Practicing Law Librarianship: Podcasting, Vodcasting, and Law Libraries: How to Understand the Newest “IT” Technology and Use It In Your Library

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/lisa_smithbutler/3/
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How to understand the newest "V" technology and use it in your library

As we look back in time just a few years, we realize that technology is in constant flux. In a not too distant past eight-track technology was all the rage. Rotary dial phones were the standard in those days, and typewriters were the preferred method for creating documents. Soon walkmans and cassette players took over, but were then replaced by CD players, which in turn are now replaced by MP3 players.

While cassettes and CDs used to be tangible manifestations of music ownership, today audio files take us into a new frontier. These audio files have opened the door to podcasting and a new world of media-rich content.

In order to assess the importance of podcasting, first consider the word "podcast." Since this technological term is not yet available in traditional dictionaries, we must rely on its practical and executable definitions: in other words, what a podcast does or what its function is.

Demystifying the Terms
A podcast is the action of publishing audio files to the Internet, while allowing patrons the ability to download them. As a result, the patrons are able to enjoy audio on demand because they can have audio access at any time and at any place. The magic of this technology flows from the MPEG working group and its MP3 standard.

What is MP3? Is it a standard or a product? It is both. The MP3 format is the standard, and the MP3 file is the product. Sound files or music recordings stored in MP3 format (also known as MPEG-1 Audio Layer III) have become the most important avenues used to deliver high quality audio through the Internet. MPEG stands for Moving Picture Experts Group, a working group of the International Organization for Standardization/International Electrotechnical Commission (ISO/IEC) in charge of "the development of standards for coded representation of digital audio and video." The ISO/IEC is a center jointly operated to provide standardization information.

In recent years, blogs have shown us the power of RSS feeds and aggregators. Now, podcast aggregators, or "podcatchers," make available the content of RSS feeds to MP3 players. RSSRadio, Juice, Transist, and Apple’s iTunes, for example, serve as podcast aggregators.

MP3 is the common format used when referring to podcasting, although it is not the only one. The Advanced Audio Coding (AAC) standard seems to be opening up new possibilities as well. Also known as MPEG-4 Audio, AAC was also developed by an MPEG working group and is now being presented as a better quality coding standard for audio by Apple through its iTunes jukebox. For the patron, this means an improved listening experience.

What is MP4? MP4 is quite another level of technology. An MP4 file is based on the standard introduced by the MPEG-4 working group. MP4 files support audio and video. Now you have video on demand, or "vodcasting." To enjoy vodcasting, consider the Advanced Video Coding (AVC) format. Also known as MPEG-4 Part 10, AVC is designed to ease the delivery of quality video from various applications. Now that iPods have incorporated the ability to play video files, vodcasting is within reach.

The Journey to Podcasting
Recently the issue of podcasting cropped up in the Nova Southeastern University (NSU) Law Library and Technology Center. Since it involved audio streaming through the Internet, the NSU library director considered it necessary to find an explanation of how the process differed from the library's current online audio streaming, "Legal Replays," which was created in 1997.

Before deciding to experiment with this new medium, several questions were considered.

- Why should we use podcasting if RealPlayer still works for students?
- What should we podcast?
- How do we podcast?
- What additional resources are needed to podcast?
- How do we persuade faculty to participate?
- How should we design the Web page?
- How should we market podcasting to students?

At the NSU Shepard Broad Law Center, back in June of 1997, staff started recording some faculty classes and streamed this audio through the Internet, calling this feature "Legal Replays." Class sessions were recorded with RealPlayer, which allowed students to use their required laptops to listen to the audio.

During the years, staff updated the Web page on which "Legal Replays" were posted, trained some faculty to record and upload...
their own sessions, and debated whether to use video. Plans to use video were always scrapped because of network server space issues and download times.

When the issue of podcasting arose, Legal Replays was compared with the podcasting process to consider whether it would be beneficial to students. The librarians’ and IT staff’s investigation revealed that podcasting involved placing a file, either video or audio, onto the Internet while using an RSS feed. As long as a person had an RSS reader or news aggregator, he or she could subscribe to a particular podcast and would automatically receive any updated files created for the podcast. Practically speaking, this meant that students would automatically receive the next update/recording of the property class, for example, as soon as it was posted. With RealPlayer, students could listen to the class audio on their laptop in the library. With the MP3 format, students could download the class to their iPods and listen while commuting or jogging. The benefits became obvious, so the library director proceeded to the next question.

