Wired to the World

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Podcasting for Libraries

Podcasting is a neat way for libraries to "push" out information to patrons. Probably the best known software for viewing/listening to podcasts is the Apple's iTunes software. The iTunes software can be downloaded free at this Web site: www.apple.com/itunes. Both Windows and Macintosh versions are available. Several players are available for listening to podcast files, with iPods by Apple being the most players used. Apple sold their 100 millionth iPod in April of 2007. Recently several other companies have come out with cheaper players that play the MP3 format that is used in podcasting. Cost of players has come down so low that at the recent Computers in Libraries 2007 conference in Washington, D.C., they were given away free to all attendees as promotional/educational items. Podcasting is making its way into academic courses. The Wired to the World column author was enrolled in a graduate level Disaster Management course recently where the professor used podcasting to "push" out his interactive classroom lectures to students. "Push" for those of you not familiar with the term refers to any technology where information can be delivered (sometimes without approval) to an individual's computer desktop or player. Podcasting is used for example to transmit most NPR programs such as "In the Public Interest" and "Science Friday." Commercial TV and Radio programs are also podcasted, most of them at no cost to listeners. Apple's iTunes works with both proprietary and non-proprietary hardware, so you can use the software on a Dell laptop or ScanDisk MP3 player as well as Apple products. How can you use podcasts in your library? Podcasting can be used to send audio books, library tours and book club discussions for example over the internet.

Let's looks at a few examples. The Public Library of Charlotte-Mecklenburg County has a neat section on their webpage called "Library Loft" (www.libraryloft.org). This site is primarily for teens, but other folks are welcome also. Here library patrons can view newscasts, programs, editorials, as well as selections from teen interest library books. The Library Loft web page has as it's motto: "Have Fun! Dude Lighten Up! Join the Fun!" Wouldn't it be great if that were the mission statement of more libraries? Recent book offering on the Library Loft include Pete Hautman speaking about his 2006 release Rash; a podcast archive of Anastasia Goldberg's teen blog "YPulse" and "Totally Wired"; Brent Hartinger talks about his book Split Screen: Attack of the Soul Sucking Zombie Brains/Bride of the Soul Sucking Zombie Brains; Tracie Zimmer from Concord, N.C., reads from two of her poetry books; Jessica Ekstrom podcasts her poem, "The Power of Voice" from the anthology, Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul. Library Loft also has a violence prevention play "Twist and Shout" from the Children's Theatre of Charlotte; there are two scavenger hunts: one at the Joe & Joan Martin Center and the other at the Myers Park Branch Library; and April Parker of Randleman, N.C., reads from her book Watching the Innocent: A Tale from the Andover Witch Trials (Parker is working on a book on female pirates.) Arizona State University Libraries has a podcast section on their web page (www.asu.edu/lib/podcasts), has video tours, informational podccasts, and a catalog of books available for downloading. The Lunar and Planetary Institute has a NASA feed podcast (although it seems to have stopped in November of 2006) at www.lpi.usra.edu. PALINET (www.palinet.org) has a library technology online discussion podcast feed (RSS feed at www.palinet.org/rss/techconversations/tc1.xml). The Wisconsin State Legislature Legislative Reference Bureau (library) has a podcast feed at www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/podcasts/index.htm). For other ideas on library based podcasting a good source is the Podcasting–Library Success: Best Practices Wiki at: www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title-Podcasting. The Wiki also has links to information on how to make your own library podcast.

Probably the easiest podcasting software (as opposed to downloading/listening software like iTunes) is gabcast (www.gabcast.com). The gabcast software allow you to make your own podcast using a phone, VoIP, or a camera. The podcast can be saved to a gabcast channel and archived there. Gabcast also allows you to post audio to your blogs and webpages, great audio ringtone greetings, and host conference phone calls. A recent podcast on the gabcast website featured "Boxing Along the Beltway," commentary and interviews about professional boxing in and around Washington, D.C. / Baltimore / Northern Virginia. Other channels are available or you can host your podcast on another server. Instead of boxing, libraries could feature "Libraries Along the Beltway" or "Libraries in North Carolina," discussions on the web. This is just a brief overview of podcasting. There is a lot more detail such as subscribing to podcasts, syncing your MP3 player, sharing files that you can learn about on most player manufacturer websites. For example some think that you cannot down load MP3 files on to non-Apple MP3 players using iTunes. This is not true. You cannot download MP3 files you purchase using iTunes to non-Apple MP3 players, but you can download for example files you own on CDs or non-copy protected internet (free) files. If this seems somewhat confusing, it is, but this new still new technology and the various stakeholders, including libraries, have yet to settle their turf wars. Enjoy podcasting what your library has to offer.