Podcasting

What is a Podcasting?

The term podcasting derives its name from Apple's iPod and the word broadcast. Podcasting is delivering audio content usually over the internet to iPods and other portable media (ie MP3) players. Users use software can synchronize content to their media player using a laptop or PC and take it with them to listen at their convenience. Because podcasts are typically saved in MP3 format, they can also be listened to on nearly any computer. To facilitate regular updates the publishers can also create Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds that reference the audio content. So you can think of podcasting as radio on demand where the content is sometimes described as being "pulled" to the subscriber.

How do you connect to a Podcast?

RSS Feeds and RSS readers (see also RSS Advice Sheet)

RSS feeds allow syndicated delivery of the audio automatically as subscribers connect to the Internet. Each RSS feed item provides meta information about an audio file, such as the file's name and description, and contains an RSS enclosure with the URL of the audio file. The RSS feeds are accessed by RSS readers or aggregators which the user has set up on his/her laptop or PC. Some browsers have their own built in RSS feed readers. Once subscribed to a feed, an aggregator is able to check for new content at user-determined intervals and retrieve any update. The information which is then displayed in the reader's viewer and can be transferred to the portable device or played from the viewer.

Podcasting Process Steps

1. Individuals/publishers create and record audio content, and post it to a web server, typically in MP3 format.
2. They publish an RSS file that contains a reference the audio content.
3. Users regularly check the feed for new versions or updates using a reader application. If a new version is found, the reader reads through it, identifies the audio file URLs, downloads them and syncs them to a media player.
4. User listens to the podcast audio file at his convenience.

Tools needed to create a Podcast

Once you have access to a PC, laptop or Mac and have a reasonable quality microphone eg a unidirectional, dynamic-type microphone you have all the hardware you need.

The software tools to enable this work are already available, in most cases for free, and will work on PC and Apple platforms. There are a number of off-the-shelf podcast solutions available now but they all generally contain the following:

- A feature for recording your audio and creating editing your MP3
- Access to a Web server to upload the MP3 file and the RSS file (text file) and a website.
- Text editor for creating RSS files eg Notepad
- An FTP (File Transfer Protocol) program or possibly a webpage-based upload feature such as the many software interfaces many hosting companies now provide.

Why use Podcasts?

Podcasts are a great way of telling children and parents what is going on at school. They can deliver educational content for listening or viewing on a computer or MP3 player freeing learning from the constraints of the classroom and its clock and allow children to connect outside school. Teachers can use podcasts to emphasise important aspects of a course or ensure students who are absent get access to classroom interaction.

A podcast's content can be anything conveyed by an audio or video file: a recorded class, a foreign language lesson, a demonstration of nature or science principles. Teachers can easily create a podcast of daily assignments from class, and publish it for all of their students.

Students can create and publish content and deliver it to their teachers or other students. Share lesson plans and lessons with their class and others. For example, impressions of a visit to an art gallery, a history documentary, short story or compiling a projects with input from the whole class or classes form different regions or countries.

There is a cross –curricular dimension to students creating podcasts. For example, students working on podcasts experience teamwork, individual participation and self awareness, enterprise, a variety of technical skills and planning, as well as research, script writing, compare and contrast and dialogue, discussion and communications skills.

Students with language difficulties, and speech and communication difficulties are encouraged to practise sounds and words they find challenging and then when available as a podcast to support self-review and to communication with others. Also for students with who use English as a second language find having access to podcasts allow them to re-listen to a lesson with less distractions and it may make translation easier second time around. Students with writing difficulties are freed to express themselves in a podcast instead.

Podcasts can be highly motivating for students because they know their work will be available to a wider audience by the pupils' families, and can generate external feedback to supplement the process of pupils reviewing their own and their peers'work. So, there is an incentive to strive for the best production. Through the process pupils get the scaffolding they need to move on to a new stage in their development.

Pitfalls to using podcasts

Creating and uploading podcasts can be time consuming and technically challenging for some teachers.

Time frame of classes may mean that there is not enough time each week to give all the pupils the chance to edit their own voice work. There may be a heavy planning requirement.

Not all students may have access to personal audio devices or computers and internet access to download and play the pod casts.

Overuse, apathy, poor quality or ineffective use of podcasts may cause disillusionment.

Safety issues regarding students identity and material content needs to be carefully monitored.

Relevant Web Sites

- Podcasting in Education
  http://images.apple.com/education/solutions/podcasting/pdf/PodcastCreationGuide.pdf
  Guide to creating podcasts using Garageband and itunes.
- Commoncraft guide to podcasting
  http://www.commoncraft.com/podcasting
  Short Video on Podcasting explained inPlain English

- Education Podcast Network
  www.epnweb.org
  Directory of Educational Podcasts covering a wide range of topics.

- Podcasting with simple tools
  http://www.edsupport.cc/mguhlin/share/uploads/Work/mguhlin_3simpletools2podcast.pdf
  A simple guide to creating a podcast

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