

## Review of “Audacity” and “Propaganda”: Two Applications for Podcasting

<b>Audacity</b>	<b>Version</b>	1.2.6
	<b>Hardware requirements (minimum)</b>	No special requirements mentioned; the reviewer suggests using the requirements for “Propaganda” as a guide.
	<b>Supported operating systems</b>	Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X, Linux/Unix, source code (to compile on other systems)
	<b>Price</b>	Free software, donation possible
	<b>available at</b>	<a href="http://audacity.sourceforge.net">http://audacity.sourceforge.net</a>
<b>Propaganda</b>	<b>Version</b>	1.4
	<b>Hardware requirements (minimum)</b>	Intel Pentium or AMD Athlon 600 MHz or higher 256 MB RAM Soundcard
	<b>Supported operating systems</b>	Microsoft Windows XP and Vista
	<b>Price</b>	US\$ 49.95
	<b>available at</b>	<a href="http://www.makepropaganda.com">http://www.makepropaganda.com</a>

### Reviewed by Martin G. Döpel

#### 1 Introduction

This review does not discuss pedagogical issues related with podcasts in foreign language teaching. With this paper two software applications, *Audacity* and *Propaganda*, shall be introduced and compared.

In section 2 the term *podcast* will be defined, followed by an explanation why *Audacity* and *Propaganda* were chosen. The task designed for demonstration and evaluation purposes will be defined in the following section. After this, both applications will be introduced and compared with each other, with the reviewer arriving at the conclusion that both applications are suitable for the production of podcasts.

#### 2 Podcasting and foreign language teaching

One of the trends connected with the term “Web 2.0” (O’Reily, 2005) is podcasting. “Simply put, a podcast is audio content available on the Internet that can be automatically delivered to your computer or MP3 player.” (Geoghegan & Klass, 2005, p. 5) This main characteristic turns podcasts into an interesting tool for education in general (Richardson, 2006) and also specifically for foreign language teaching (McQuillian, 2006).

Podcasting offers the possibility of distributing audio content easily to learners. They can copy the content to their MP3 players and listen to it as and when they want to. For instance, podcasts can enable students to practice listening in a self-directed manner and at their own pace. The

teacher can guide students with worksheets distributed through the same “channel” the podcast uses. There is no reason why listening exercises should take place solely or mostly in the classroom.

### 3 Why *Audacity* and *Propaganda*?

Podcasts consist of two parts: sound file(s) mostly encoded into MP3 and a so-called RSS-Feed (Yahoo! Inc., 2005). This review deals with two software applications that can be used in the production of podcasts. *Audacity* is a powerful sound recording and editing tool, unfortunately without the capability to produce the RSS-file needed for podcasting. In spite of this, *Audacity* is often recommended as the software for podcasting beginners by podcasting tutorials (e.g. Mack & Ratcliffe, 2007; Deitz, 2007). *Propaganda*, on the other hand, is a software application developed for podcast production.

Both applications are user-friendly, although users should have basic knowledge of their computers’ operating systems (e.g. *Microsoft Windows*) and the hardware.

### 4 Task

For demonstration purposes and in order to evaluate both applications under the same circumstances, the following task was developed: Produce a show consisting of an intro, an extro, an explanation and a song. We should also bear in mind that there should be cross-fading<sup>1</sup> between the explanation, the song and the extro.

The intro and extro are short pieces of music with a voiceover, telling the listener what kind of show this is. After the extro comes additional information about credits and so on.

Both samples can be accessed at <http://www.martin-doepl.de/podcasts/sample/feed.xml>.<sup>2</sup>

### 5 *Audacity*

*Audacity* (Fig. 1) is a multiple-track sound recording and editing tool. This means that all parts of the sound file get their own track giving the user the opportunity to change the arrangement as often as needed.

#### 5.1 *Recording and importing*

In the menu bar at the top of the window, the software provides buttons similar to those that can be found on video recorders etc. By pressing the red button, *Audacity* records from the chosen source in a new track.

Other sounds like music can be imported using the import option. These sounds get their own separate track as well. Although *Audacity* is stable, it is strongly recommended that the user saves his work frequently and regularly.

#### 5.2 *Editing*

The recorded (or imported) sound is shown in “waveform”. This makes editing very simple. For instance, marking a chunk of the sound wave enables users to play only the marked part of the recording. Well-known editing shortcuts like cut, copy and paste are included in this application as well. In addition, the software offers a large variety of different filters and effects including the *Nyquist* programming environment. This particular environment offers users the possibility of creating their own effects (*Audacity Development Team*, n.d., c). *Audacity* also includes a special tool for volume adjustments (needed for fading and sound-overlaying) and a tool for moving the sounds within their tracks, crucial for sound arrangements.

### 5.3 MP3 export

Due to patent issues, *Audacity* does not include an MP3 encoder (Audacity Development Team, n.d., b). However, the software is programmed to be ready for use with the *LAME* MP3 library, which can be downloaded for free<sup>3</sup>.

