



Podcasting

VO: In the early days of radio, the quality of the sound was largely time dependent, place dependent, device dependent. But that's all changed. The iPod revolution has declared audio independence.

Susan: Hello and welcome to Tech Talk from the University of Minnesota, your source of information about the technology that surrounds us every day. I'm your host, Susan McKinnell. Today we are talking about one of the latest technologies to sweep the internet; podcasting. It's actually a convergence of technologies that makes it easier to distribute audio. Some of the terms you'll hear include: RSS feed, aggregator and sync. Our first guest today is Peter Weinhold. Peter is in charge of information systems for the Health Sciences Libraries of the University of Minnesota. He has more than 15 years of technology experience in multiple industries as well as state and local government, education and nonprofit development. It's great to have you here today, Peter.

Peter: Thanks.

Susan: Peter can you define podcasting for me?

Peter: Sure. Podcasting is essentially, really an extension of something that's brand new; it's called RSS. And what it does is it allows you to actually attach audio files and (eventually) video files to the RSS feed and so that people can actually download that content. And then one of the things that you can do, which is why it's called podcasting, is that you can sync it up with your iPod or other mp3 player.

Susan: Okay, let's go back a little bit. What does RSS stand for?

Peter: RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication.

Susan: That's not too technical is it?

Peter: No, it's not.

Susan: So RSS is a way to get it syndicated?

Peter: Correct. It allows you to actually go into websites and picking off the content that you'd like to do.

Susan: Like just downloading audio file which you can do in lots of different places.

Peter: Correct. What you can do is then copy and paste code into what's called aggregators and create lists of content that you can schedule for downloading and you can actually bring in all the content you want to your computer instead of going off to all the websites. So you can actually manage all the types of things that you want to read on a daily basis via this technology.

Susan: Okay, so I could look around for a podcast. I could find that piece of code and put it into an aggregator and then it's going to give me information on when there's a new podcast; a new piece of audio file for me to download.

Peter: That's right. If you go to your computer and you open up your podcast aggregator, your software, what it'll do generally, is go out and then find what you have listed as the things you really want to listen to or view and it will automatically download them, whatever is updated in that from the list that you have from the last time that you downloaded.

Susan: So, it sounds like a podcast, what people who are creating podcasts, it's not just one audio file that they're sending out. It's something that they may do on a regular basis or every so often they put up a new file and that's what my RSS feed is looking for is that or my aggregator is looking for the new file.

Peter: Right. That's correct.

Susan: Okay. So one of the reasons I might be interested in podcasting is because I don't have to go around to each website and check and see what's new.

Peter: That's correct.

Susan: Why else do people podcast? Are people looking for podcasts, using podcasts?

Peter: Well, actually there is a whole host of information that people are using RSS feeds to deliver all sorts of information. There is the entertainment and there is the casual browsing that people do. But then, in my field where we're supporting an academic health center here at the University, people are putting medical journals, medical pieces of information and putting that on a regular basis. And so it's easy to know what's brand new and what people are putting out there what people are publishing on a regular basis or a recurring basis. And so it's just a way of managing that information. If it needs to come on a recurring basis then it's a great way of creating a list and then checking it twice.

Susan: Mm. Hmm, absolutely.

Peter: So that's really why, that's one primary reason why people use that.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. And then you mentioned that the reason it is called podcasting is because of its association with the iPod.

Peter: That's correct.

Susan: That you can put it on your player and bring it around with you.

Peter: That's correct.

Susan: Okay, we have one, an iPod, here. This is just one of the kinds of iPods that you can get. It's just a little player that plays audio files. Do I have to have an iPod to listen to podcasts?

Peter: You do not. The iPod is the most really seamless way of and Apple's technology that they use which is iTunes is really the most seamless way to let's say download a podcast and get it into the iPod but if you're married to the Windows format it's a little bit more complicated but it's still eminently doable.

Susan: Okay. Now iTunes is a software that Apple has.

Peter: Correct.

Susan: iTunes is available on both Windows and Macintosh. Is that correct?

Peter: That's correct.

Susan: Okay. So you could have an iPod and use iTunes on your Windows machine.

Peter: That's correct.

Susan: But, if I don't have an iPod, if I want, I mean this little guy right here; what is this here?

Peter: That's a Sandisk mp3 player. It's one gig. I like that a little bit better for long travels because instead of having the rechargeable battery in it like the iPod, what it does is just have a single triple A battery.

