Chapter 4: Producing Your Videocast

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*W*hen you need to deliver video to clients but not on a set schedule, a *videocast,* or *vlog* (short for *video blog*), is a helpful way to supply information. A videocast is similar to a podcast, but rather than create episodes, you create it as needed to convey information about your products and services to people who are following you on social media. You can host video at your own Web site or use an online video hosting service. When you use video hosting service, you can embed videos in your Web page or blog. The latter option has the additional benefit of not adding bandwidth charges from Web site downloads — instead, the video hosting service takes the bandwidth hit.

In this chapter, we show you how to participate in vlogging (video blogging). We cover hardware and software and show you the best online sources for hosting a videocast. We also offer recording tips and more.

Finding Hardware for Your Videocast

You may think that the cute little Webcam on top of your computer and its built-in microphone are all you need to record a videocast. The hardware that comes with your computer works fine if you're a tenth-grader who wants to post a video rant on YouTube. However, if you want to create a videocast that grabs the attention of potential consumers, you have to put your best foot forward and cough up some coin for a good camcorder and microphone. This combination enables you to create a quality videocast.

REMEMBER

Videos you upload to a hosting service must be in an approved format. Because the hosting service also compresses your video for optimal Web delivery, you must send video in the best quality you can.

Here's a list of tasks that your new camcorder should be able to perform:

✦ **Capture video to a flash memory card or hard drive rather than to a cassette tape.** After you record a videocast, simply connect the camcorder to the computer by using a USB cable and then drag and drop the file to your computer. If you use a camcorder that records on cassette, you have to capture the video with a video capture program, which takes a long time. (Trust us: We've been there and done that.)

✦ **Capture video in the MPEG-4 format.** This format offers fairly high-quality video with a reasonably small file size that is easily viewable on computers and portable devices such as the iPod.

✦ **Capture high-definition, or HD (1080p or 720p), video.** This capability is a bonus because many sites provide HD video options for visitors.

✦ **Record stereo sound at 48 Kbps (kilobytes per second).** This gives you the highest fidelity for your videocast and compresses well for delivery on mobile devices.

✦ **Use an external microphone jack.** External microphones provide better sound quality than microphones built into your camcorder. Built-in microphones can pick up motor noise, which can be heard in the final videocast.

Camcorders with these features mentioned previously start at about $300.

If you own a high-end digital SLR camera, you can record videos of excellent quality — the only drawback is that the camera cannot change focus. To create a video where viewers see you in a standard head-and-shoulders shot, try to use a digital camera that records high-quality video.

Here's a short list of other equipment you might need for recording videos:

✦ **An external microphone:** You must consider sound quality in your videocasts. You can use a camcorder's built-in microphone, though it often picks up mechanical noise from the camera, such as motor noise when the camcorder is zoomed in or out. An auxiliary microphone is definitely necessary if you're shooting video a fair distance from your subject. Purchase a quality lavalier microphone (which plugs into your camcorder) or a condenser microphone and stand. Contact your local retailer for more information.

✦ **A tripod for your camcorder:** A tripod steadies the camcorder if someone else is shooting the video. If you're capturing video of yourself, you simply press the record button, walk in front of the camcorder, and start your videocast without having to deal with the camcorder.

✦ **A mixing board and microphone for each speaker or an omnidirectional microphone:** Omnidirectional microphones record all sound in the room, but if you have a relatively quiet studio, that shouldn't be a problem. Place the omnidirectional microphone equidistant from each speaker, which keeps the sound volume fairly equal across the board. Of course, you may have one speaker with a loud voice and another that speaks softly but carries a big stick. If you're recording with a single microphone in this case, experiment with different positions until you find a mix that sounds good. Alternatively, you can use a mixing board to equalize the input from each microphone to the same volume level.

