



# FREAK ONOMICS RADIO™



**Stephen J. Dubner comes to Marketplace to tell you what the hidden side of everything sounds like.**  
by Luke Taylor

**W**hat do *Freakonomics* and pornography have in common? According to *Freakonomics* co-author Stephen J. Dubner, it's that both can be defined in the 1964 words of Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart: "I know it when I see it."

Dubner says this description works as well as any when he's asked to define *Freakonomics*. "We've defined it about 100 different ways over the past few years," Dubner says. "We're trying to tell interesting and true stories about the world, but instead of operating from an anecdotal or political or emotional baseline as a lot of storytelling does, we operate from an empirical baseline."

Dubner, together with University of Chicago economist Steven Levitt, wrote the bestsellers *Freakonomics* and *Superfreakonomics*, the groundbreaking books that ask provocative questions such as, "What do a schoolteacher and a sumo wrestler have in common?" "The biggest fun," Dubner says, "is taking a topic that people have strong beliefs about and then tipping the apple cart a bit."

Now their surprising observations have come to public radio, thanks to a co-production between American Public Media's *Marketplace* and WNYC. Dubner can be heard regularly on *Marketplace*, in a segment called *Freakonomics Radio*. He's already explored new ground on the show, such as looking at why there are fewer runs in Major League Baseball games today versus 10 years ago.

Although a lot of the research findings in *Freakonomics* are unexpected or even accidental, *Freakonomics Radio* was a deliberate creation. In February 2010, Dubner began producing his own podcasts to see if *Freakonomics* lent itself to audio. "Even though it was a podcast, I called it *Freakonomics Radio*, hoping it would become a radio project of some kind," he says.

And this is where the story takes a *Freakonomics*-like, surprising turn: Dubner made the overwhelmingly unlikely transformation from "core listener" to correspondent. "As a big admirer of *Marketplace*, I went out to talk to [executive producer] JJ Yore because I knew that he had created the show," Dubner says. "I thought it would be great to just get some advice from him, and he was receptive from the outset."

After the appropriate meetings and agreements with WNYC and *Marketplace*, Dubner was soon recording pilots. Host Kai Ryssdal went to New York City and visited several locations with Dubner to record some live audio to be used in future *Freakonomics Radio* installments (their visit to Yankee Stadium was used in the premiere segment). Dubner feels the time he and Ryssdal spent working face to face helped accelerate the on-air chemistry the two share.

No stranger to broadcast media, Dubner has appeared innumerable times as a guest on radio and television programs, but he admits he prefers doing *Freakonomics Radio* because he'd rather be the one asking the questions than answering them. "As a writer, I love being the one who actually writes and shapes the material that the audience will receive," Dubner says. "And what I like about public radio audiences is that they're just a very astute, curious, engaged and smart audience, and to me, that's a dream audience."

Listen for *Freakonomics Radio* bi-weekly segments on *Marketplace* at 6:30 p.m. (segments will be weekly starting in January) on Minnesota Public Radio News. For the podcast version, news updates and online extras, check out [FreakonomicsRadio.com](http://FreakonomicsRadio.com).