Susan: You can see right here it takes a battery. A standard AAA battery which the iPod does not. And there are all sorts of mp3 players on the market.

Peter: That's correct.

Susan: And you can put podcasts on any of these.

Peter: That's correct and you cannot use iTunes with that particular one so there again you must use something like Windows Media Player to be able to take that content and sync it up with the mp3 player.

Susan: Okay. Now you say that iTunes is the most seamless way.

Peter: Correct.

Susan: iTunes is going to go on my iPod, but if I have an mp3 player I'd need to use Windows Media Player. Do I put the RSS feed information into the Windows Media Player?

Peter: What happens is that you usually need a third party piece of software, let's say like, iPodder or Doppler and what you do there is you will download the RSS feed, you will subscribe to the RSS feeds in that particular piece of software in that particular application and what'll happen is that you'll kind of configure Windows Media Player then to read in the directory where the podcasts are then they will pick that up. You can create a list within that Windows Media Player and then by means of that sync with your mp3 player.

Susan: Sounds like a couple more steps. Windows Media Player, of course, comes with Windows.

Peter: Correct.

Susan: But you said iPodder or Doppler, there are other ones out there as well, aren't there?

Peter: Yes.

Susan: If we're looking, in particular, for a podcast what would I be looking for?

Peter: You would be looking for a podcast aggregator.

Susan: Podcast aggregator. And iPodder and Doppler; are those free?

Peter: Yes, they are free. They are open source for the most part and they're this is really kind of the beginning of this. This is an emerging technology. In the next year or so it's really going to be exploding.

Susan: So, there may be many more podcasting aggregators out there and we should just look for and look for probably the one that's the best rated and so forth.

Peter: That's right.

Susan: Fabulous. So in any case, there are a few more steps if I want to use my mp3 player, but I certainly can. What if I don't have either of these? I hear that there are some great podcasts out there. I just want to listen to them. Is there some, I mean, can I listen to them on my computer?

Peter: Absolutely. The majority of podcasts, right now, at least in audio format are mp3 and with any it's like downloading any mp3 player or any mp3 file, rather, is that you can play it through your mp3 player if you have a media player like Windows Media Player or iTunes you can play it directly on your computer. You don't have to actually push it out to an mp3 mobile device like an mp3.

Susan: So if I want to get involved with this and listen to some of the content that's out there, it can go straight onto my computer and put it on a CD?

Peter: You can burn the content to a CD as long as its not necessarily copyright protected.

Susan: Ha! Absolutely. You always have to keep that in mind. But in any case there are lots of different ways to listen to this content. Why are people podcasting?

Peter: Well, I think it's the explosion of personal publication that's happening. I mean you see blogs, you see RSS feeds. The whole thing with think there's a revolution in how the internet has changed the way that people communicate with each other. And I think that the technology has afforded people to be able to essentially take their own subject matter and via technology post it up on a web site somewhere so that they can share it with other people.

Susan: Absolutely!

Peter: And it gives them a voice where other people necessarily wouldn't, you know, be terribly interested in it. But they can create their own communities that way. And I think in that sense it's very valuable. And it gives people who normally maybe wouldn't have that opportunity to go ahead and do that.

Susan: And you say a voice, and obviously with audio you really do think of voice. There is blogging out there which gives people another opportunity to communicate with people. I also want to get back to the idea of RSS feeds. RSS feeds are not just for podcasts, are they?

Peter: That's correct. RSS feeds are primarily text in nature. They refer to an article that's been posted on a web site for the most part. If you go to the New York Times and what not they have a whole different list of listing of different content that they have on their website then, that you can actually download. And kind of do more of a narrow cast for things that you're particularly interested in. As opposed to going through the whole website and finding those things. You can actually kind of go to that channel or that particular feed, schedule a download and then see on a daily basis or whatever schedule basis and find out what that's all about.

Susan: So with an RSS feed, rather than going to the New York Times website everyday, I could just be taking a look at it

Peter: It comes to you.

Susan: It comes to me, for that matter I could include the Daily Times or whatever I wanted and it would do the same thing.

Peter: That's right as long as they offer the service. Not all major websites offer that but it's growing exponentially as we speak.

Susan: But the difference with podcasting is, of course, it's audio.

Peter: That's right.

Susan: And that is happening, you said, with some various commercial ventures and you mentioned the medical field. What other folks are doing this?

Peter: I think every day people are doing it. I mean I think that you know, obviously, technology people are doing it. I think that a lot of people are just, depending on the subject matter, whether it be sports, entertainment, people see themselves as comedians.