If you're not sure where to purchase your equipment, check out a consumer electronics retailer such as Best Buy. If you prefer to purchase equipment online, look for reviews of the equipment you're considering. Just because a piece of gear garners a positive review doesn't mean that it's your ideal solution. Find a local retailer that handles the product you're considering. Make sure the camcorder controls are easy to reach and operate. If, after touching and feeling the product, you're sure that the camcorder is right for you, find a reputable online retailer. In addition to the excellent reputation and wide range of excellent video products at B&H (`www.bhphotovideo.com`), its helpful staff can assist you in making the right decision.

Recording a Videocast

Recording a vlog isn't difficult. However, to be able to put your best foot forward, you have to be as polished and professional as possible. Though this task may not be easy at first, after you have a dozen videocasts in the bag, you get the job done quicker and with fewer mistakes.

Here are some recording tips for you to consider:

✦ **Devote part of your home or office space to your recording endeavor.** This strategy is helpful if you're serious about creating videocasts to promote your business.

✦ **Act as though you're talking to your best friend.** Your relaxed demeanor will result in a video that looks and sounds more natural.

✦ **Be enthusiastic.** Use hand gestures to emphasize key points. Visuals such as charts or physical products are also beneficial.

✦ **Use a pop filter if you use an auxiliary microphone.** This small device, which looks like a small screen, is placed in front of the microphone to prevent popping sounds whenever a speaker says words with plosives such as the letter *p*. You can find a pop filter at your local music store. If you use a lavalier microphone, the pop filter looks like a little foam ball that fits over the end of the device.

✦ **Record in a quiet area.** If you hear an airplane or a car approaching, stop speaking until the vehicle passes. When you edit the file later and see an extended flat section in the waveform, you know that it has silent spots to edit out.

If ambient noise is an issue, create temporary soundproofing by draping heavy blankets over windows to muffle outside noise. If your computer is noisy and must be operating while you're recording, purchase soundproofing foam (which looks like a baffle) from your local music store and wrap the foam around your computer tower. Be careful not to block off entry and exit ducts for the cooling fan (or fans). You can also purchase soundproofing foam to muffle sounds from any nearby mechanical equipment. When you're recording, turn off any mechanical device, such as a noisy computer, that you're not using.

✦ **Leave a couple of seconds of silence at the start of the recording.** This technique gives you a "fudge factor" for adding other content, such as a video title or an audio introduction.

✦ **Complete a dress rehearsal to help you loosen up and become familiar with the material.** The rehearsal makes your recording sound more natural and inevitably helps eliminate mistakes.

✦ **Create on a chalkboard or an erasable presentation board a list of key points.** The list serves as a cue card to help keep your presentation on track.

✦ **Position the microphone just below your lips and about six inches from your mouth.** If you position the microphone too close to your mouth, your voice booms and overmodulates, resulting in distortion; if you move the mic too far away and the volume is too low, ambient noise may be heard in addition to your voice.

✦ **Drink a glass of water before recording.** It prevents your voice from sounding raspy.

✦ **If you make a mistake, clap your hands in front of the microphone.** The loud noise puts a spike in the waveform (a graph that shows the relative volume of each second of the recording). When you tweak the file later in your video editing program, the spike in the waveform is your signal that this area of the recording needs editing.

✦ **Choose an appropriate recording location.** If you're recording a videocast that only shows your head and shoulders, for example, your desk is the ideal place to record.

✦ **Create a visually appealing recording venue.** Remove extraneous clutter and position the camera to include a pleasant background, such as a bookshelf or a wall displaying a few photos or diplomas.

✦ **If you're recording team members, use a generic backdrop, such as a black sheet.** Place the backdrop several feet behind them, to avoid diverting attention. A tastefully furnished meeting room is another possibility.

✦ **When you mount your camera on a tripod, consider where you will sit during the recording.** Rather than position the camera so that your face is centered in the middle of the frame, position it so that your face is to either side of the middle of the frame. This technique creates a more visually compelling composition. When the camcorder fully zooms out, you should be able to see all podcast participants and part of the room. You can always zoom in on a participant who has the floor for an extended period.

✦ **Look directly at the camera.** This technique makes you look as though you're talking directly to your viewers.

