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Have Cellphone, Want Radio?

Dan Frommer | March 18, 2008 7:15 AM

As cellphone carriers try to lure more subscribers into all-you-can-talk monthly plans, here's one potential winner: Portland, Maine-based Foneshow. Their business: Podcasts and radio via your phone.

How does it work? Find stuff you'd like to listen to, like audio versions of The New York Times (NYT) front-page stories, CNN (TWX) news updates, Politico.com podcasts, popular NPR content, or *The Onion's* radio news. Subscribe via Foneshow's Web site. When a new episode of the show is available, Foneshow sends you a text message. Dial the number in the message, and Foneshow will play back your selection.



Turning your phone into an audio player isn't a new idea, but Foneshow has simplicity going for it. Carriers offer streaming radio services, but they're rarely free and often require a wireless data subscription. And while there are many podcasts available on Apple's (AAPL) iTunes store, you have to sync up your iPhone/iPod with your computer to listen to them.

All Foneshow needs is a cellphone -- which 240 million Americans already have. The only cost: The cellular minutes you use for the call, and whatever your carrier charges to receive a text message. Text messages running around 20 cents a piece, and much less if you have a monthly messaging plan, and carrier minutes [get cheaper every day](#). And since the idea is to listen to short clips, not entire audiobooks, the service won't strain your phone's battery.

What's in it for publishers? Mostly distribution -- they can fill their shows with whatever ads they'd like. Foneshow makes a tiny bit of money thru text ads in the text messages you get when your new content is available, and co-founder/CEO Erik Schwartz tells us that once more people are using the service, he thinks he can sell short, 'pay-per-click' audio ads that listeners can respond to.

Schwartz, former Yahoo! (YHOO) entertainment head, started the company with New Yorker Nic Wolff in 2006. Last summer, they closed a Series A round with CEI Community Ventures, Masthead Venture Partners, and Small Enterprise Growth Fund of Maine.

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