone, which is good in situations where a small group of people are crowding around a microphone. Blue Yeti offers versatility in varied podcast situations.

John uses a Sennheiser e935 dynamic vocal microphone. Dynamic microphones are great microphones for vocal recording and are the primary type used for singers.

I use an AT2020 USB microphone, which is a priced similarly to John’s Sennheiser e935 and yields a similar sound quality but is limited to a bidirectional pattern.

**Hard disk:** Sandberg’s use of an iPad as a hard disk is very interesting to me because it promotes portability and expands a range of inexpensive mobile applications that are not available to John and me, who use PCs. These are both immense benefits.
The problem with using an iPad is that it has limited storage space to hold a large archive of podcasts. It also requires the use of adapters to make use of high-end microphones. The Blue Yeti that Sandberg uses has a USB out, but the iPad does not have a USB port so he needed to buy a USB-to-Lightning adapter usually used for cameras so that he could plug his microphone into his iPad.

John’s setup is portable and allows him to record on-the-go, which is useful if he needs to interview outside sources for his show. It also includes enough disk space to store an archive of podcasts and has an interface that allows for in-depth editing.

My setup is not ideal because it is stationary. I do most of the production on my large desktop computer, so if I have a noisy roommate in the room, I can’t easily leave the space. This also limits the guests I can have, since it would involve inviting the guests to my house. I get around this by plugging my microphone into my laptop and recording at whatever location works for them, but it’s difficult to improvise sound isolation on the go. I then take that recording and transport the data from my laptop to my desktop for editing.

*Mixer:* Sandberg’s setup is much different than John’s or mine because he uses an app that acts like a mixing board. Sandberg uploads files like prerecorded opens, sound effects, and background music and is able to toggle them on and off. This results in him recording his show in a scenario similar to a live broadcast. While his show does not air live, he does record his show all the way through from beginning to end and saves the end product to be distributed online. This is similar to my process of producing *Cover*
Story described earlier. John and I create our podcasts differently, recording different pieces of audio at different times and piecing them together in post-production.

Sandberg’s method requires little to no post-production.

Music/fx: Sandberg and John both use music in their podcast that they have acquired by obtaining permission from the recording artists. I use music in The Sweet Roll that artists have posted to the Internet saying that anyone is permitted to use the music for personal or creative purposes. If The Sweet Roll becomes a source of income, I should offer the musicians royalties for use of their music.

I also use very short sound effect audio clips from video games to act as transitions within podcasts. As The Sweet Roll currently is not a commercial podcast, I am operating within fair use guidelines. Once the podcast begins to make money, I will need to acquire permission to use these sound effects to avoid legal problems.

Editing software: John and I use desktop applications called Audacity and Adobe Audition, respectively. These two programs serve very similar functions in terms of podcast editing. They are able to amplify audio to standard volume, perform noise reduction processes, and cut, paste, and delete sounds. Examples of these processes will be shown in the Production Process section. Audacity is free, open-source software. Audition requires a monthly fee to own.

Sandberg uses the BossJock app to record and can use it to do some light editing, but often he posts exactly what he records without post-production. If he needs to record an interview separately, Sandberg uses Audacity to record and edit the interview and then
adds it to his list of clips in BossJock. There are some good audio editing apps that can be used on iPads, such as Hokusai (which has similar functions as Audacity) but Sandberg doesn’t use them.

*Hosting/distribution: Offbeat Oregon History* can be found on iTunes, which is arguably the dominant hub for podcast aggregation, and Stitcher, which is a mobile app for a variety of smartphone operating systems. *Sandberg On Sports* is hosted on Spreaker, an audio hosting website/app. *The Sweet Roll* is hosted on Soundcloud, a web-based audio hosting service. Spreaker and Soundcloud are both services that give users an allotment of free space. Users can then pay to upgrade their account and have more space.
VII. Production Process

My role as news director at KBVR-FM demanded that I learn how to produce solid news packages and edit them in a studio setting. I use similar techniques to produce *The Sweet Roll*.

When creating news packages for *The Sweet Roll*, I collected sound files one of two ways: in the field or at home.

*a. In the field*

Field reporting demands that the interviewer have a good sound recording device. OSU’s Orange Media Network had high-end, brick-sized Zoom brand voice recorders available for checkout; I liked to use these and advised my student volunteers to do the same. However, since there was a time restriction on the checkout and a limited number of recorders available, I did not rely exclusively on those. Instead, I carried a more petite Olympus brand voice recorder at all times.

