

Podcast power part of new wave

Internet pioneer advises companies to watch their blogs, iPods, and wikis

BY KRISTIN GOFF

The Internet is poised for a powerful new push that will offer small companies ways to link with a select number of far-flung customers and could as easily spell the dangers for giants who fail to catch the wave, says Internet pioneer Nathan Rudyk.

Mr. Rudyk, who runs a company that uses the emerging media of "blogging, podcasts and wikis" to help launch products over the web, told a marketing luncheon yesterday that "social media" is the next big thing.

Its power is in its ability to hold two-way communications. For large companies it can provide an avenue to instant feedback to new products from masses of interested consumers. For small companies, it could provide a tool to reach a select audience of only dozens of potential customers for a niche product that needs a global market, said Mr. Rudyk, president of market2world communications inc. of Ottawa.

Web logs, or blogs, which invite comment back to web postings by individuals or companies are growing at a rate of more than one per second and have reached 26.7 million according to some estimates, said Mr. Rudyk. If only one per cent of those are geared toward some business-related communication, that still amounts to more than 260,000. By comparison, there were 50,000 to 60,000 websites in 1995 when the Internet was poised for its explosive growth, he said in a brief interview before speaking to the Ottawa chapter of the Canadian Marketing Association.

"People in our profession look at numbers like that and say, 'Wow, this could be five or six times bigger than the web

was' in how we do business," he said.

The podcast — a radio show or interview that can be downloaded to a computer, iPod or MP3 player — is one format Mr. Rudyk's company helped develop for the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation, to spread information about the region.

Mr. Rudyk, who has worked as a technology expert in conventional broadcast media in the past, is co-host of a monthly "podcast" for OCRIRadio.com which has featured interviews with executives of DNA Genotek, Third Brigade and a broadcast of an Ottawa speech by Microsoft's Steve Balmer.

While OCRI doesn't track audience numbers, Mr. Rudyk said he's noted mention of the podcast in blogs from all over the world. Companies could do the same by arranging telephone interviews with appropriate experts, presenting them in podcast form and drawing a community of listeners who may be potential customers.

Wikis — named after the interactive online encyclopedia "Wikipedia" — is another way to engage people to share knowledge by adding their points of view and editing others on topics, he said. That format has been used by some companies to allow clients to create new products in ongoing reviews of new developments.

There is a downside, though, for people who are already feeling overwhelmed by e-mails, phones and Blackberries.

"Yes, it will be in addition to everything else," he says. "Most people still have a television and a radio in their house even though they have a computer which is downloading podcasts and web pages and they are looking at wikis in the evenings."