What Should We Podcast?
It was agreed that classes would be recorded for professors requesting recordings. The audio would then be posted on the Internet in both MP3 and RealPlayer formats, allowing students to use both their laptops and iPods. Every year, the NSU Law Center holds a symposium on various topics, such as law and medicine or the Caribbean law. Nationally known speakers are invited to present, which was another item with podcasting potential. Other guest visitors, providing they agreed to the recording, would be podcast as well.

Lastly, we concluded that professional lectures on bar subjects for third-year students, known as ALA Recordings, could also be podcast. The Shepard Broad Law Center creates and records lectures for seniors on a variety of bar exam topics, including “How to Draft Essays,” “Answering Multiple Choice Questions,” “Florida Constitutional Law,” “Florida Criminal Law,” and “Florida Wills.” These lectures are created and produced by law center faculty. (See Advanced Legal Analysis, Shepard Broad Law Center, available at www.nslaw.nova.edu/csp/ala/workshops.cfm.)

The next step required a determination as to how to podcast and what additional resources (equipment and personnel) were needed. According to Podcasting Tools (www.podcastings-tools.com), a microphone and recorder are all that one needs to get started. Once the audio recording is created, the file is then added to an RSS feed and finally submitted to a site that accepts podcast submissions. Consultation with the network administrator indicated that we had sufficient server space to handle podcasting.

However, it looked like everyone was podcasting, and the library director wanted to do something different. The associate director suggested vodcasting. After reviewing the network administrator, we learned that an additional server, plus software, was needed in order to prevent the vodcasts from overwhelming the network and absorbing too much server space. We needed to spend approximately $10,000 in order to be able to effectively vodcast without harming the rest of our network.

Working out the Details
As the issue was discussed among the library podcast committee members—the library director, associate director, Web developer, director of network services, and head of computer services—and with faculty, some items emerged. Some faculty didn’t want anyone other than students to have access to the audio files. The committee members also wondered if releases were needed from faculty and speakers.

As the committee members pondered these questions, they decided that locking the files down would defeat the purpose of making them readily available to the students. Faculty who wanted to record and limit access to the recordings was advised to use WebCT. Audio files were recorded and loaded onto our Web page in MP3 and RealPlayer formats and could be accessed by anyone.

Faculty had to request the service. Their e-mail requests, asking that the classes be recorded and uploaded to the Internet, served as the release. The committee concluded that a legal release was necessary for guest speakers and began creating one. Faculty was made aware of the new format via e-mail broadcasts, one-on-one discussions, and mention at a faculty meeting. Volunteers were solicited via e-mail and in face-to-face discussions. Several happily agreed to participate.

The Web developer then began designing the Web page, allowing students to access the recordings in either MP3 or RealPlayer formats. It was decided to

For Further Exploration

Advanced Audio Coding (AAC)
www.apple.com/quicktime/technologies/aac

Advanced Video Coding (AVC)

www.chiariglione.org/mpeg/standards/mpeg-4/mpeg-4.htm#4.4

CALI Classcaster Podcasting Project
www2.cali.org/index.php?Fuseaction=help.laq&topic=classcaster

Classcaster
www.classcaster.org

Classcaster
www.classcaster.org

ISO/IEC Information Centre
www standardsinfo.iso/isoiec/index.html

ISO/IEC Project
www.iso.org/sen/propservices/psopstds/mpeg.html

JSInc
http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net/index.php

Joomla
www.joomla.com

MPEG
www.chiariglione.org/mpeg

MPEG-4
www.apple.com/quicktime/technologies/mpc4

Overview of MPEG-4
www.itu.int/ITU-D/techt
dis/broadcasting/kiev/References/mpeg-4.html

Transisr
www.transisr.com

Wikipedia List of Podcatchers
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcatchers
experiment with video, planning the pursuit of vodcasting as well. Students were alerted to the new formats with broadcast e-mails as well as with library lunch and learn sessions, known as Glad You Asked. The library’s information and technology faculty instructional sessions, known as Faculty Informs, and its lunch and learn series for students also make excellent podcast/vodcast subjects.

How to Podcast
Podcasting’s simplistic and inexpensive approach to deliver rich media has increased its popularity in educational environments. The minimum requirements to create a podcast are a personal computer with a sound card, microphone, sound/video editing software, and an Internet connection with access to a Web site. Podcasting works in the same way, but requires a much faster personal computer and a digital video camera. Once you understand the basic structure for setting up a podcast, you can begin to develop the process to successfully implement your own podcasts.

The first tool required to begin your podcast session is an audio capture tool. The best way to accomplish this is to have a microphone connected to a computer. After the audio has been recorded, we need audio editing tools to edit and manipulate information before it is available to the public. There are various audio editing tools available for all computer platforms. Numerous shareware, freeware, or open source packages can do an excellent job for little or no cost.

