

RODE PODCASTER

Anyone with a computer can now be a 'podcaster'.

Text: Chris Holder



► The Podcaster might not be the first USB mic on the market, but it's the first to make its intentions so blatant. Yes, it's for podcasting – and all the multifarious innovations and evils that the word entails.

You know, and I know, that any mic is essentially appropriate for podcasting – so long as you have a preamp and a way of recording it – but Joe Punter as he wheels around in the electronics store uncertainly deliberating over a way to get his deepest thoughts 'out-there' will naturally be attracted to something labelled 'Podcaster'. Meanwhile, Harvey Norman floor staff will hardly be able to believe their luck – talk about an easy sell ("You wanna podcast? Well, *here's* your mic")!

I'm not meaning to sound cynical here, it is after all a canny move on the part of Rode, and I wish them well. But my feeling is, my 'wishes' won't be required; the bulk of Podcaster sales will not be to AT readers, it'll be the people who don't know a cardioid from cardigan.

With that in mind, Rode has launched a whole new website dedicated to podcasting and the Podcaster. It's a very smart and impressive site (www.rodepodcaster.com) with some good advice on how to get you on your podcast feet. Well-known voiceover man, Ken Sparkes, takes would-be podcasters by the hand, working through basic mic technique etc. Alongside the tips is a Podcaster forum to hear and be heard – just log on and create a user name for yourself.

This isn't Rode's first broadcast mic – the Broadcaster has that distinction. But the Podcaster seems to be inspired by the Electrovoice RE20 a little more – and why not... as the RE20 is an absolute legend in the broadcast field. So the Podcaster bears more than a passing resemblance to the RE20 both aesthetically (long, imposing barrel-chested end-address mic), internally (a dynamic capsule well set back from the 'nose' of the mic) and sonically (a noticeable lift around 9kHz).

BROADCASTING THE FACTS

But it's easy to make too much of the RE20 comparison, as clearly, there are some very obvious differences. First up is the USB lead sticking out of the Podcaster's rear end. The Podcaster has an onboard A/D converter (18-bit and up to 48k sampling) and then packages off the data to your PC via USB. To state the obvious, this obviates the need for a preamp or a mixing console – just go directly to your computer. The second big departure is the 3.5mm headphone socket. And not just a jack but a volume pot. Integrating a headphone amp is a real stroke of genius. It allows for latency-free monitoring of your voice, and is one less thing for people to worry about when it comes to setting up their PC.

The Podcaster could hardly be easier to 'operate'. Once you've plugged it in, a status LED glows red momentarily and then green once it senses bus power. And that's it. Job done... no questions asked, no dialogue boxes to contend with, nothing. If you're after more computer-based control over the mic then download a little control panel from the Rode site – it offers a volume slider and a mute button.

Working with the Podcaster is a pleasure. It's easy to get more than enough level (both on the output of the mic and the headphone) and the sound of the mic was instantly satisfying. One caveat, when I first sparked up the Podcaster I was a bit concerned about some low-level hum. It transpired that I was picking up computer noise. So, as ever, be aware of what hums you have in your room, but given the Podcaster is a computer 'companion' product it might be harder to fully escape the racket of a PC fan.

Adding to the Podcaster's appeal are the optional accessories. Podcaster comes packaged with a regulation mic stand mount but, for my money, you've simply got to invest in the 'extras'. First up is the PSM1 shockmount. The Podcaster is already internally shockmounted, and is nicely resistant to the odd shake, but the PSM1 offers greater protection. Next, and the real deal-clincher for me, is the PSA1: an 'anglepoise'-style arm that clamps neatly to your desk edge (with a bolt-on option for something more permanent). With the Podcaster in place at the end of the arm, it sits perfectly balanced, swivelling a full 360 degrees and extending the reach of the mic over its dual pivot-point span. Combine the shockmount with the arm and for less than \$200 extra you're instantly transported from 'lonely hack in the spare bedroom' to 'golden tonsils professional'. I just loved the setup, and couldn't stop unctuously intoning 'Valvoline... you know what I mean' incessantly into the end of the mic.

POD ALMIGHTY?

The Podcaster is suitable for any application where vocal clarity and direct digital connection is required. If you have a laptop then, in theory, you could be recording podcasts from a street in Bagdad's Red Zone... But, this is not really a 'portable' mic and lends itself to a desk job. Speaking of which, ask Rode about its desktop baby tripod stand which I reckon gives this mic some extra portability and is a good option for those not wanting the full PSA1 extendo-arm.