Susan: They may or may not be.

Peter: That's right. It's up to us to judge, but they're still putting it out there and the technology, essentially, makes it very cheap and simple to use.

Susan: So that sounds like a lot of fun. Getting back to cheap and simple; now we know that the software to download to get the podcasts is free. What about podcasts themselves? Are people charging for these?

Peter: It depends on if it's a commercial venue or not. Generally, there is a lot of free content available. There are magazines that let's maybe failed as magazines but are trying different delivery methods in order to charge.

Susan: Because print is expensive. It's an expensive way to

Peter: Right. Or they can't get advertising and that sort of thing. And so they create a podcast and maybe charge you a subscription fee per month.

Susan: MM. Hmm.

Peter: And then within that per month you'll have either a monthly or a weekly download that's available to you. iTunes has new music Tuesdays that you don't have to pay for but it's an example of how they push their own content and advertise their own music service for that. And so you don't see that as much. A lot of the content that you see now out on the web is free but I think that as it grows you're going to see more people take advantage of the opportunity to maybe try a different delivery method.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. And you say that podcasting is growing. You mentioned that with the aggregators there are going to be more and more of those. What's going on? I mean how many podcasts are out there?

Peter: Well, there are a few thousand at least now. And I think there has been some new research that has just been produced in the past couple months that say really by the time in five or ten years it's really going to be a predominant technology. I think it's really starting to catch on. It's not only catching on in the commercial venture but I think it's...it seems like it's catching on with specialized delivery, like the medical journals that I talked about before. I think that people... it's a very inexpensive way of getting your message out so I think disk space is cheap the internet

Susan: We're going to be seeing more. More and more of it. Thank you so much, Peter.

Peter: Oh! You're welcome.

Susan: Great information today.

Peter: Thank you.

Susan: But how do I find and listen to podcasts or even make one of my own? Let's find out! Joining us today is Hope Johnson. Hope works for Academic and Distributed Computing Services here at the U. She teaches courses on Breeze, Web Design and development and Podcasting. Hope has a degree in Film Studies and has her own movie blog. It's great to have you here today, Hope.

Hope: Thank you, Susan.

Susan: So, Hope can we subscribe to some podcasts right now?

Hope: We sure can. We can start by using iTunes to subscribe to a couple of podcasts.

Susan: Great! We've got that right up here, don't we?

Hope: We do! So the nice thing about this version of iTunes is that it has a little podcast section to it over here on the left. You can see that there is already one podcast that we've subscribed to that is Creative Screenwriting magazine's podcast.

Susan: Okay.

Hope: So if we wanted to find another one. We could simply just go down to this podcast directory that's right here.

Susan: Now, you'd see this on both the Windows and the Macintosh version of iTunes.

Hope: Yep.

Susan: As long as it's a recent version.

Hope: Yep.

Susan: And iTunes is a free download too.

Hope: It is which is extra special. So should we just go right ahead and try to find one?

Susan: Yeah, let's see what's out there.

Hope: So, now basically, we're connecting to the iTunes or the iTunes music store and it's specifically looking for the podcasts that are available.

Susan: Okay. I didn't imagine it to be this colorful with all the podcasts available but I see that it's listing the top podcasts and

Hope: The top podcasts are listed over here on the right. There is also a search function. So, do you have a suggestion for something that you might be interested in? I mean, I have a preference being a movie fan, myself.

Susan: Well, let's look for some movie podcasts.

Hope: How about Ebert and Roper?

Susan: Sounds great.

Hope: You know, and here it is and it's listed, actually

Susan: It's number fourteen!

Hope: Fourteen.

Susan: On the list so.

Hope: Movies.com. Yeah. So actually to subscribe to it all we're going to do is click on it.

Susan: Sometimes it's best just to take a look around just to what's there.

Hope: Yes.

Susan: Now, it's listing four things here, does that mean that there are four podcasts from?

Hope: There are, as you can see there are four of them and each of them have different descriptions, so they're different movies that they are actually reviewing or talking about. There are four different shows that are available and to subscribe to them we just click on "subscribe."

Susan: Okay.

Hope: And it has to make sure that we really want to subscribe to this so you click subscribe.

Susan: Mm. Hmm.

Hope: and we will wait as it goes and it downloads the first episode. One of the really nice things about podcasts is that you can control how many of them you have stored on your computer.

