iPod, You-pod, We-pod

Podcasting and Marketing Library Services

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The one constant of library work is change. In the last few years, a new vocabulary has entered the lexicon of our users. Sounding like a foreign landscape, it is a world inhabited by wikis, RSS feeds, blogs, and podcasts. It is tempting to dismiss such strange sounding entities as techno fads—here today and gone tomorrow. Successful marketing, however, means meeting our users on their turf, not ours. And many of our users now acquire information and socially interact within a digital sphere. If we want to be a meaningful part of their lives, we need to be there as well. This is particularly true of one of the hottest technological crazes, podcasting.

Pod What?

The editors of *The New Oxford American Dictionary* chose *podcast* as its 2005 word of the year, crowning a two-year rise to prominence. But what exactly is a podcast? According to EDUCAUSE, podcasting is a "software and hardware combination that permits automatic downloading of audio files (most commonly in MP3 format) for listening at the user's convenience."[1] And EDUCAUSE would know. In the 2006 Horizon Report, developed jointly by the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative and the New Media Consortium, personal broadcasting (which includes podcasting and Webcasting) is one of six highlighted technologies likely to have an impact on higher education in both the short and long term.[2]

The ability to load media files on Web sites is not new but the podcasting craze began in earnest when Apple introduced its small MP3 player, the iPod. Small and trendy, the iPod allows users to build personalized music libraries, download music files, and collect and listen to audio (and now video) files at their convenience. Packaged with a free MP3 management program called iTunes, the iPod soon captured the MP3 player market. Note that a number of alternative MP3 players can be used in place of the Apple iPod and that most computers are capable of playing MP3 files.

Podcasts are audio or video files that are syndicated on a Web site (usually via an RSS feed). Podcasts are often in MP3 file formats, although other options are sometimes supported. Once available online, the podcast can be loaded onto an iPod or any MP3 player and played at the user's convenience. The RSS feeds can be managed in a software application called a *podcatcher*. One of the most popular is iTunes, which is available for free download at www.apple.com. Other often-cited podcatchers include Juice (http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net) and jPodder (http://jpodder.com). Users can subscribe to selected podcast feeds through applications like iTunes—this allows the user to automatically have loaded into their podcatcher the latest podcasts produced by selected podcast producers.

Finding a Podcast

While some podcasts include video and the newer, larger MP3 players such as the 30 gigabyte and 60 gigabyte iPods can accommodate these large files, most podcasts are simply audio files. This trend will no doubt be ironic for those of us who remember the dire predictions concerning the demise of the radio. But the podcasting craze has breathed new life into all types of audio files—everything from audio broadcasts from the commercial television networks to radio shows, class lectures, training sessions, and, of course, music. How do you find these gems? Software packages such as iTunes have a music store included—it allows users to access both fee-based programs and music files as well as a library of freely downloadable podcasts. A simple Google search using the word *podcast* and the topic of interest will at times retrieve hundreds of choices.

Users (and libraries) can register their podcasts with iTunes for broader distribution but this process can take quite a bit of time. To meet the needs of users looking for other directories, a number of services have appeared on

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the Internet. Like other Internet directories, these podcast metasites allow users to tap into a broad range of podcasts; many can be played from the host Web page but some will require the user to copy the link into a podcatcher service such as iTunes. Table 1 lists some of the more useful Podcast directories.

Podcasting and Libraries

What does all this have to do with marketing in libraries? Podcasting allows libraries to develop audio and video resources targeted toward very specific audiences.

An example of this can be found in the podcasts developed by the Lansing Public Library in Lansing, Illinois. Podcasts are available in four areas: adult programs, teen programs, youth programs, and information technology programs. Freely available for downloading, these podcasts allow the library to promote key services and resources to a target audience and to publicize and capture notable events in the library. One example is the Lansing Public Library's Teen Poetry Café. This podcast captures an event hosted at the library in which local teens read their original poetry. The library hosts a Podcast Information Page (www.lansing.lib.il.us/podcast.htm) that both provides users information about how to use a podcast and allows users to subscribe to library feeds.