After the installation of the *LAME* library, users can export into MP3 as well. The quality can be adjusted in “Settings” → “File formats”. ID3 tags (meta-information like title, album, artist and so on) can be set under the menu “Project” → “ID3 tags”. Exporting itself is quite easy: the option “MP3 export” can be found in the “file” menu. After choosing a location and a filename, the MP3 file is created.

### 5.4 Additional issues

Although *Audacity* was developed to be used intuitively, users may some help. The *Audacity* web page offers documentation, FAQs and some tutorials. Deitz (2007) gives three reasons why one should choose *Audacity*: “1. It has an easy learning curve. 2. It has advanced features for those who want them. 3. It is free.” The last point is of special interest. *Audacity* is a so-called “Open Source” or – to use their term – “Free Software” project. “Free software is not just free of cost (like ‘free beer’). It is free as in freedom (like ‘free speech’). Free software gives you the freedom to use a program, study how it works, improve it, and share it with others.” (Audacity Development Team, n.d., a)

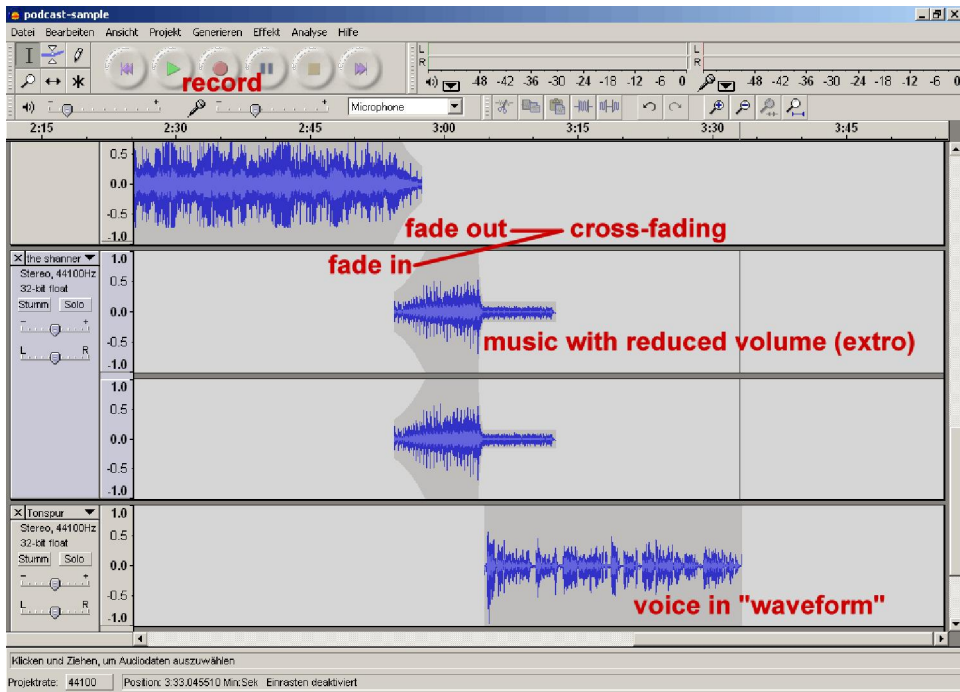


Fig. 1: Annotated screenshot of *Audacity* (annotations in red)

## 6 Propaganda

While *Audacity*'s target group is not limited to podcasters, *Propaganda* (Fig. 2) targets this particular group of users. This software is a multi-track sound recording and editing tool with enhanced export options.

## 6.1 Recording and importing

The “philosophy” of *Propaganda* differs from that of *Audacity*. Designed more like a radio-editing tool, *Propaganda* offers a library. In this library every recording and imported sound is listed with the meta-information of the sound. Recording, under this philosophy, means adding a new file into the sound library.

Activating the record button opens the recording dialog box. Users can also choose between different sources. After recording the recorded sound is saved in WAV-format. Meta-information to enable easy retrieval from the library can be added.

Importing a sound file is also made easy. By pressing the “+”-button the importing function opens up. Meta-information of MP3 files – so-called ID3 tags – are shown in the library for practical reference.

It is strongly recommended to restart the computer after the installation of *Propaganda*. The reviewer experienced several crashes immediately after installation. After the restart, however, *Propaganda* runs smoothly.

## 6.2 Editing

Like *Audacity*, *Propaganda* uses well-known editing shortcuts like cut, copy and paste. It also offers multi-track editing.

The sounds are also displayed in “waveforms,” enabling easy editing. *Propaganda* makes sound arrangements effortless. For instance, the user can define the point where the next sound is to be included. Next, the desired sound recording is dragged from the library into the playlist. Transitions like cross-fading can be defined in the playlist.