The Podcaster is great. The price is right, it's easy to integrate into your computer setup, and the accessories are very cool. It turns any home-spun 'broadcast' studio into something entirely more serious... 'if you know what I mean'. ■



NEED TO KNOW

Price

Podcaster: \$345; PSA1 Studio Arm: \$132; PSM1 Shockmount: \$53

Contact

Rode Microphones
(02) 9468 5855
ozsupport@rode.com
www.rode.com

Pros

Direct and easy USB setup.
Zero-latency headphone connection.
High quality sound.

Cons

Some won't buy into the iPod aesthetic.

Summary

Superficially looks like an attachment for an Imperial Storm Trooper's helmet, but look a little deeper and you have a well-priced, well-featured, one-stop voiceover mic for any would-be podcasters with a computer.



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Rode is one microphone that can give you that studio sounding quality without requiring extra hardware.

The Podcaster is a dynamic mic that connects to your Mac via USB and does not require any type of breakout box or phantom power. It is self powered, so that means you don't need to worry about external power supplies, although it does need a powered USB port. Connecting the Mic to one of your Mac's built-in USB ports, or into a powered USB hub will do the trick.

The mic ships with a USB cable and a mic stand adapter, so it's ready to go when you take it out of the box. No special drivers are needed, either. Actually, there are no special drivers or additional software for Mac Podcaster users, even though the manual says there are.



The Rode Podcaster microphone.

You will need your own mic stand, and be sure to balance it because the Podcaster is a fairly heavy microphone. Like about two pounds heavy.

Since the Podcaster is a dynamic mic, it is designed to pick up sound that is directly in front of it. The audio quality is really good, but you can tell when someone pulls away or gets too close to the mic. That is not a problem with the Podcaster, but instead just the nature of dynamic microphones.

Despite the great audio quality, I did have some issues getting enough gain out of the Podcaster. When Ricky Spero and I started testing this mic during the [Apple Weekly Report](#) podcast, I had to max out the sound input level in the Sound Preference Pane. I also had to keep the mic a bit closer to my face than I was comfortable with while recording.

I first used the Podcaster during the [December 16, 2006](#) edition of *AWR*. If you listen closely, you can hear where I accidentally bumped my glasses against the mic while turning my head. Odds are that most people were born with better physical coordination

than I was, so you probably won't have to worry about bouncing your face off the Podcaster while recording – but that wouldn't have happened if I didn't have to get so close to the mic.

If you want to monitor your audio input directly from the microphone, you can do that, too. It includes a headphone jack and volume out control on the side of the mic body. This is the only microphone I've ever tested that included its own headphone jack.



Monitor your audio through the built-in headphone jack.

Another first for me was the Rode Podcaster [Web site](#). This site was set up by Rode to host and broadcast the podcasts that Podcast owners make. You'll have to set up a free account on the Podcaster Web site, and there are support documents to help you get your recordings uploaded. Not many users are taking advantage of the site, but my guess is because most already have podcast feeds set up elsewhere.

At first I was disappointed that the Podcaster didn't include some kind of carrying case. After time, however, I realized that it wasn't really necessary since this mic is more likely to stay in a studio environment instead of traveling around for on-site recordings.

The Bottom Line

The Rode Podcaster is a great choice for voice recordings, and is capable of pro-level quality when used correctly. If you tend to move around a lot when you record, this may not be the best choice for you since condenser mics are better at picking up moving targets.

For users that are comfortable with dynamic mics, however, the Podcaster is a fantastic choice that will reliably and accurately record your audio for you. Just remember this one will most likely stay in your recording studio.

Product: [Podcaster Microphone](#)

Company: [Rode](#)

List Price: \$349

Amazon Price: [\\$199.95](#)

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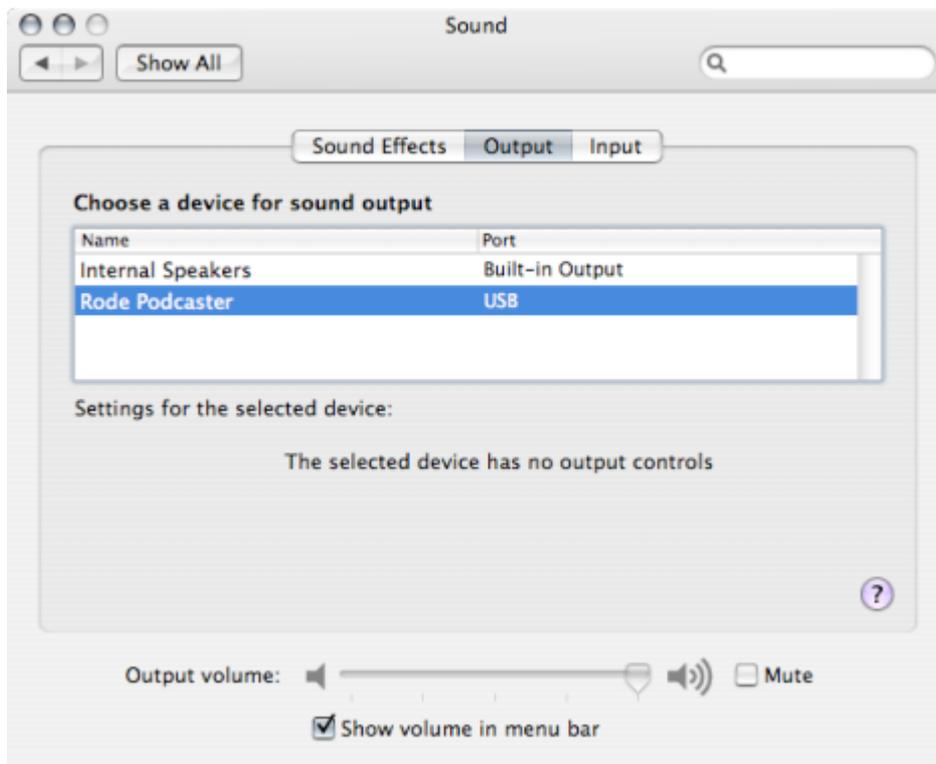
[Rode Podcaster: The Review.](#)