If I was about to go on assignment and knew I needed to record something, I’d record using the Zoom recorder. But if I stumbled upon news happening in front of me -- and I often did -- I was glad to have the Olympus handy.

My volunteer staff will often ask me if it is all right to use the built-in voice recorder on their smartphones. If the student is only using the audio for note-taking purposes, I don’t care. But audio that goes to air should not be recorded using a cell phone; the audio collected is distorted and tinny, which makes for very poor listening.
b. In the studio

KBVR-FM comes complete with a sound recording booth. The production booth we used to have in Snell Hall was not studio-quality as Snell Hall was built as a dorm and later converted into the radio station. True studio-quality recording booths are built with specifications like double-walled doors and windows, floating carpet, and angular walls for sound diffusion. KBVR-FM has now transitioned into a new building since March 2015 that is built to radio specifications with studio-quality equipment.

Even in Snell, KBVR’s recording booth was nice because it was more quiet than a noisy public space. It also included nice features like studio microphones that capture rich, full vocal audio. These microphones, as well as some record players, CD players, and other components, are attached to a mixing board similar to the one described in the on-air room. To capture audio there, it’s as easy as opening the recording software, turning on the microphones, and hitting “record” on Adobe Audition 1.5. The production room in the new Student Experience Center is equally easy to use, but with updated equipment and recording software.

Figure 2: The SEC production room’s microphones, monitors, and microphones
c. At home

Recording at home is sub-optimal, but I have improvised some techniques that produce clean audio. The first tool I need is a microphone; I use an AT2020 microphone, which is popular for podcast use. I record my audio on Adobe Audition CC, so the recording process is much the same as it is in the studio. However, my home is not very sound absorptive. To compensate, I’ll find a couple of fluffy blankets and pillows. I’ll place the pillows on my desk on either side of the microphone, and then cover myself, my microphone, the pillows, and my computer screen in a blanket tent. Fabric and down make for pretty good sound absorption, so my voice doesn’t echo off walls and my neighbors’ noises don’t come in.
VIII. Post-Production Process

A news package often has several audio components that need to be mixed together. This might include one or more interview tracks, a narration track, and natural sound tracks. I use Adobe Audition to weave them all together.

_The Sweet Roll_ is slightly different than the news packages I create in production and structure. First, we have not done any recording in the field yet. That may be wise for future podcasts, but it was outside of our scope for this project.

We record primarily using the in-home technique described above, though KBVR-FM has allowed us to use their space for our recording needs a couple of times.

For the purposes of this paper, I will demonstrate my editing process by using screenshots of a clip as it is taken through the process.

![Figure 3: raw recorded audio](image)

Figure 3 is the raw recording. It is a clip of me saying “My name is Jodie Davaz and you’re, uh, listening to _The Sweet Roll._”
Figure 4: audio edited to be amplified to standard volume

Figure 4 is the raw recording amplified. Standard maximum volume is 0 decibels (db), so the peaks of the waveform are at 0 db. The larger waveform reflects its increased volume.

Figure 5: “uh” is pointed out

Figure 5 shows the “uh” that needs to be removed identified by an arrow.
Figure 6 shows the “uh” having been removed.

Figure 7 shows the background noise being reduced. This is more evident in the bottom portion, called the Spectral Frequency Display, than it is in the top waveform illustration.

The audio recorded with some very quiet static noise and humming that is a result of the
natural sound in the recording space and artifacts generated by my microphone. I selected a quiet piece of audio before the speech begins and captured a noise print. This results in the program registering the characteristics of the noise I’ve selected. Then I use the noise print in a noise removal process. In this process, the program uses the noise print that I registered and identifies that noise throughout the entire document. Then it removes that noise without disturbing the parts of audio that are not that noise -- that is, the words I am speaking. A before and after:

Figures 3 and 7
This is just a short clip introducing the podcast. If I have a 15-minute podcast to edit, it takes about an hour to run these processes and then paste in whatever sound effects I choose.
IX. Potential Problems

The biggest limiting factor in producing *The Sweet Roll* is access to a budget for traveling to conventions and purchasing games. *The Sweet Roll* is currently running because the director (me) enjoys making podcasts and because the producer (Ken) is a video game hobbyist who would elect to purchase games regardless of whether the podcast existed. However, Ken does not often have resources available to go to conventions that would give *The Sweet Roll* an edge on timeliness and exclusive interviews. As it stands, our operation incurs expense without any compensation. As a business model it is unsustainable.

