

Unrelated Inventions: Catering for the uncommon denominator

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By Gabriel Nijmeh

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This is a first in a series of Software/Shareware developer profiles as presented by MP3-CDBurner.com. Let's get started with a brief profile of Unrelated Inventions.

Unrelated Inventions – <http://www.unrelatedinventions.com> is an umbrella for shareware developed primarily by Andrew Fish. The name comes from the fact that Andrew doesn't want to be tied down to writing collections of software with related purposes, preferring to keep his imagination in tip-top shape by developing a broad range of applications and using lessons learned developing one to improve the other unrelated inventions. He also feels that he should develop software which doesn't pander to the broadest range of people by only including those features which most of them will use, but to provide for a broad range of people by providing software which is flexible enough to be adapted to many tasks, providing many unusual features whilst lacking none of the obviously useful ones. Few people will use all of the features, but all will benefit from some. Hence the motto: Catering for the uncommon denominator.

Q: What motivated you to create shareware software?

A: I never actually intended to create shareware. Audiotools was developed to solve a particular problem that I faced back in March 1998 and the release as shareware was an afterthought. After that I was drawn into continuing its development by the interesting code and by user feedback.

Q: In developing software, what part of the process do you most enjoy?

A: I love the actual process of working out new algorithms and techniques – Audiotools is not an off-the-peg package by a long stick of limestone, so there's a lot of scope for imagination. I also like responding to user comments – when I used to work at BSS, the marketing manager told me that nobody ever contacts you just to say how well you've done: well I've got stacks of email that proves him wrong, so I'm quite happy about that.

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Q: Do you have a clear vision of what the end product will be?

A: Haven't a clue. The software is partially driven by my ideas and interests and partially by user requests and, since one affects the other, I can't really predict the future. I'm continually working out ways to increase the feature count without overburdening the software with complexity, so I imagine that the "end product", if there ever is one, will have some unique user interface features anyway.

Q: What is your favourite feature of your software?

A: In development terms, probably auto-track – it's a very elegant piece of code and there were some good ideas went into it.

Q: What do you think is the key to developing good software?

A: Good ears. The key is to listen to your customers – don't blindly take on every feature that they request as they request it, try to distill it into something more general which serves a wider set of purposes.

Q: What were some of your setbacks and highlights you encountered in developing software?

A: In terms of setbacks, the obvious and periodic one is the unexplained bug. I have a virtual armoury of tools to help me test Audiotools on different versions of Windows, but I can't test for different combinations of hardware. There's nothing worse than a showstopper bug which you can't reproduce. In terms of highlights, the fact that two of my users have freely given time and effort to translate the program into French and German and to continue translating as I make changes is incredible. I just couldn't have predicted that degree of support when I started out.

Q: What do you find to be the most effective marketing and promotion vehicles of your software?

A: I don't really focus on marketing or promotion – perhaps I'd be a millionaire if I had ;-) My main focus is to keep the software going out and make sure that it's available from a wide range of websites. I occasionally get approached by magazines who wish to covermount the software and I usually accept those. Most of my sales come from word of mouth.

Q: What distinguishes your product from others on the market?

A: In the beginning it was a combination of being a direct-to-disc recorder and having auto-track. A few programs now contain an approximation of auto-track now, but I'm told that mine is probably the most effective. Now, I guess that the sheer weight of features is a big selling point as well as the degree of customer support I offer. There are lots of little unquities (if that is a word) in the software, but it's really up to the user whether those are what they're after.

Q: What kind of market research did you perform prior to developing your product(s)?

A: I didn't. I don't really go with the idea of looking for a market and developing a product for it – it's too

calculating and it means that you'll have less interest in what you're doing than in how much money is coming in. Good shareware works because users are dealing with a fellow enthusiast.

Q: What tools do you use to manage your software development business?

A: My development is done with Visual C++ 6.0 under Windows 2000 with Visual Sourcesafe for revision control. I have VMWare for cross platform testing and use a combination of Microsoft Word and Doc-to-Help 2000 for my help development. The rest of the operation is handled by a fusion of MS Outlook, MS Access and a huge amount of home grown VBA code and C++ plugins. It's a real timesaver having your website, backups and even your release procedure totally automated and it also removes the likelihood of mistakes caused by shipping the wrong file (it used to happen occasionally). I used to use Installshield Express for distribution, but the old version broke on systems which had used installs from the new version and the new version couldn't be automated as easily, so I now use my own installer. Finally, for distribution, I have Aid Submission Genius, PadGen, AddSoft and Submass (all paid for, of course) and for keeping an eye on my website I use 123 Log analyser. There are other tools I use for various purposes, but nothing which is development specific.

Q: Where do you see your business/software heading in the future?

A: I'm branching out into writing now – my other shareware projects haven't met with the same degree of success as Audiotools and I don't really want to keep all my eggs in one basket. There may be some more shareware coming in the next couple of years (I have a couple of products in development) but I imagine that Audiotools and my books will be my main focus. I even plan to write a book about Audiotools at some point, to give shareware developers "the inside story" as it were. Ultimately, I follow the path of least resistance, so my direction in the future will very much depend on my successes in the present.

That concludes a very insightful conversation with Andrew Fish from Unrelated Inventions – <http://www.unrelatedinventions.com>. Please take the time to visit his web site and check out his software and some of his writings.

Gabriel Nijmeh is the software editor at MP3-CDBurner.com – <http://www.mp3-cdburner.com>, where we feature software reviews and downloads of MP3 software including CD rippers, MP3 CD burners, MP3 converters and more. Stay up-to-date on the latest and hottest MP3 software downloads and enjoy our MP3 tutorials, FAQs, music articles and shareware developer profiles.

How To Get Free Publicity For Your Home Business

By Dean Phillips

Did you know you can get free newspaper and television advertising for your home business? How? Just pick up the telephone and call your local media and tell them all about your home business. If they think your home business is interesting enough, they'll come out and interview you, and just like that—free publicity!

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You might not know it, but this occurs much more often than you realize. Why? Because the media loves doing those kinds of community interest stories. It makes them appear more sensitive and caring about what's happening in their community, which leads to more viewers and readers—and of course more advertising revenue.

However, depending on how busy they are and what type of other newsworthy events are going on in your community, they might not immediately appear interested in your story.

In the event that happens, try calling them once a week until you get your interview. Don't be rude, but be persistent. Reporters understand about persistence, because that's how they get many of their stories.

It also doesn't hurt to be creative. I heard of a story where a home based catering business catered a surprise free lunch for a local television station. They literally walked in the front door of the tv station, and started handing out free lunches to all of the employees—starting with the security guards.

The news staff was so impressed with the quality of the food, they dispatched a news crew to interview the caterer the very next day.

Apparently, someone in higher places saw the interview on television, because two weeks later that catering company was catering lunch at the governor's mansion.

That catering job led to many more catering jobs, and other than a small ad in the yellow pages, that catering company is so busy, it doesn't need to advertise at all.

I know of another story where someone who owned a home based mobile oil change company volunteered to change the oil in the cars of the employees of a local newspaper for free. In the evening addition of that newspaper, the mobile oil change company was featured on the front page.

The company received so many telephone calls from that one newspaper article, they were booked up for months in advance.

Free publicity. You can't buy it, you can't beat it—go get it!

Dean Phillips is an Internet marketing expert, writer, publisher and entrepreneur. Questions? Comments? Dean can be reached at <mailto:>

Visit his website at:

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