Podcasts are ideally suited to tours and this is probably the most commonly found podcasting application currently found on library Web sites. Western Kentucky University Libraries hosts a tour via podcast on its Web site (www.wku.edu/library/podcast). But the library also provides other podcasts, including guest lecturers associated with key events (such as Black History Month) and to publicize upcoming lectures. Likewise, the Sheridan Libraries at John Hopkins University (www.library.jhu.edu/podcasts/index.html) have developed a number of podcasts for both instructional and promotional uses.

Another use emerging in libraries, especially school and public libraries, is for booktalks. One example can be found at the Isinglass Teen Reed Award BookTalks (www.hopkintonschools.org/hhs/library/podcast.html). These podcasts were developed by and for the Hopkinton High School and the Hopkinton Middle School Library in Contoocook, New Hampshire.

What other potential marketing uses could libraries make of podcasts? In addition to the locally produced READ® poster highlighting local celebrities, libraries could develop a podcast celebrating National Library Week with local officials, community leaders, or university administrators describing what the library has meant to them. Groups that meet in the library (local board meetings, civic organizations) could post a podcast of their meetings on the library Web site. Visiting lectures and presentations could be archived via podcasts and broadcast to community members that are not able to attend.

Even the ubiquitous library tour could be developed with particular audiences in mind. In an academic environment, one podcast tour might be developed for the freshmen writing their first composition paper, another for graduate students at the dissertation stage, and yet another for new faculty on campus. Alternatively, a public library might develop specialized podcasts for different community groups: one set would be targeted toward local economic development and small businesses, another toward families home schooling their children, and yet another to local book clubs.

Getting Started

Interested in learning more about podcasts? First, load iTunes and become familiar with the wide breadth of podcasts available. But a word of warning–in the democratic frontier of the unregulated Internet, podcasts can vary greatly. Anyone can develop a podcast and load it for distribution. Some are clearly not appropriate for underage users or anyone easily offended! Table 2 lists some resources than can help you start developing your own podcasts.

Table 1. Podcast Directories

Apple iTunes Podcasts	www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts
Education Podcast Network	http://epnWeb.org/index.php
Podcast Alley	www.podcastalley.com
Podcast Net	www.podcast.net
University Channel	http://uc.princeton.edu/main
Yahoo! Podcasts	http://podcasts.yahoo.com

Table 2. Podcasting Resources

Print Guides:

Bierdorfer, J. D. *iPod & iTunes: The Missing Manual*. Pogue Press/O'Reilly, 2005.

Geoghegan, Michael W. and Dan Klass. *Podcast Solutions: The Complete Guide to Podcasting*. Friends of Ed, 2005.

Web Guides:

GarageBand Support: Working with Podcasts. (For Mac users.) Available online at: www.apple.com/support/garageband/podcasts.

McElhearn, Kirk. *Beginner's Guide to Podcast Creation*. Available online at: http://ilounge.com/index.php/articles/comments/beginners-guide-to-podcast-creation.

Podcasting: The Beginner's Guide. Available online at: www.geeksquad.com/centralintelligence/music/2005_10_podcasting101.php.

Before developing your own podcast, however, you should check out a good copyright guide on podcasting. The rules governing copyright apply when doing a podcast. When doing booktalks, for example, the works read should either be in the public domain or appropriate permission obtained from the copyright holder prior to broadcasting the podcast. Anyone recorded for a podcast should sign a release. Many of these issues are explored in the Creative Commons' Podcasting Legal Guide, available online at http://wiki.creativecommons.org/podcasting_Legal_Guide.

Is podcasting a fad? Is it worth the time and effort to develop library resources? Certainly, it is not a service that all users will avail themselves of equally. But for Internet-generation, or "netgen," users and more technologically savvy patrons, podcasts offer the library the ability to provide promotional activities, cultural events, and instruction on-demand in a highly portable medium. Only time will tell if podcasts are a permanent addition to the library marketing toolkit. But for now, it has emerged as one of the most powerful new technological trends of the twenty-first century with new recreational and educational uses emerging daily.

References

1. "Seven Things You Should Know About . . . Podcasting." EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2005, www.educasue.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7003.pdf.
2. New Media Consortium and the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2006 Horizon Report, www.nmc.org/pdf/2006_Horizon_Report.pdf.