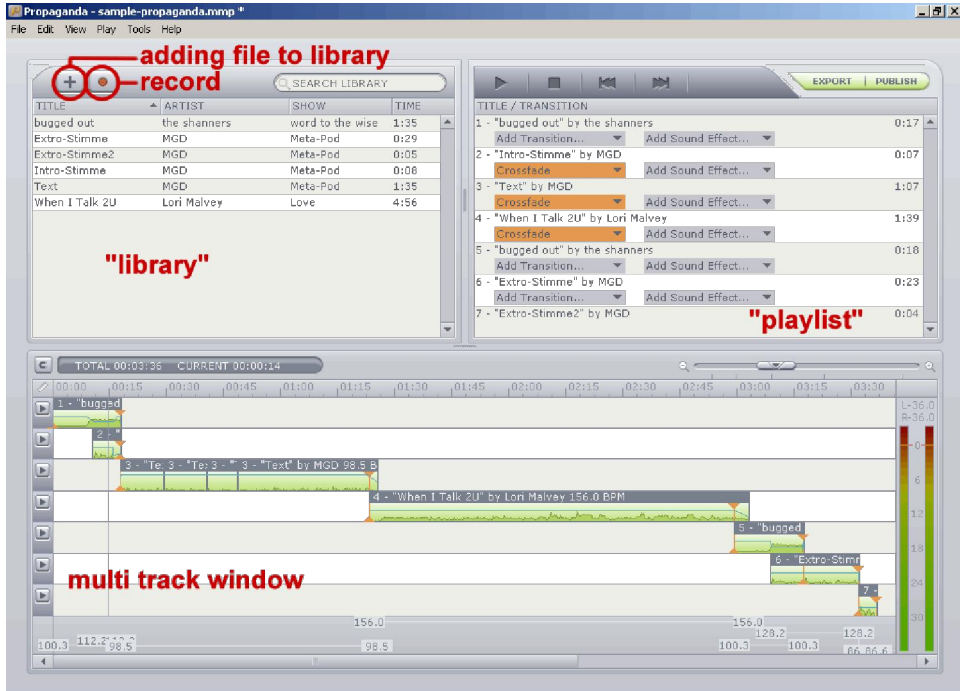


Fig. 2: Annotated screenshot of *Propaganda* (annotations in red)

### 6.3 MP3 export and publishing

*Propaganda* offers two ways to export the produced show. Unlike *Audacity*, *Propaganda* has an in-built MP3 encoder for direct MP3 export. The quality can be chosen in the export dialog box. Second, it offers the possibility of exporting an MP3 or WMA file and upload it to either a podcasting service<sup>4</sup> or any other FTP-server. The show is exported into MP3 format and uploaded onto the server. In case the show is uploaded to an FTP-server, *Propaganda* will create the RSS-feed as well.

### 6.4 Help

Although *Propaganda* is very user-friendly, the user may request additional help. *Propaganda* is a commercial product and thus offers on-line support with FAQs and a support form. *Propaganda* can be purchased for US\$ 50 from <http://www.makepropaganda.com>.

## 7 Conclusion

Both applications enable the completion of the task we have set ourselves at the beginning – the creation of a typical podcast production.

Table 1 provides an overview of the advantages and disadvantages encountered.

	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<i>Audacity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free</li> <li>- easy to edit</li> <li>- large number of filters and effects</li> <li>- MP3 export at different levels of quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no RSS-feed creation</li> <li>- no in-built MP3 encoder</li> <li>- larger projects are overly complicated</li> <li>- arrangements take some effort</li> </ul>
<i>Propaganda</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- overview over larger projects</li> <li>- easy to arrange</li> <li>- easy transitions between different parts</li> <li>- in-built sound effects</li> <li>- MP3 export at different levels of quality</li> <li>- easy to publish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- costs US\$ 50</li> <li>- editing not as good as in <i>Audacity</i></li> </ul>

**Table 1: Comparison of advantages and disadvantages of Audacity and Propaganda**

The reviewer would recommend a double strategy in using these applications. Use *Audacity* for recording and editing of self-recorded sounds, and the production of jingles like intros and extros. *Propaganda* is very convenient for the final production when different sounds have to be combined, and enables easy publishing. In case you do not want to invest US\$ 50, do not bother. *Audacity* is fine and will do the job alone as well.

Producing podcasts is – even for experienced podcasters – a time-consuming endeavor. For those with little time or who feel overwhelmed by the prospect of using the applications discussed here, there is a second possibility: Using third-party podcasts produced for target language listeners. These podcasts have to be carefully selected by the teacher, who also should offer self-produced worksheets designed to help the learner understand these authentic materials.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Cross-fading means” that instead of a sharp cut between two sound components both components “flow” into each other. See sample in Fig. 1.

<sup>2</sup> This URL has to be accessed with a podcatcher, an application to “subscribe” to a podcast (e.g. *iTunes* or *Juice*). The MP3 files can be accessed at <http://www.martin-doepl.de/podcasts/sample/audacity.mp3>.

(Audacity) and <http://www.martin-doezel.de/podcasts/sample/propaganda.mp3> (*Propaganda*). The PDF file containing credit information can be accessed at <http://www.martin-doezel.de/podcasts/sample/credit.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The LAME library is available at <http://lame.sourceforge.net/index.php>, further information see Audacity Development Team (n.d., b).

<sup>4</sup> “Liberated Syndication,” offering a podcast account starting from US\$ 5 per month (Liberated Syndication, n.d.)

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