✦ **If possible, wear a set of headphones to monitor the recording.** This way, you know in an instant if your voice grows too loud or too soft. When it happens, clap your hands to signify that the sound needs editing and then repeat your last sentence.

Finalizing a Videocast

After you record a videocast, you may think that your job is finished. In reality, you've only just begun: You need to edit the videocast to delete any mistakes and then render it in a format suitable for its intended destination and optimize the content for its intended destination. We discuss software and the editing and optimizing tasks in later sections of this chapter.

Obtaining software to edit and render a videocast

If you create a perfect take from start to finish, you're a better videographer than most people. But we're counting on your being human and making a mistake or four. In addition to having to edit mistakes, you need to add such goodies as a video title and perhaps an audio introduction. Adding still pictures is another possibility.

To edit a recording to perfection (and add the other bits), you need a good video editing application that supports multiple tracks. Adobe Premiere Elements (`http://tryit.adobe.com/us/premierelements/?sdid=EPZST`) or Sony Vegas (`http://www.sonycreativesoftware.com/movie studiope`) are both good applications for PCs. They both support multiple timelines — necessary when you need to assemble various pieces of a production. For the Macintosh, try Final Cut Express (`http://www.apple.com/finalcutexpress/`). We can't give you an in-depth tutorial on each application, but the following section shows you some guidelines for creating your masterpiece.

Putting the pieces together

When you record a videocast, you're creating the meat for a sandwich — you wrap your creation in a title or perhaps an audio introduction and display your company logo at the beginning and end of the video. This task involves using your editing software to assemble the media into a palatable video for your faithful fans. Follow these general steps:

1. **Launch your video editing application.**

2. **If you record narration to introduce the video, import the narration file and place it at the beginning of the first audio timeline.**

   Check your video editing user's manual for detailed information on how to import audio and video files.

3. **Import your company logo and place it at the beginning of the first video timeline.**

   Most video editing applications specify a duration for still images, usually five or six seconds — a shorter duration than for your intro segment.

   You can use the features of your video editing application to create a title for your video.

4. **Increase the amount of time your logo is displayed to match the duration of the introductory video.**

   Most applications let you drag the tail of an object to increase its duration on the timeline. Refer to your user's manual for additional information.

5. **Create a new video timeline.**

6. **Import the recorded videocast and place it on the new timeline so that it starts immediately after the introduction.**

   In most video applications, the object you're moving snaps to adjacent media on neighboring timelines. Figure 4-1 shows a video being edited in Sony Vegas.
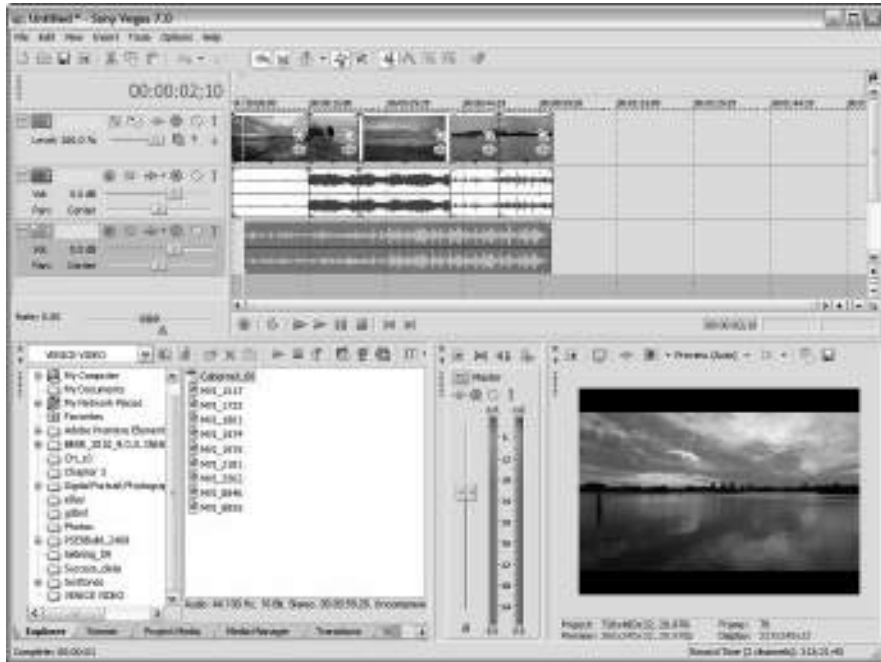
Figure 4-1:
Editing a
video.

