

Chapter 6

The Past, Present, and Future of Podcasting

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to the friendship of an XML programmer and an ex-MTV video jock, the first podcast took place in July of 2003 by automatically streaming a single audio file half way around the world. Four months later Apple Computer, Inc. proved that its personal listening device, the iPod, could synch with a new program called iTunes and download files using the same technology. Since then podcasting has grown at a remarkable rate. In 2007, over 65 million people had used an RSS feed to download a podcast. Literally, millions of podcasts are currently available covering every topic imaginable. The broadcast media have begun to use podcasting as a method of time shifting programming. Educators are using podcasting for reaching out to students. Businesses are using podcasting as a marketing tool. Music artists are using the format to promote themselves and sell their records. The commercial future of podcasting appears to be in the area of advertising and broadcasting.

INTRODUCTION

Podcasting, a Lewis Carroll-style portmanteau word created out of the brand name *iPod* and the term *broadcasting* is a distinctive area within social interaction technology. Although podcasting often employs multi-user social software application such as iTunes to distribute content, that content is often listened to or viewed within the cocooning world of

a personal audio/video device (Kay, 2005; Kuster, 2007; Sarrel, 2007). The upload or the download is the interaction, and often the download does not involve a user at all. Podcasts can be pushed to, or pulled by, a user incorporating Really Simple Syndication (RSS) subscription software scripts that gather and update audio and video files automatically (Go, 2007; Holtz, 2008).

Once the content has been served, the interaction can end there. The user listens to or views the file, deletes it, and waits for the next episode. However,

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because a podcast audio or video file is digital and in a format common to the Internet, normally MP3, that file can *go viral* being reposted, edited, linked to through social sites (such as YouTube, Facebook, or MySpace), or moved around the Internet through email or by some other social interaction means (Copeland, 2008).

Podcasts are often free yet many times involve a fee. They are seen as a low-cost method for unsigned musicians to present themselves to a worldwide audience yet are used by the music licensing firms ASCAP and BMI and many national radio talk shows as a new subscription revenue stream. Local broadcast radio seems to be rushing to offer its programming through podcasting to allow its audience to listen to time shifted content claiming the audience consume “what they want, when they want” (Burns, 2007). Yet at the same time those same stations want the Arbitron Rating Service to find a method of accurately measuring when the audience is listening to that time shifted programming in order to track it for advertising purposes.

Podcasts are global yet they are enjoyed individually. Podcasts are used by the largest broadcast entities in the world but are easy enough for a high school student to create. They are used for entertainment, education, instruction, profit and just to pass the time. Podcasting is a strange dichotomy and yet a viable and interesting section of social interaction technology.

BACKGROUND

The concept of offering packets of audio and video, known generally as *files* or *episodes*, for download has been in use since the general public began using the Internet. Yet, simply offering a file for download through an Internet server or over email is not specifically part of the history of podcasting. What we know today as podcasting must include the use of syndication feed enclosures or the ability to deliver the files as part

of a subscription process. This is why the word *broadcast* is used to make up the term *podcasting* (Overton, 2006).

The earliest demonstration of what we know today as podcasting can be traced back to late 2000 and the convergence of programmer Dave Winer’s RSS format and multiple *audiobloggers*, including ex-MTV Video Jock Adam Curry (Christopher, 2006). Winer’s RSS format was, and is today, a small program written in Extensible Markup Language (XML) that allowed users to create a subscription link to a server in order to automatically download updating files (Joly, 2007; Lopresti, 2007; McCormick, 2007).

Curry and others were running what were termed *audioblogs*, Internet web logs in audio packet formats available for download. Audiobloggers were interested in Winer’s RSS program because through it, a user would only need to install the XML program once. From that point on, the subscription would automatically update on a timely basis set up by the audioblog. The testing proved successful, yet the files were still being played on stationary computers. The technology that would free the user to move was about to be released.

In October of 2001, less than a year after Winer had shown the viability of the RSS format, Apple Computer, Inc. began marketing the iPod (Kahney, 2006). According to Bob Doyle (2005), webmaster of skyBuilders.com, in July of 2003 his server hosted the first podcast that followed the format we know today. The podcasted file was an interview of Dave Winer by Boston-area reporter Christopher Lydon. The file was streamed automatically through RSS to Adam Curry’s iPod in Europe. The experiment’s success moved Winer to write the first widely available RSS file-sharing program, iPodder.

Four months later at the first BloggerCon 2003 conference (October 4-5, 2003, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA). Kevin Marks, a programmer working for Apple Computer demonstrated how to download RSS-enclosed audio

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