

Podcast development stuck in 20th Century timewarp

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We appear to be adopting podcasts and other emerging technology in typically rapid fashion but I wonder if we aren't jumping on the horse before it is properly broken in.

The Boston Globe reported in July 2006 “Hoping to appeal to tech-savvy students with a shrinking attention span, Boston-area colleges are pushing professors to record their lectures as downloadable files that students can listen to wherever, whenever.”

Let's think this through a little. To resolve shrinking attention spans in class we'll provide the lecture in a form that allows someone even more distractions while listening. This way, learners can be distracted “wherever, whenever.”

In order to appeal to shrinking attention spans Boston professors should provide stimulating learning experiences.

Of course, podcasts can be stimulating learning.

On the website of the University of Wisconsin, they have a helpful podcast by Elliot Maisie. The advice is simplistic and premised on technical challenges. The site also offers these ‘five easy steps to designing podcasts’:

1. Select appropriate content
2. Determine your instructional goal
3. Design your content
4. Produce your podcast
5. Incorporate the podcast into your course.

Griffith University felt positively enough about these friendly tips to offer the same suggestions on their site. Elsewhere, Jason Van Orden profoundly suggests:

1. Plan
2. Produce
3. Publish
4. Promote

He doesn't get much deeper than that when he goes on to consider these questions:

- Will you be doing the podcast solo or will you have other hosts?
- What segments do you want to do
- How long will your podcast be? (For the novices, he advises “*Your Podcast Should Be As Long As It Needs To Be*”)
- How often will you release new shows?
- Will you just be talking or will you play music as well?

Van Orden gets close to home base with the throw-away line:

- Maybe you will buck the norm and come up with something completely different?

I might just create a podcast of my own. In it I'll suggest that we need to think of podcasts just as we do with any learning medium. My “*Five Steps to Designing Podcasts that Teach*” could be:

1. Put the listener first. It's not about what you can record and broadcast. It's ONLY about what they can absorb.
2. Allow about 20 hours to produce every 1 hour of material and decide if you can spare that level of resources.
3. Provide plenty of mental maps for the listener. As George Bernard Shaw suggests: “*Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em; Tell 'em; and then Tell 'em what you told 'em.*”
4. Consider transitional effects. Let the learner know when you are moving from one point on the mental map to the next. Don't assume they are following you.
5. Did I mention that you must put the listener first? Put them last as well. When you're done, test it out and try to understand what level of take-up there is in the information you are putting out there.

Finally, I'll leave you with the words of Harold Stolovitch.

Telling ain't training.