Susan: Just like anything it's going to take up room on your hard drive. I suppose if you start subscribing to everything right and left it will fill things up pretty quick.

Hope: Yes. Definitely. So, this is downloading and I'll just click on this here and we'll see that the latest podcast is available for us to listen to.

Susan: It hasn't downloaded the other older ones, but we could easily download this as well.

Hope: Right, yes. And actually you can control how you're subscribed to different podcasts under the settings. So you can tell it to check for new episodes.

Susan: I see. So if it's looking every day and I presume my computer has to be on and connected to the internet but as long as it is on it's going to check and see what's available once a day.

Hope: Yep. And it also does a little bit of content management. So if you're lazy and you don't want to clean off your computer all of the time it will go in and it will delete some of the played files. So in this instance we've got it set to keep only the unplayed episodes.

Susan: so, once I listen to it it's going to go away.

Hope: Yep.

Susan: Don't need to worry about deleting it.

Hope: Yep.

Susan: That's fabulous.

Hope: I know. It really works so it's pretty cool. So we'll just leave the setting as they are.

Susan: Okay. And that was just listed under the settings here.

Hope: Mm. Hmm.

Susan: That's great! Now, you got this from the movie store of iTunes. We didn't pay anything for it.

Hope: Right.

Susan: There was a lot listed there. They have lots of podcasts available there. But are there podcasts that aren't on the movie store?

Hope: There are. So in order to get your podcast listed you have to submit it to iTunes. Other places might not list their podcasts with iTunes or iPodder which is another aggregator. So one thing we can do is go to sources of information that you like to check on and see if they have a podcast available. And you can actually manually subscribe to them.

Susan: Okay.

Hope: So that really means, you know, get the URL of the RSS feed of the podcast and then just add it to your podcast list here in iTunes.

Susan: Can we take a look at doing that?

Hope: Yep. So we kind of have one set up already.

Susan: Over at NPR; the books and NPR as they have a podcasting for this and this is just via a web browser so we're in Firefox right here. When we were looking for podcasts, we looked for podcast books or podcasts NPR.

Hope: Yep.

Susan: And what we're looking here for is... is this the RSS feed?

Hope: It is. So as you can see it's got the full RSS information.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. And that's a big old address.

Hope: Yeah, you're not going to want to try and memorize this and enter into

Susan: Or even write it down.

Hope: Yeah, no! So we're just going to do a little simple copy and paste. So we'll just do copy and we'll switch back on over to iTunes and if you have this version of iTunes under the advanced menu you can just click on to subscribe to podcasts.

Susan: Now if I were using something like iPodder or Doppler or some other aggregator this is what I would be doing. I wouldn't be looking at the music store. I would be getting the RSS feed.

Hope: Mm. Hmm. Yeah and copying it in there. Now we click on "okay." And it will happily go out to the internet and download the podcast.

Susan: It's that easy. So I have lots of different resources to look at.

Hope: Yeah.

Susan: The movie store is very slick and easy but there are lots of other options too. And I'm still subscribed to it just like I was the Ebert and Roper.

Hope: Yep. All of the settings are the same for each of the podcasts that you subscribe to.

Susan: Fabulous! What if...Oh! And it says that when it's played it's going to take it off, that's the default. Does it know when I put it on my iPod?

Hope: Well, you have to sync your iPod. So if you haven't done that it won't know that it's on your iPod.

Susan: Okay.

Hope: And if you listen to it on your iPod it won't know that you've listened to it in iTunes until the next time you sync your iPod.

Susan: Okay. But it is smart enough to talk back and forth between the iPod and the computer?

Hope: Yeah.

Susan: Fabulous. What if I want to make my own podcast?

Hope: Well, if you want to make your own podcast there are actually some simple steps and they really are simple because first of all, you just need some audio. So you need to create an audio file. You can do that with your own computer or you can use something really fancy, your own iPod if you want to.

Susan: Okay.

Hope: And this other neat little gizmo we have here.

Susan: We have this little guy here. This is so tiny. What is this?

Hope: It is a Griffon iTalk. So, basically it is a speaker and a microphone that you can attach to the iPod and the microphone to it will allow you to turn your iPod into a recorder.

Susan: So I just pop this little guy right in here

Hope: Yep.

Susan: And it's easy. Oh look at that. My iPod is on now.

Hope: Yep. It switches it right into record mode. So you can just start recording. If you were, maybe, teaching a class or you were giving a seminar or if you were just even wanting to podcast your daily thoughts about anything and you wanted to walk around you could clip this thing to your hip with the little clip. You can also just record with it attached.