7. **Add your exiting narration on the audio timeline or place your
   corporate logo on the video timeline.**

8. **Render the project.**

   When you render a project into a viewable movie, you do so in a
   Web-friendly format that matches the specifications of the service that
   will host your video.

   Before you render you movie, check the specification of the service you
   plan to host your video. You don't want to end up with a video that you
   can't upload later.

Optimizing your videocast for the Web

After you render a video, you optimize it into a file format matching the
specifications of the service that will host the video. We discuss the most
popular video hosting services in later sections of this chapter.

You can optimize the video when you render it, or you can use a program
specifically designed for compressing and optimizing video. (One such
program is Sorenson Squeeze at `www.sorensonmedia.com`.)

Here are some suggested settings for optimizing a podcast:

✦ **File format:** Use the MPEG-4 (`.mp4`) file format, supported by most video hosting services. You have to specify the audio file format: Choose `.aac`.

✦ **Video dimensions:** Size the video to 640 pixels wide and 480 pixels high. If the video was shot in a wide screen format (16:9 aspect ratio), size it to 640 pixels wide by 360 pixels high. These dimensions match the high-resolution option offered by most video hosting services, although your video hosting service may reduce the size for general playback.

✦ **Frame rate:** The *frame rate* is the number of frames per second that play back when a video is played. A higher frame rate yields a video that plays smoothly but has a larger file size. You can generally export the video with a frame rate of 15 fps (frames per second) and get acceptable results. If the file is a video capture of your computer screen that shows viewers how to use an application, you can squeak by with a frame rate of 5 fps.

✦ **Data rate:** A high *data rate* — the rate at which data is processed when a video is played back in a browser — produces the best video quality at the expense of a large file size. For a videocast, a data rate of about 800 kbps is ideal.

Finding an Online Service for Your Work

Unless your Web hosting service gives you unlimited bandwidth, you have to find a service to host your video. If you plan to create lots of videos and expect lots of people to view them, a hosting service is a blessing. You can embed the hosted video in a blog or Web page. When someone clicks the link to play your video, it's downloaded from the hosting site and plays on your site, which means that your site doesn't supply the bandwidth for the data transfer. Exceeding the allotted bandwidth from your Web hosting service adds a hefty surcharge to monthly hosting fees. In the next few sections, we explore video hosting services for you to consider.

YouTube

`www.youtube.com`

When you create an account at YouTube, you're given your own channel to which you can upload video. You also categorize your video to match the type of video you've created. Yes, you can send your faithful Twitter followers, Facebook fans, and the like to your YouTube channel. But you also have the chance to pick up some adoring fans of your own from YouTube. Creating a YouTube account is straightforward: Just go to `www.youtube.com`, click the Create Account link, and follow the instructions.

TIP

When you sign up for a YouTube account, make sure to choose the proper account type. The Standard account is for your everyday, garden-variety videos. But because you're an expert in your field, you're qualified to create a Guru account. People who are looking for instructional videos on YouTube are more likely to look for a guru, which bodes well for you.

After you're on YouTube, you can upload videos that last no longer than ten minutes or are no larger than 2GB. You can also spruce up your channel to include the URL of your Web site, and a description, as shown in Figure 4-2. You can also customize the channel. You have a wide array of options at your disposal. By using a bit of creativity, you can create a channel that looks similar to your Web site.

To customize your YouTube channel, log in to YouTube, click your username, and choose Account from the drop-down menu. Then click Customize Homepage and follow the prompts.

When you upload videos, be sure to enable comments, to give YouTube visitors a chance to comment on them. You're notified by e-mail when someone posts a comment. Figure 4-3 shows a video that has received at least one positive comment.