by Chris Coyier



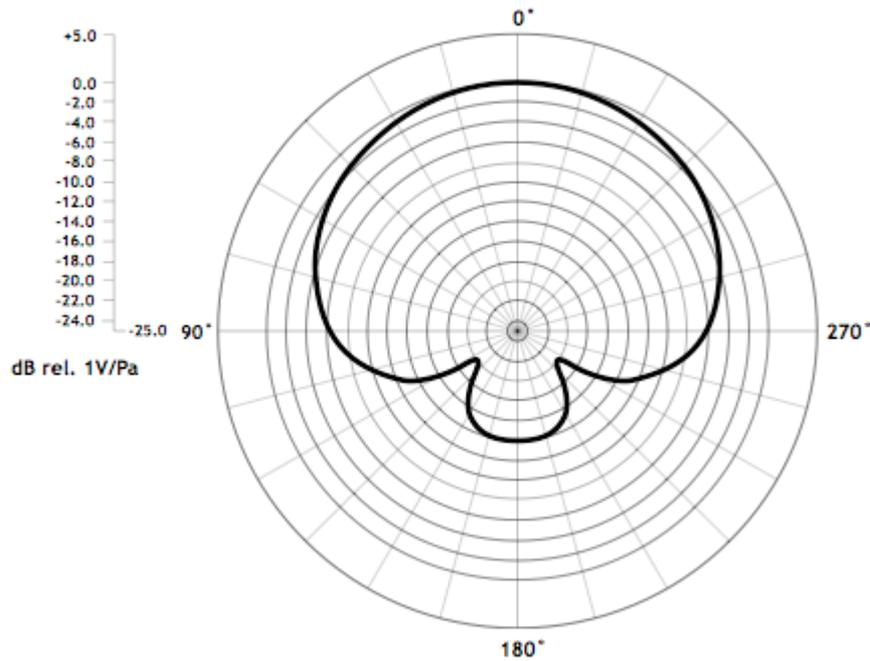
I'm not exactly shy around microphones. I've been in many studio recording sessions, there has been a microphone in every Mac I've owned since I've been 12, and I even own a small arsenal of 57's, 58's, and a decent condenser for band activities. At the same time, I'm no expert. I couldn't tell you what the right microphone is for an acoustic bass in a small theater with echo issues on a humid summer evening like the pros could. That kind of microphone trivia comes across as comically absurd to me, kinda like in *City Slickers* when Mitch challenges Barry what the perfect ice cream is to follow a meal of frank and beans: "*Scoop of chocolate, scoop of vanilla. Don't waste my time.*"

What I do know is good products and good deals, and the Rode Podcaster is both. The Podcaster is a USB microphone, meaning a single cable from the mic to USB port is all it takes. Being a condenser, it needs to be powered, but the power from the USB bus is enough, it needs no separate power source. My iMac instantly recognized the device.



