Podcasting 101

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What is a Podcast, Anyway?

By Quentin Hammock

While many people today might be able to make a guess as to what a podcast is, especially with the proliferation of mobile devices like the iPod and iPhone, the word podcast doesn't necessarily offer a clear definition of what it is. The word podcast actually comes from the idea of broadcasting media to MP3 players like the iPod. Without getting too technical, a podcast can be an audio or video file, usually an MP3 or MV4 respectively, and are distributed to a wide audience. These files are distributed through special software that allows users to select a podcast, download it, and listen to it on either their computer or mobile device. The most popular software today is iTunes, which holds a very large Internet inventory of podcasts, both audio and video.
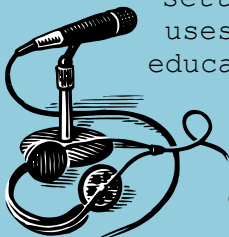
Most podcasts accessed through iTunes are produced in series. That is, just like television shows are filmed in a series format, where each episode relates to a main topic or idea, podcasts are typically developed in an episodic format. One feature that sets podcasting apart from other dissemination methods is in the software. Once users subscribe to a series of podcasts, or a podcast show, iTunes or comparable software then automatically delivers new episodes as they are released (via RSS feeds). After a download completes, the podcast is available for the user to listen to or watch at a time of convenience.

Uses of Podcasts

By Quentin Hammock

Podcasts have several uses, both in the classroom and the "real world". For the intent of this newsletter, we will focus on the uses of podcasting in an educational setting. One of the first uses of podcasting in education can be for instructors delivering just in time lectures and presentations to students outside of class. Not only can instructors record their lectures, but they can also include photos, slides, etc. for visual support. Another use of podcasts, and probably the most obvious, is a tool students can use to complete assignments and projects. Yet another use for podcasts in education is the ability to create tutorials for things like how to use software and applications for students and teachers. While there might be a few more uses for podcasting in education, these are the three primary uses found in schools today.

The Good
By Quentin Hammock

After exploring several different podcasts from a variety of sources, I have found two model examples of educational podcasts.

The Tech Teacher's Podcast
This series of podcasts is geared toward the technical teacher. While it seems that the shows are not tightly scripted, the two people speaking have a very conversational style in the way the present their topics, which works well for them.

Grammar Girl
This series of podcasts is centered around grammar and the English language. The person speaking does seem to have a tight script for the shows, as there are no unnatural breaks in speaking.

In both cases, it's important to keep in mind when creating a podcast that you should have some type of script or outline to keep your podcast on track and make sure you communicate your ideas effectively.

The Bad & Ugly
By Quentin Hammock

In addition to finding some good examples of podcasts, I have also found two poor examples of educational podcasts.

EEE1009 Course Impressions
This podcast was created as a project for a course at a university. The group of students speaking on the podcast demonstrates that this show was not well scripted or organized. There are a lot of unnatural pause and cuts, caused partially by editing out mistakes. The quality of the microphone used was also poor.

Junie B. Jones
This podcast is a teacher reading a Junie B. Jones story aloud. While this is presented as a poor example of a podcast on the website, it is worth mentioning that speaking with inflection can go a long way in captivating an audience. Speaking in monotone is a quick way to lose the attention of your audience, and often times, they will just turn the podcast off.

EDITORIAL

The Value of Podcasts
Editorial by Quentin Hammock

While many people might see podcasting in education simply as capstone-type projects, this type of project can greatly contribute to classroom instruction. Not only does podcasting give students a creative way of expressing what they have learned, it also adds great value by incorporating skills from other academic disciplines. Not only does podcasting integrate content and skills from the discipline being studied, but also content and skills from English and Language Arts. Students must not only prepare a grammatically-correct script, but also use proper speech to record their voices for the podcast. In Ohio, activities like podcasting are being integrated directly into the new common core standards. Students will be required to create audio recordings to practice speaking and pronunciation, while adding visual aids where needed. It is for these reasons that I believe podcasting has great value in education today.

SOURCES

The History of Podcasting

Podcasting – Evolution of Technology

Podcast Directory

Learning in Hand