That problem will be eliminated once we have established ourselves as a serious and credible source for gaming news and reviews. Press is often given advance releases of games for review and invited to game conventions with comp tickets. Being serious and dedicated will put us on the press map, and when we are on the press map, we will have access to the resources that will make us as successful as the other big names.
X. What is next for *The Sweet Roll*?

*a. Music and sfx production*

Having job shadowed at OPB and examined their news team, I understand that I operate at a professional level when cutting audio. The next thing for me to learn is how to produce sound effects, bed tracks, and other digital audio compositions. Weaving together audio tracks can be fun and creative; popular storytelling podcasts like *This American Life* and *Freakonomics* operate just fine with minimal non-vocal compositions. But I also enjoy the musical and audio-illustrative qualities of podcasts like Snap Judgment and Radiolab and think that an ability to create such an audio atmosphere would be valuable.

To start, I think I’d need to study music composition techniques using tutorials like those found on Lynda.com. Programs for music composition include BATTERY, GarageBand, and Logic Pro. I have basic knowledge of music theory and practical knowledge based on about 10 years as a musician; I just need to learn how to apply that musical knowledge to a digital instrument.

*b. Advertising*

It is typical to hear advertisements in podcasts. Unlike commercial radio, advertisements are few and far between and often have a specific appeal to the listener. At the time of this writing, for example, *Freakonomics* is sponsored by Squarespace, a service that provides templates on which people build websites. Stephen Dubner of *Freakonomics* spends maybe 30 seconds in an hour-long episode thanking Squarespace
for their contribution, describing their services, and offering a coupon code exclusive to *Freakonomics* listeners.

Though it is outside the scope of this project, *The Sweet Roll* could easily adopt such sponsorships in the future. Companies that sell gaming supplies like CritSuccess would find a niche audience among our listeners. Referrals from *The Sweet Roll* could yield a cut sent our direction.

*The Sweet Roll* could also engage in advance reviews. A game developer could send Kenny an advance copy of the game in exchange for his playthrough and game-critiquing expertise. Sometimes, developers will dish out money for an honest review even if it doesn’t extol only the game’s virtues. At worst, the critic gets a free game to review. At best, *The Sweet Roll* gains financial support. The critic is responsible for balancing the ethics of being paid to review a game.

c. Community building

Social media offers an exciting platform for engaging a community in between podcasts. *The Sweet Roll* has huge potential on Facebook and Twitter. Our audience is highly adoptive of these platforms and tend to have lengthy discussions about video games. I can see Facebook and Twitter being utilized in two main ways:

1. Discussion about the most recent podcast. Perhaps Kenny reviews a game and users disagree with the review. Facebook is an incredibly useful platform for hosting discussions about video game reviews.
2. Updates from the host. Live-tweeting is a popular way to engage an audience. Kenny would be wise in the future to tweet his experiences with a game as he is playing it, ultimately leading up to the full review in podcast form. Should *The Sweet Roll* gain in popularity, it may also be wise to connect with fans at conventions where games are discussed such as BlizzCon, E3, PAX Prime, and Norwestcon.

d. Regular scheduling

*The Sweet Roll’s* biggest flaw currently is its lack of consistency. We have produced a couple of tester episodes and placed them on a website. But a podcast begins to be taken seriously when it produces content on a regular enough schedule that an audience knows what to expect and is not left with a lengthy lag between episodes.

My suggestion for a schedule:

1. Gaming news every other day. Any longer lag, and the news is no longer current.

2. Game reviews every week. This provides enough time for Kenny to power through a game and at least get far enough to give a well-rounded review. More frequently and Kenny is under too much pressure. Less frequently and our listeners become bored.

3. Bonus episodes (featuring special guests or topics) every two weeks. *The Sweet Roll* is primarily focused on gaming news and reviews, so listeners will expect frequent content in those areas. The bonus episodes will engage listeners on a different level than normal, but are infrequent enough that it does not take our energy away from the main goal at hand.
XI. Conclusion

Now that this project has a few pilot podcasts completed and we are looking forward to continuing the project into the future, it’s important that we reflect on the project. Most thesis projects would start with secondary research and a review of the literature, but since we already had experience from direct practice, we forged ahead with the creation of the podcast without examining theory much..

Now it’s time to go back and see what research has been done on the topic of podcasting and pod listening. As it happens, there actually has not been much research, according to Daniel Faltesek, professor of New Media at OSU.

In a recent email, Faltesek explains that:

Podcasting can be a strange topic for research, for a few reasons it never caught as an archive for scholarly criticism at most of the media studies journals, although there are definitely articles about podcasting both as audio program and the ipod as a listening device (Faltesek, May 13).