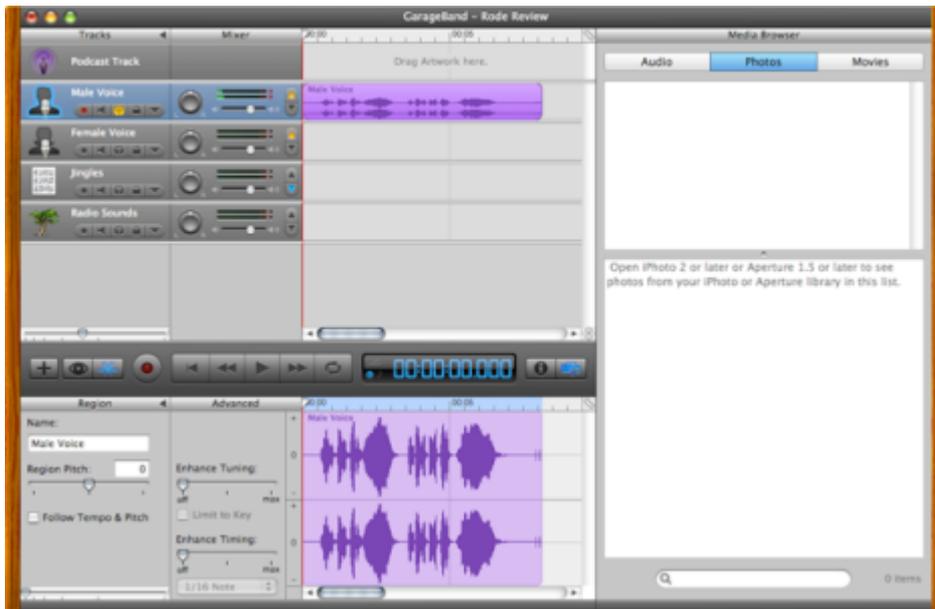
Notice how it is both a sound input device as well as an output device. The Podcaster has a headphone jack directly on the microphone, which allows you to listen to yourself in real time without the delay that plagues other USB microphones.

Being a condenser mic brings about some issues people should be aware of before purchasing. As a rule, condensers are extremely sensitive. If you are sitting in your home office recording and your neighbor is mowing his lawn, that is going to be a problem. If you have a mostly-quiet environment, you should have no trouble. Most condensers are side address, meaning they point upwards and you speak (sing, play, etc.) into the side of them. Don't make that mistake with the Podcaster, it is a frontal address microphone, meaning you speak into the "top" of it. Condensers, as well as regular microphones, are subject to handling noise, meaning it is going to pick up some low rumbling sounds if you are holding it in your hands or passing it around. Condensers are often put in shock mounts to avoid this (pictured in this post, but the Podcaster does not come with a shock mount). Some condensers pick up sound from many feet away, but the Podcaster's range is much smaller. Speaking close to the head is your best bet. Regardless, the pickup pattern is still [cardioid](#).



If you have read this far, maybe you'll be interested in actually hearing the Podcaster in action! Check out the first FreshArrival audio review below:

Recording that in GarageBand was a fairly simple affair.



For around \$200 street price, the Podcaster is an amazingly good deal. There are bigger, better, fancier microphones out there (obviously), but the Podcaster is more than capable of producing very high quality professional sound for a fairly low investment.



Blogs > Audio



Rode Podcaster Review

By [Scott Bourne](#)
December 9, 2006[listen](#) 

Beginning podcasters quickly find out that a bad mic makes for bad audio. Period. There's no undo button on the microphone. Or as you have no doubt heard, garbage in equals garbage out.

I always advocate improving your sound by improving your mic first. Everything else should be secondary in my opinion. But for many podcasters, especially those new to audio recording, adding a professional mic can be a daunting task. It usually means adding a digital to analog converter (via USB or Firewire interface) and/or a mixer. It might also mean adding a microphone pre-amplifier if you use a condenser mic.

Now if it weren't enough to face the learning curve of adding all those new components, there's the issue of money. All those extra goodies cost extra cash.

Enter the USB microphone. USB mics just plug right into any Windows or Mac computer and without much fuss, you have audio. There's no need for an interface, separate pre-amp or mixer. You may have to set some preferences or load a driver, but otherwise, it's a painless process.

David Battino got me interested in the Rode Podcaster [with his post from the AES show](#).

I decided to take a closer look for myself.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The first thing I noticed about the Rode Podcaster was its weight. It felt sturdy, heavy and solid as a rock. I was surprised because some USB mics feel like toys. While I didn't subject the Rode to any physical harm, I got the feeling it could hold its own if dropped.

The Podcaster is a dynamic USB mic designed to record voice. It has the look and feel of the venerable EV RE-20. It ships with a 15-foot long USB cable. I plugged it into my MacBookPro, opened the System Preferences panel and clicked on Sound. There it was on the Input list, already selected. I fired up GarageBand 3.0 and same thing. It immediately saw the Rode Podcaster, and I was recording in less than 60 seconds. I do have to admit that the ease of that transaction was not lost on me. There's a great deal to be said for ease-of-use in this time-is-money world we live in. I did not test the Rode on a Windows machine, but noticed there were Windows drivers available and I assume that the process would be similarly simple.

OPERATION

Right off the bat I decided the mic needed more gain. This seems to be a typical side effect of the USB mic. It has more gain than the Snowball, but not much. In order to get enough volume out of