Once you have created and manipulated the media, it must be posted on a Web server via File Transfer Protocol (FTP) or HTTP upload. Another tool required is an RSS news reader. This tool allows users to automatically download their desired podcasts. The RSS news reader is designed specifically to download podcasts to a designated folder on the subscriber’s computer. Two packages to look at are iPodder or iPodderX.

In addition to an RSS news reader, a user must also install a content management system (CMS). The CMS is used to manage podcasts. The software allows the user to sort and organize content into playlists, which can be scheduled to automatically synchronize with a media player when connected to a computer. The most popular CMS for podcasting is Apple’s iTunes, which allows users to manage their audio content on both Windows XP and Macintosh OS X computers.

Finally, a digital music player, or MP3 player, is required to play the media. MP3 players range from $15 to $150. The iPod, probably one of the most popular MP3 players, ranges from $99 to $499.

Podcasting and Vodcasting Infrastructure
Both podcasting and vodcasting represent challenges to a network’s infrastructure. The effects of these new technologies will be outlined for the following areas: storage needs, bandwidth, security, supporting hardware, and other requirements.

Bandwidth. Basic audio presentation is about 15MB per hour and takes about one to two minutes to download, depending on network traffic. An hour-long video is about 70MB and takes about 10 minutes to download.

Storage. A 15MB-per-hour audio file or a 70MB video requires a one terabyte storage device to house the media.

Supporting Hardware. Any computer with an Internet connection and the ability to run Windows XP, Apple OS X, or Linux has all the power, storage, sound input/output, and memory required to create, edit, package, and distribute podcasts.

Supporting Software. There are two types of software required—publishing and subscribing. Current publishing software needs both an audio capture application and an RSS editing package. Subscription software retrieves the specified content feeds and can place the content directly into the designated folder of a content management application like iTunes or Windows Media Player.

Other Requirements. A broadband Internet connection is highly recommended, due to the relatively large file sizes and the amount of information that must be transmitted.

Podcasting in Action
Today at NSU Law, podcasting is a reality, and the library is beginning to work with vodcasts. Across the nation, law schools have begun to utilize podcasts. The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI) Classcaster Podcasting Project has expanded the frontiers of the podcasting world in legal education. As explained by CALI, “the Legal Education Podcasting Project (hereafter LEPP) is a semester-long investigation into podcasting in legal education. CALI is providing stipends and digital recorders to law faculty for the spring 2006 semester so that they can either record their classroom lectures or record weekly summaries and post these on a blog where their students can access them. More than 50 faculty members have agreed to participate in the project.”

For example, Wayne State University Law School and Law Library participates in the CALI podcasting project, says Michael Sanson, electronic services and systems librarian. Diane Murphy, reference/Web services librarian at Southern Illinois University School of Law, also started to get involved in podcasting through CALI’s Podcasting Project.

Looking at the Classcaster Web page reveals an intense participation by many law schools. “Classcaster is a course blogging system that provides faculty, librarians, and staff of CALI member schools with a new way to interact with students and communities,” the site explains. “A Classcaster blog provides authors with tools for posting not only traditional blog articles, but also tools for podcasting and sharing any documents and/or files with students and communities.”

Other podcasting projects are just as exciting. For example, Rutgers University Law School Library’s Susan Lyons, documents/research librarian, and Dennis Kim-Prieto, reference librarian, explain that the library is doing “some limited podcasting of major lectures and programs” (http://law-library.rutgers.edu/feeds/podcast.php). James G. Milles, associate dean and director of the law library, associate professor of law at the University At Buffalo State University of New York Charles B. Sears Law Library, continues to share his famed weekly podcast project called “Check This Out!” (http://cto.libsyn.com).

Last but not least, the efforts at American University Washington College of Law (WCL) are impressive. Billie Jo Kaufman, associate dean for library information resources, and Korin Munsterman, director of office technology, explain that WCL has been podcasting events and activities, as well as classroom lectures. “The school has a respectable 4,917 regular subscribers and had 33,742 MP3 downloads from September to December,” Munsterman says. “This tool has allowed us to make all event content available to internal and external community members and has allowed students who miss a class or speak English as a second language to listen to class content multiple times or at a modulated speed.”

This list of podcasting activities is not exhaustive, but rather an example of the various activities occurring across the nation. If you find podcasting interesting, consider attending the AALL Computing Services Special Interest Section program on podcasting, E-3: “Invasion of the Podcast People: Podcasting for the Law Library,” which will be presented at the AALL Annual Meeting in St. Louis on July 10.

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