Figure 4-2: Creating a custom YouTube channel.

Figure 4-3: Comments are a way for YouTube viewers to interact with you.

We show you the ins and outs of uploading videos in an upcoming section.

Getting to know YouTube

When you log in to YouTube as a visitor, your first glimpse is of the home page, which shows the most popular videos. The menu choices are simple: Home, Videos, Channels, and Shows. Unless you're an entertainer, your primary focus should be on the Videos and Channels sections of YouTube.

In the Videos section, you find a long list of categories on the left side of the page, as shown in Figure 4-4. Before uploading your videos to YouTube, review the categories that seem most applicable to the type of video you're uploading and the type of business you're in. You may be surprised at what you find in certain categories. You may also find that your videos fit into several different categories. You can post videos in multiple categories.

Figure 4-4:
Find the
right
category for
your videos.

On the home page of the Channels section, you find the most-viewed channels, as shown in Figure 4-5. You can also review the most-subscribed channels. (Falling into this category is your goal.) On the left side of the page, in the channel categories, do a little exploration to find the heavy hitters in the channels related to your business. When you find a channel with lots of subscribers, view some videos by the channel creator to see what all the hubbub is about. This strategy can spark ideas for your own videos. Find some videos that you think are useful and informative, and then put on your thinking cap to see how you can create a better video. After you develop a knack for using YouTube and you understand which type of video is attracting your target market, you're ready to create your own content.

Figure 4-5:
So many
channels, so
little time.

After you upload a couple of videos to your YouTube channel, click your username and then choose Account from the drop-down menu. From the Account page, click Activity Sharing and specify how visible your actions are on YouTube. You can also share YouTube activity with your Twitter followers and Facebook fans.

Meeting YouTube video requirements

The YouTube compression algorithm is a closely guarded secret, though the site definitely compresses videos. If you upload a low-quality video, it looks awful on YouTube. If you upload a well-thought-out video, however, that's rendered to perfection and meets YouTube requirements, you'll likely be pleasantly surprised at its quality online. To ensure that you upload the highest-quality videos, YouTube recommends high-definition video that measures 1920 x 1080 pixels. It also ensures that when YouTube adds different video options, your high-resolution file yields the best possible quality for the new YouTube format. YouTube encourages you to upload video that's as close to the original as possible.

For YouTube, use a data rate of about 1200 Kbps (kilobits per second) using the MPEG-4 format. You should also use the AAC audio option and render the audio as 2-channel stereo with a sampling rate of 44.1 kHz.

Vimeo

www.vimeo.com

Another excellent video sharing service is Vimeo, shown in Figure 4-6. It offers two types of accounts:

✦ **Basic:** It's free.

✦ **Plus:** You pay $9.95 per month or $59.59 per year.

Figure 4-6: Vimeo is a premier video-sharing service.

Vimeo is for noncommercial use only and will remove any videos that it deems inappropriate without warning. A soft — or nonexistent — sell is appropriate here. Check out its guidelines at www.vimeo.com/guidelines before proceeding.

