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4 Feet Running's setup, such as it is

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Hi, Dan here from 4 Feet Running. In case anybody's interested, here's some info on the hardware Nik and I use to record 4 Feet Running (<http://4feetrunning.blogspot.com>).

For our first few episodes, we used the XtremeMac MicroMemo (<http://www.ipodobserver.com/story/27964>) connected to my 30GB 5th-generation iPod. We attached to this the XtremeMac MemoMic, which is a cheap but serviceable lavalier microphone. We attached the mic to my right shoulder, and Nik ran close to me on my right, so the mic was effectively between us.

The MicroMemo was awful. Terrible, terrible, terrible. It required me to take the iPod out of its case, which left it susceptible to scratches. It plugs into the dock connector at the bottom of the iPod, but doesn't ever snap in fully, so it would either bend at an unnatural angle or simply fall out while running. We had to plug it in, then wrap the entire iPod in Saran Wrap and clear tape to keep it steady. It drained the iPod battery -- because it writes the audio to the hard drive, the HD is constantly spinning. More than that, either due to the shoddy connection or the read/write lag time on the iPod's hard drive, the MicroMemo would skip several seconds of audio every few minutes. The one convenience of it was that the audio files were higher-quality WAVs and became available directly through iTunes when you plugged the iPod in afterward. But trying to edit a show where the audio skipped every so often was a nightmare.

We eventually bought what we use now: the Olympus WS-300M (<http://tinyurl.com/6go22e>). It's been much, much better to use. It's tiny, relatively cheap and very easy to use. We still use the same lavalier microphone with it, still on the same shoulder and all that. It uses a single AAA battery and it's got a USB plug built into it, which makes downloading very easy. Recording in high-quality stereo, we get about 8.5 hours of recording time.

The downsides to the Olympus WS-300M are that it's cheap, and has an omnidirectional mic which means while we do get some nice ambient sounds, we also get a bit of hiss (though I realized only just a few days ago that I may have set the recorder's settings wrong, so that may just be my own fault for not reading the booklet). Also, it records to Windows Media Audio files, which are lossy and not compatible with my Mac. I use a free program for the Mac called Switch (<http://www.nch.com.au/switch/plus.html>) that converts the WMA files into some other format I can edit. There are other programs that do the same thing, too. I like Switch b/c I can convert files in batches.

It's not really high-quality stuff we're using. The Olympus cost about \$60 US, the mic about \$20 US. If we hit the Lottery, we'll buy some pricier stuff that captures better-quality audio, but for now we're using the cheapo setup and trying to get the most out of it we can.

So that's what we use when we're on the road, running. For our "in the studio" bits, we use the exact same setup, except this time the recorder and mic are on the coffee table, or clipped to the sofa, or wherever we happen to be. Most of the time, we have to record that stuff while Nik's working, so I just sidle up to her when she has a free minute, put the mic somewhere near her and let 'er rip. Again, nothing fancy.

We don't have a mixer, we don't use a standalone mic, and we don't record direct to the computer. I have a headset mic around here somewhere. We never use it.

The last main bits of podcasting hardware we use are my trusty 15-inch MacBook Pro (<http://tinyurl.com/2cd4gx>), which I love more than life itself and carry with me everywhere like a security blanket (but not when we run), and one of a couple of digital cameras. Whoever remembers to bring the camera when we go running is whoever took the pictures that week. Nik's camera is a Canon Powershot A95 (<http://tinyurl.com/5kwpfv>), which she really loves and has both manual/auto settings. Mine is a Kodak EasyShare M753 (<http://tinyurl.com/6zvx9x>).

That's about it. So long!
