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By Mike Musgrove, Technology Columnist

With this Web radio gig, who needs FM?

By [Mike Musgrove](#)

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It's Tuesday, just before noon in Manassas, and time for Mike O'Meara to go over some quick notes with his on-air crew before the day's taping of the podcast that bears his name.

O'Meara wants to begin today with a short bit featuring one of the regular, fictional characters who populate his new program: "Internet Radio Tommy" a dim, quavery-voiced kid who does a Web show from his mother's basement. In the opening sketch, O'Meara will bumble his way through some observations about the Olympics, in character as Tommy, while the other members of "The Mike O'Meara Show" shoot down his glaring mistakes.

With the general premise for the sketch laid out, somebody closes a curtain to the makeshift studio in O'Meara's living room, and the day's show begins.

In case you missed it, O'Meara -- the local radio personality who lost his gig at local FM station 106.7 last year during a format change -- is back. So is his team of familiar voices, including Robb Spewak and news guy Buzz Burbank (real name: Michael J. Elston). New to the lineup is Oscar Santana (or Oscar Zeballos), who also lost his job at the station when CBS Radio converted to a sports-talk format.

For most of O'Meara's on-air career, losing a radio show would have meant a job hunt and a move to a different market. But, of course, that was before the age of the Interweb. Rather than part ways, the guys decided to stick together and make a go of it online. Since December, there have been fresh episodes of the hour-long podcast every day from Monday to Friday; it's sort of a boiled-down version of the former, four-hour show.

"It's going better than I ever would have dreamed," said O'Meara, a fixture on the airwaves in Washington for about 25 years on shows that were nationally syndicated. He's already paid off the show's start-up costs, thanks to a couple of local sponsors buying promotional consideration on the show and its [Web site](#). Early advertisers include a Salvadoran chicken restaurant in Rockville and a plastic surgeon in McLean.

O'Meara's regular listeners know that he wouldn't have chosen to be this sort of Internet pioneer - he has sometimes bawled in mock-hysteria on the show about the turn his career has taken. But

the young enterprise appears to have some juice: The podcast regularly cracks the "top 20" list of comedy programs at iTunes and is up to an average of 15,000 downloads a day. About 40 percent of those downloads are in the Washington area, though fans around the world are tuning in.

For broadcasters seeking advertiser dollars, it's a new sort of pitch, said Zeballos, the one who persuaded O'Meara to try podcasting as a new medium. Most radio advertising, he argued, is based on passive listening. Maybe you're stuck in a car, for example, and can't find anything better to listen to. For such folks, the radio is the audio equivalent of wallpaper.

Podcast listeners, on the other hand, have gone out of their way to find and download your content. Give those folks a marketing message, and they are far more likely to pay attention. To use a military analogy, it's the difference between carpet-bombing an area and sending over a sniper. With podcasts, he said, "you're getting a head shot every time."

O'Meara says about 67 percent of his show's listeners are 25 to 44 years old, a group considered a key demographic for advertisers. And "100 percent of them are great," cracks Spewak, who will later complain on the show about the abuse one of the show's fans has been giving him on Facebook.

On the recent show, the Winter Olympics was the main topic, though the conversation flowed naturally to confusing insurance policies and getting the kids back to school after a long snow break.

For advertising or business information, contact Marc Ronick.

marc@mikeomearashow.com