If you have a free Vimeo account, you can upload 500MB of video per week. The video is compressed into the Vimeo version of high-quality video. Banner ads are displayed with your video, and your video waits in line with other videos from free accounts. In other words, if you catch Vimeo at a busy time, your video may wait a while to be converted for the site. You can upload one high-definition (HD) video per week. You can also create one group for like-minded people, one channel, and create three albums into which you organize your videos. Figure 4-7 shows how a video looks with a Basic account.
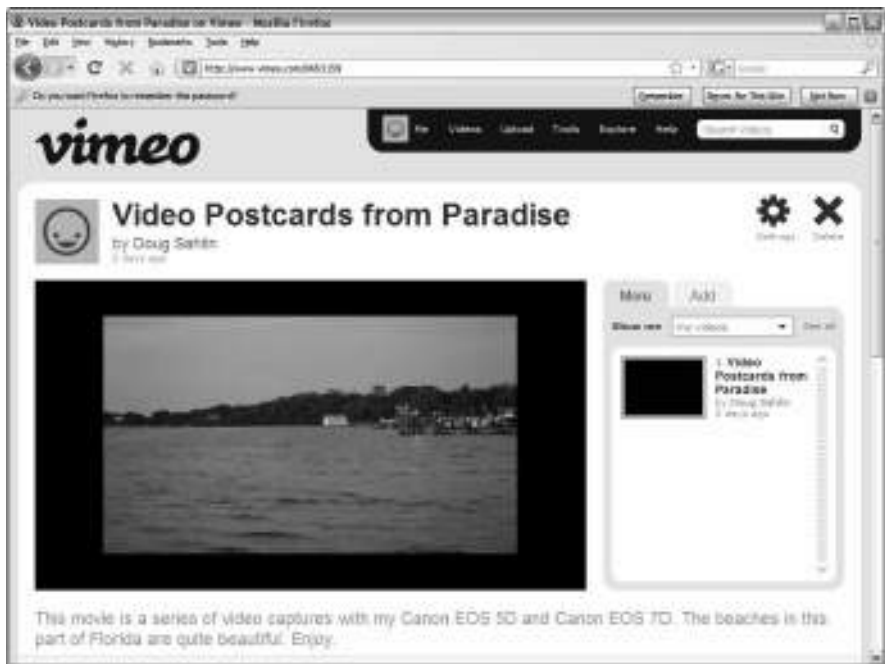
Figure 4-7:
A high-
definition
video
uploaded
from a Basic
account.

A Vimeo Plus account puts you in the driver's seat. You can upload as many videos as you want and they're converted immediately to high-quality video, and you can customize the player and create an unlimited number of groups, channels, and albums. Other Plus account benefits are that you can embed videos wherever you want, hide converted videos from view on Vimeo, and download an unlimited number of converted videos per week. Plus account videos aren't subjected to banner ads.

You find lots of artists, filmmakers, producers, and photographers on Vimeo. However, the site has a place for all types of people. Whether you choose the Vimeo Basic or Vimeo Plus account, the site is a reliable place to host videos — its conversion is flawless.

blip.tv

At the blip.tv site, shown in Figure 4-8, you can find lots of video from filmmakers, producers, and actors. The cool feature at this video sharing site is that a video you upload to blip.tv is distributed to all other major players. That's right: Your video is distributed to sites such as YouTube and Vimeo.
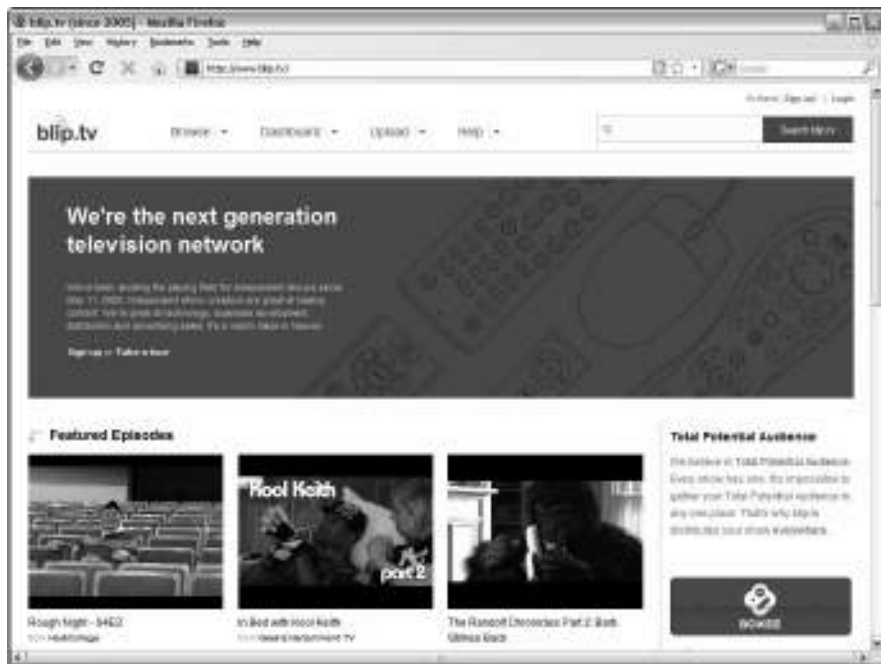
Figure 4-8:
blip.tv, your
place on
the Web for
independent
TV.

