

## Audacity Callburner Review (Jun 08)

This month we focus on three tools that when combined provide you with pretty much all you need to do effective recording of Subject Matter Experts for inclusion in your e-learning, all for free: Skype, Callburner and Audacity .

If you're in the business of recording lots of audio clips from Subject Matter Experts as part of your learning development, and (like us) quality face to face time with a range of global experts is not possible, here's a little equation to familiarise yourself with:

**Skype + Callburner + Audacity = free, rapid, quality audio**

Since none of these are really authoring tools in the more conventional screen-based learning sense, we've suspended our usual scorecard and given you more of a narrative view of what these tools can do. And since they're all free in their basic formats, you don't need to worry about the cost score either...

### **Step 1: Recording your interviews with Skype + Audacity.**

**Skype:** Still using a landline to make calls to experts? Hang up immediately! Skype is of course the leading free VoIP (Voiceover IP) application. It enables you to make phone calls through your internet connection. If the person you want to speak to has Skype, then it's free, anywhere in the world. If you're dialling a landline, it's as near to free as you can expect.

**Callburner:** Once you (and your SME, obviously) are both on Skype, you need a tool to record your audio. There are many free ones out there, we've found Callburner to be one of the best (Skylook's also worth a look).

You can download Callburner for free here: <http://www.callburner.com/>

It has a 14 day trial, and after that will still record Skype to Skype calls for free, though you'll need to pay if you want to record Skype to landline calls. The quality won't be as good of course, so for cost and quality reasons we recommend that you do all SME audio as Skype-to-Skype – if you can do it in person all you need is a microphone and Audacity, which we'll come onto shortly.

Install and configure Callburner as follows:



Always set to record BOTH SIDES of the call – otherwise you’ll just hear yourself going ‘I see...interesting...’ (which isn’t actually that interesting). And of course, make sure your SME knows that you’re recording them.



Set ‘don’t start recording automatically’ – otherwise it will record every Skype call you make – and unless you want to fill your hard drive with your own personal audio diary, it’s not recommended.

You’re now ready to record with Callburner. We recommend that you try it with someone else before you call your SME to ensure you can record at the right level of quality.

Once you’re ready to start recording, start Skype . The Callburner window will open automatically:



-Call your SME

-Click 'record' to start recording

-Watch the meter while you are doing it to make sure you're getting a signal.

-Be sure of sound quality when you're recording your SME. Record a little bit of the conversation first, then hang up and play it back to make sure you are recording properly and the recording levels are right, i.e. background noise isn't excessive.

-When you're recording them, we find it's a good idea to mute your own mic so there's no noise on your side while they're speaking, so you can get clean soundbites.

-After you've finished the full interview and gotten answers to all of your question and end the call you will get this pop up to confirm the call was recorded:



Click 'show me' to see the file:



Save it to another folder, leaving the original here for back up.

And that's how you use Skype + Callburner to record calls.

There's not much more to say about Callburner – and that's a good thing. It is free, easy to use and pretty much foolproof – so if you're going to record audio, we highly recommend it.

Now you've got your mp3, You're then ready to edit it into small standalone mp3 clips – and this is where part three of the equation comes in:

### **Step 3: Edit into standalone mp3 clips using Audacity:**

#### **Step 1: Download Audacity. At once!**

Audacity is without doubt the leading audio recording package from our perspective. Not surprising, since it's completely free, well supported, easy to use and produces quality mp3 outputs. You start by downloading it here:

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

To export mp3 audio format you will need to download and install the [LAME MP3 Encoder](#). It's an extra file that enables you to output mp3s. This is a one time, really easy process.

1. Go to the [LAME download page](#).
2. Under "For Audacity on Windows", left-click on the link "libmp3lame-win-3.97.zip" and save the zip folder to anywhere on your computer.
3. When you have finished downloading the ZIP folder, unzip it and save the file **lame\_enc.dll** that it contains to anywhere on your computer.
4. The first time you use the "Export as MP3" command, Audacity will ask you where lame\_enc.dll is saved.

#### **Step 2: Open your mp3 in audacity**

File / open / browse to your mp3 file from your SME interview.

We recommend you listen to it straight through first to determine what you can/ cannot use.

Make notes of the time codes that have good takes that you can use, so you can quickly find them again in your edit.

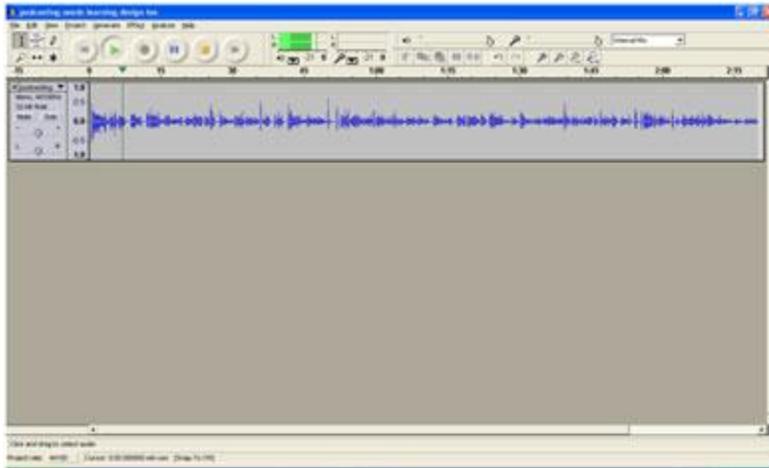
#### **Step 3: Edit your file in Audacity:**

You can do loads with Audacity, including creating multi-tracked audio, adding music, adding fade-in and fade-out, and a range of other effects. It's rich with features that you can easily turn on and off (and turn yourself into Brian Eno if you want to). For basic audio editing, there are

really only three things you need to be able to do.:

## 1. Selecting , cutting and pasting into new clip

Audacity uses a really simple timeline metaphor which shows you the audio file as you listen, making it easy to cut, copy and paste audio files into a new file. This is a handy way to keep your master file and your individual sound bites separate:



To edit audio in Audacity, you simply highlight the area that you want to use, copy it and paste it into a new file.

## 2. Tidying up:

You can then tidy up your rough cut very easily by zooming in on a specific area in the timeline (say if you want to take out a pause or cough), selecting it and deleting it.

With about 30 minutes practice with any audio file, you'll be reasonably competent. Once you get comfortable with the basics of copying, pasting and deleting, you can add some other effects:

**Amplify:** Another useful feature is the 'Amplify' feature. If you find the audio level's not high enough (tut tut, you should have checked when recording, but we'll overlook that...), you can just choose 'effect -> amplify' and boost the sound (to stadium rock levels if you're not careful, so do watch out).

**Silence:** On the other end of the spectrum (literally), you may find you want to add some silence, say between one thought and the next, or if you're editing two clips together. Again, this is easy to do via the effects menu. Just choose silence, drag your cursor to where you want it on the timeline, and a few seconds of golden quiet will appear.

### **3. Exporting to mp3:**

Once you've got the audio the way you want it, you'll want to output it to create your standalone file, or for insertion into your e-learning authoring tool. The most compact and best quality format to use is mp3. Exporting from Audacity to mp3 is simple: File – export as mp3 – put in the details that you want (e.g. genre, artist –not really necessary to use for SME recording) and output it to the folder where you want to save it.

And that's about it. There are lots of great tutorials and resources on Audacity [like this one](#). As always, best to just get stuck in and see how you get on – it's very hard to go wrong in this tool which is why we like it so much.

So that's it: a simple kit bag for audio recording, and not a penny spent in the process. Who needs YouTube? Audio is the new video.