What this tells us is that it’s a good thing we did not wait until we were up to our ears in research. If we did, we might still be drawing a blank today. Faltesek explains,

In a historical sense, podcasting came of age at the exact wrong moment, television studies was really getting solid feet in the early 2000s and social media studies took off about 2007. The window when podcasting would have been an issue for research without those other rising media would have been really small. … By 2011, podcasting was done from the abstracts of the [MIT biannual] conference. (Faltesek, May 13)
The issue gets more complicated. For academics to take an interest, they need to deal with the questions of radio. Faltesek says:

The folks in radio research are really quite historical. Battles and Hayes new book on War of the Worlds is big, but that does little for molecularized (Humphreys 2007) models of effect like podcasting. (Faltesek, May 14)

This raises the question: how similar are radio and podcasts really? Scholars who focus on the social justice potential of radio, for example, might not turn their attention to podcasts. Because pod listening requires an Internet connection, some groups might not have access to podcasts as easily as they would have access to radio (Faltesek, May 14).

On the other hand, podcasting can have a democratizing effect on radio content that does get produced. Anyone with a computer (or iPad, in Sandberg’s case) and microphone can put their thoughts on this new form of radio, putting more voices into the field. In this way, access to Internet can amplify the voices of people without access to radio booths -- but the voices of the less privileged are still silenced. Ideas around podcasting as a potential tool of democratization were discussed at a 2005 conference in Duke. The event was podcasted, but the audio is no longer available (Todd).

Other works exist regarding topics surrounding podcasting, such as iPod use, mobile listening, MP3 file formatting, and psychological audio cues. While they do not directly inform the work we needed to do to create The Sweet Roll, they are works that could potentially inform the further development of the podcast. These works are listed in the “Further Reading” section.

The Sweet Roll has a promising future as a gaming news podcast. Armed with the knowledge of what successful podcasts have done before me, as well as a solid
understanding of what I need to improve on, Ken and I are ready to “level up” our podcast to create a professional quality product that fills a currently empty niche. I look forward to filling this role in the gaming community.
Glossary

Dead air: Silence that is being transmitted over the radio. Listeners tune in to hear talk or music, so hearing dead air in between songs or in transitions between music and talk can be uncomfortable for the listener.

(Mixing) board: A control panel that operators to use what sounds are being transmitted. Several inputs, or channels, go into the mixing board, such as studio microphones, computers with sound effects, the on-air phone, CD players, and record players. The mixing board has on/off buttons for each of these channels. Each on/off button is accompanied by a slider that adjusts volume.

Bed music: Music that is played quietly while someone is talking.

Intros/outros: Sequences that introduce a show or sign a show off. They are often pre-recorded so that there is consistency among episodes.

Array: A program shown on a computer monitor near the mixing board. The interface is partitioned into buttons that the user can press to trigger some audio effect to play. Buttons can be programmed to play a wide variety of audio clips, like intros/outros, bed music, sound effects, and pre-recorded public service announcements.

On-air room: The physical space where the host and board operator carry out their tasks as they broadcast a live show.
Works Cited


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Figures Cited

Figure 1 - Equipment comparison chart. By author. 9 May 2015.

Figure 2 - Mixing Board. Photo by author. 13 May 2015.

Figure 3 - Screen shot of raw audio clip. By author. 12 May 2015.

Figure 4 - Screen shot of amplified audio clip. By author. 12 May 2015.

Figure 5 - Screen shot of audio clip with “um” identified by arrow. By author. 12 May 2015.

Figure 6 - Screen shot of audio clip with “um” removed. By author. 12 May 2015.

Figure 7 - Screen shot of noise reduced audio clip, By author. 12 May 2015.
Further Reading


This article connects prisoners’ radio production with notions of active citizenship.


This article suggests that studies of mobile media need to be more attentive to the history of screening technologies.


This article discusses research that shows how interrupting a comfortable audio flow can cause people to briefly but automatically snap to attention. This can apply to radio broadcast, podcast, and web streaming purposes.


This paper questions examines whether podcast is the newest and purest form of Walter Ong’s secondary orality. It compares traits between podcasting and other personal experience-telling mediums like bloggers, DJs and beat poets.


This book discusses the crucial role of compression in audio in telling the story of the MP3, the most widely-used audio format. The author uses a historical context dating back a century to the wide use of telephones to explain how MP3s came to be.


This article discuss the intimacy of using an iPod, specifically how it creates a space in which listeners “lose themselves” in music.
Appendix A: Prezi presentation used when presenting project