Uploading and Archiving Your Videocast

After you create a videocast, you're ready to share it with the world, if
you've planted the right seeds, or at least with your target market. When you
upload a video, you do other tasks, such as choose a category and add tags
and descriptions.

Follow these generic steps for uploading videos to video hosting services:

1. **Log in to your account.**

2. **Click the Upload button**.

   The Upload page appears.

3. **Upload the file.**

   At Vimeo, you click the Upload a Video button. At YouTube, click
   Upload. This step opens a dialog box in which you choose a file.

4. **Navigate to the file you want to upload and follow the steps to upload
   the file.**

After uploading the file, a new dialog box appears, prompting you to enter tags and other information. On YouTube, you also have the option to specify the category in which the video will reside. Choose a category that makes sense for the type of video you're uploading.

5. **Add a title, description, and tags to your video.**

Adding this information is imperative. People who visit YouTube or Vimeo can find your videos based on the information you enter in these fields. At YouTube, you can also share your activity with your other social media contacts, such as on Twitter and Facebook, and make your file public or private. You can keep the file private and direct your social media followers and clients to your videos by sending them URLs. However, if the file remains public and you generate interest from YouTube visitors, we highly recommend that you choose the Public option for all videos you upload.

6. **Complete the uploading process.**

If you have a Vimeo Plus account, the video is processed immediately. If you have a Vimeo Basic account, your video is processed in the order in which it was received, which means that you have to wait until all videos in front of yours are processed. If you have a YouTube account, your video is processed fairly quickly, depending, of course, on the number of YouTube uploads taking place at the same time as yours.

Adding Music to Your Videocast

You can add a lot of panache to a videocast if you include music. You can use background music for the introduction and exit. If you're creative and know a little about music, you can create your own background music using software and royalty-free music samples. You can use an alternative method for adding music to a videocast, and you can license music clips. We show you both methods in later sections.

Creating royalty-free music

If you're musically inclined, you can create your own background music using software and sound loops. On the Windows platform, the excellent Acid Music Studio ($54.95; visit `www.sonycreativesoftware.com/musicstudio`) is quite user friendly. You can work with multiple timelines to mix and match loops to create music in just about any genre, as shown in Figure 4-9.

If you own a Macintosh computer, the GarageBand application is just what the doctor ordered. The software and lots of music loops are included with every Apple desktop and laptop. GarageBand also features multiple timelines, as shown in Figure 4-10.

Figure 4-9:
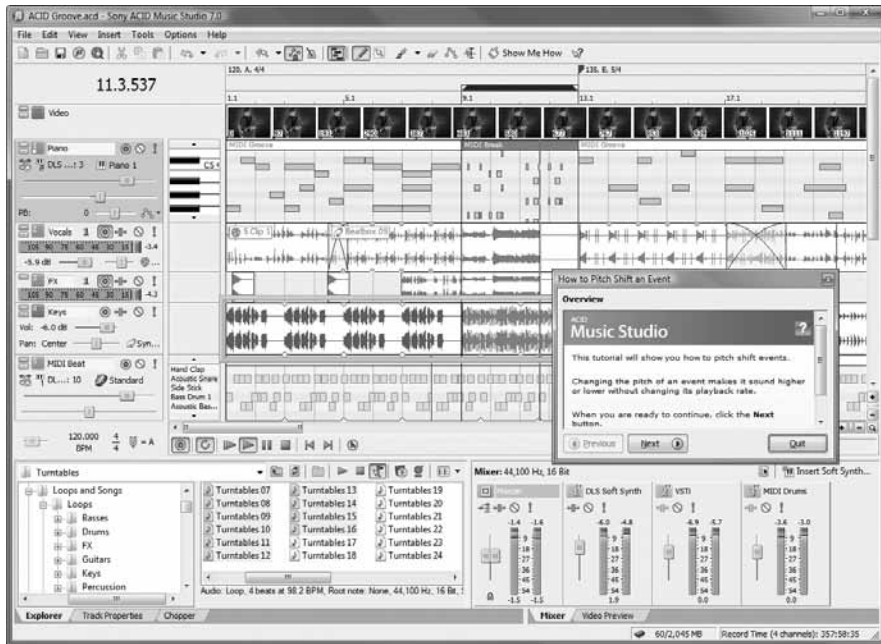Creating royalty-free music with Acid Music Studio.

