

Producing academic-related podcasts – helpful hints

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Introduction

In relation to my research on podcasts from or about museums, I have identified a number of points which I found helpful for the success of a podcast. While some of them are relevant only within a museum context. Other more general issues, seem to be relevant also to other types of podcasts, such as those from the education sector. It is these common issues, which arise in the production of quality podcasts, which will be looked at in more detail in this document. These recommendations are chiefly based on my research on podcasting supported by references to relevant literature.

1. Aims and objectives of podcast

As with written papers, authors of podcasts have something in mind, what they want to deliver to their listeners. Going through literature on 'how to make a podcast' most authors agree that stating the aims and objectives of the podcast series is extremely important, because that helps the audience to get an idea of what to expect. This in turn is said to be important to help the audience to develop an interest as well as to ensure listeners stay tuned in.

Therefore, Farkas recommends that 'the first thing to do is write out a mission statement or design document that sets out rules for the tone and overall structure of the show.'¹ Michael W. Geoghegan, author of 'Podcasting Solutions' says 'make clear what the podcast is, who has done it and explain the aims and objectives of the podcast.'²

Therefore, it will be useful to make a brief comment at the beginning of the first podcasts which briefly explains what the podcast series is about and what the student can gain from it. Also introduce yourself! An introduction and an explanation of what the series is about would help spark an interest in the programme.

For example, something like ...the objective was to make the course more lively, to help you organize your time better, podcasts will be lighthearted, you can listen to them on the go, note taking during listening is not essential, etc.

Having this information in the introductory episode would help students.

2. Format of the podcast

In order to help the listener follow the audio, it would be helpful if the format of the podcast is briefly introduced how the chosen format (for example, Introduction – main content – finish) helps to fulfill the aims and objectives of the podcast series.

For example: Some info on what the podcast is about could sound like this:

This podcast series is supposed to give you some guidance through the individual modules of the course and add an entertaining element to the course content. You do not need to take notes, as all the content mentioned in the podcasts are also covered in the module guide / learning unit / lecture notes etc..

or...

This podcast series is supposed to give you additional content to that offered in the Learning Units you found in Blackboard. Therefore, I encourage you to take notes as you listen to the programme.

Some info on how this podcast could be used could sound like this:

This podcast is supposed to be listened whilst you are sitting in front of Blackboard so that you can look up references which are mentioned in the podcast.

¹ BGF p.89.

² Podcasting Solutions, p.35.

or...

You can download this podcasts to your portable mp3 Player and listen to it wherever you feel comfortable. You do not need to take notes because you will find everything that is talked about in the podcast, also in the corresponding Learning Units.

This sort of information will help students to understand what they are supposed to take away from the podcast.

Similarly, it is useful to begin each episode with a brief statement of what the episode is about.

Also it is important to follow a consistent format, even if not too rigidly. Students will become familiar with the format. If the format is going to be different, let them know the new format at the beginning of the podcast.

Cochrane argues that 'I try to stick to the format I have developed for my show for a simple reason. By the third or fourth time you listen to my show, you will know what to expect and approximately when. Like everyone else, I experimented with the format of the show, and, still to this day, solicit feedback from the audience. Some podcasters have changed format without warning their audiences and have found their e-mail inboxes full. So it is important as you develop your format that you tell your audience in advance when you are going to make a change.'³

3. Content relevant to aural medium

The content presented and discussed in audio podcasts should be able to convey the message through the aural medium. If complex ideas are presented, incorporating visual media (perhaps visual aids on the VLE) might be worth considering.

Issues with compatibility needs to be considered. Some students have MP3 players which are not video enabled, so they could not see images. Yet, one could always do one version enhanced with images and one without.⁴ The student with the mp3 Player, which does not support images, could always look at them on the PC.

4. Description of podcasts

Since the podcasts can be listened to directly on the VLE the descriptions of the podcast episodes is probably not crucial. However, if a student decides to listen to them using his/her own software e.g. iTunes, then a proper description of the sound file is important. If all podcasts are labelled consistently from the beginning students can store them in their 'music library'; this will help them to find and playback podcasts easily.

For example, your podcasts will appear in iTunes like this, in a format familiar to students:

Name	Time	Artist	Album	Genre	My Rating	Play Count
Podcast 01	12:08	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		1
Podcast 02	14:13	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		
Podcast 03	10:17	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		
Podcast 04	8:13	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		
Podcast 05	11:18	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		
Podcast 06	11:51	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		1
Podcast 07	11:32	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		1
Podcast 08	5:16	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		1
Podcast 09	12:07	John Fothergill	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		1
Podcast 10	7:50	John Fothergill a...	Optical Fibre Comms	Other		1

Literature

- Cochrane, Todd. *Podcasting. The Do-It-Yourself Guide*. (Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2005)
- Farkas, Bart G. *Secrets of Podcasting. Audio Blogging for the Masses*. (Berkeley: Peachpit Press, 2006)
- Felix, Lionel and Damien Stolarz. *Video Blogging and Podcasting*. Emerging Media Tools for Business Communication (Oxford: Focal Press, 2006)
- Geoghegan, Michael W. and Dan Klass. *Podcasting Solutions. The Complete Guide to Podcasting*. (Berkeley: Apress, 2005)

³ TC p.78

⁴ To see an example: check the Victoria & Albert Museum's CultureCasts <http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/podcasts/?p=4> (as of 20.8.2006).