Figure 4-10:
Creating royalty-free music with GarageBand.

Finding cool royalty-free music

So you're not musically inclined, you don't have perfect pitch, and you can't tuna fish. What do you do? You purchase a license to use a product that someone has already created. To find royalty-free music for your videocast, check out these resources:

- ✦ www.cssmusic.com
- ✦ www.pond5.com
- ✦ www.premiumbeat.com
- ✦ www.royaltyfreemusic.com
- ✦ www.shockwave-sound.com
- ✦ www.uniquetracks.com

Lots of Web sites offer royalty-free music created by talented musicians. The music is covered by a Creative Commons license.

WARNING!

You cannot use content licensed by Creative Commons for commercial use. If you plan on charging for your videos, you must create your own music or pay for music.

Getting Your Videocast Recognized

Creating videos is a time-consuming process, especially if you do it well. Therefore, expecting some kind of return for your time investment is only reasonable. The return, of course, consists of the thousands of people and prospective clients viewing your videos who in turn become viable business prospects for you.

Here are a few tips for getting recognized:

- ✦ **Post in the signature of every e-mail you send a link to wherever your videos are stored online.** Most e-mail applications give you the option to create an e-mail signature and automatically insert it in every e-mail you send.

- ✦ **Post a line to your online video portals in every other form of social media you use.** For example, you can post a link to your videos on your Twitter and Facebook pages.

- ✦ **Avoid posting long videos.** If you have a lot to say about a subject, break it down into two or more episodes. Each video should be less than five minutes long.

✦ **If your videos are hosted at YouTube, be sure to upload videos to a channel that matches their content.** Getting recognized in a popular channel can be tough. If so, consider uploading your video to a different channel that matches the content but isn't as crowded.

✦ **Add multiple tags to every video you upload.** Don't overlook any possible tag. For example, if you're a published author or you're known for other work you've done on the Web, be sure to add your name as a tag. If you create instructional videos, use the tag *free tutorial.* In this day and age, people are finding that a free lunch does indeed exist and they're continually on the lookout for one.

✦ **Leave comments on other videos.** On YouTube, for example, you can leave polite video responses when you have a substantial contribution to another person's video.

✦ **Customize your YouTube channel to make a lasting impression.** When you have a large collection of videos, you can specify which one to feature, the sorting method, the page color, avatar upload instructions, and more.

✦ **Mirror the tags in your video description.** For example, if your video shows people how to do something in Photoshop, make one tag *Photoshop* and include the word *Photoshop* in the text description. The redundancy ranks your video higher than someone who hasn't repeated a tag in the video description.

✦ **If you host your videos at Vimeo, edit your profile.** You can edit your personal information to include a bio, upload a picture to display on your page, and upload a video that plays when your picture is clicked. You can also create a shortcut URL for your Vimeo page. For example, if you're a photographer, you might create the URL `vimeo.com/ photoguru`, if it's available. If you create a shortcut URL, keep it as short as possible. Its purpose is to help people more easily reach your videos, not to give them carpal tunnel syndrome from typing long URLs.

✦ **Add contacts to your Vimeo profile.** A contact must be a member of Vimeo. You can add a contact to your Vimeo profile by typing that person's e-mail address in the Search box. Another way to add contacts to Vimeo is to send an e-mail invitation to colleagues or people who may be interested in viewing your videos. A person who accepts your invitation is automatically added to your contact list.