Susan: I see there's another hook up here.

Hope: Or you could invest in a little lapel mic like the ones we're wearing right now with a stereo mini plug, with a little headphone shaped plug and you can plug it in there and walk around and record your stuff.

Susan: That's fabulous.

Hope: your daily musings.

Susan: Global recording, here. It's just so tiny. And so but what I'm doing here if I were using this I would get an audio file.

Hope: Right.

Susan: That doesn't make it a podcast though, does it?

Hope: No, it doesn't, actually. What makes it a podcast is the availability of it on the internet and also that it's tied to an RSS feed.

Susan: Okay.

Hope: So after you've created your file. Your audio file and most of them are mp3 format and you made it available on a web server. Most of them, you know, if you have a web server available to use you can upload that.

Susan: So if I have web space through my ISP or my school or something, I can upload this audio file just like I upload any other files.

Hope: Right.

Susan: But that again is just putting it up there on the web.

Hope: Yeah. So you make it available on the web and then you also create an RSS feed. There are templates available on the internet. The one that I created was actually just a little template that I got off of the internet, copied and pasted and customized it for my podcast that I have.

Susan: You have a podcast!

Hope: I do.

Susan: Sounds fun! So how did you find this RSS feed information?

Hope: Actually I did a search for "how to create a podcast." A Google search. Google; you can find everything, I think.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. So there is that much information out there just by putting in "how do I make a podcast?"

Hope: Yeah.

Susan: You're going to get the information back telling you step by step.

Hope: Yes. Yeah. There was actually a very simple tutorial that walked you through all the steps to customize the RSS feed for your podcast. How to put the dates on there so people would know which podcasts were the most current and

Susan: So, it sounds like there is a little bit of technical stuff and you need to be able to do a little bit of editing and so forth.

Hope: Right.

Susan: But it's not that bad.

Hope: No, actually, you know I may be a professional but you can do it at home.

Susan: That's good to hear because this stuff sounds like fun. Okay, now you mentioned, I just want to take it back a step a little bit, because it's a great gizmo, it's really fun for recording but you said I could record on my laptop too or my desktop.

Hope: yeah. You can, but again, you will need some sort of input device; a microphone.

Susan: Okay. That's really all that's required. Do I need any sound editing software?

Hope: You can. There are two different ways you can go about it. There is free software that's available; audacity is a popular application you can use (audacity.sourceforge.net) for audio, Quicktime pro has the option to record audio as well. So those are two options. The free one is always a fun one to try.

Susan: Absolutely. See if it's got enough features. If it doesn't then you can move on to the one that costs a little more.

Hope: Mm. Right.

Susan: Thank you so much for being here today, Hope.

Hope: You're welcome.

Susan: We've covered a lot today so in case you didn't catch it all the first time, here's a quick review for your files.

Susan VO: Peter Weinhold, information systems coordinator for the University of Minnesota's Health Science Library said podcasting is

Peter: An extension of something that is brand new, it's called RSS. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication. What it does is it allows you to attach audio files and eventually video files to the RSS feed and so that people can actually download that content and then one of the things you can do it and why it's called podcasting is that you can sync it up with your iPod or other mp3 player. RSS feeds are primarily text in nature. They refer to an article that's been posted on a website for the most part.

Susan VO: Peter said iTunes, Apples music management program, is the most seamless way to download podcasts but you don't have to have an iPod or even a Macintosh.

Peter: If you are married to the Windows format it's a little bit more complicated but it's still eminently doable. You must use something like Windows media player to be able to take that content and sync it up with the mp3 player. What happen is that you usually need a third party piece of software like, let's say, iPodder or Doppler, and then what you do there is you download the RSS feed subscribe to the RSS feed in that particular piece of software in that particular application and then what'll happen is you'll kind of configure Windows media player then to read in the directory where the podcasts are and it will pick that up. You can create a list in the media player and by means of that, then sync with your mp3 player.

Susan VO: Peter also said you can listen to podcasts on your computer.

Peter: The majority of podcasts, right now, at least in audio format are mp3 and with any, it's like downloading any mp3 player, or any mp3 file, rather, is that you can play it through your computer if you've got a media player, like Windows media player or iTunes. You can play it directly on your computer. You don't have to actually push it out to an mp3 mobile device.

Susan VO: Hope Johnson, technology specialist at the U, said that you can also use the software that downloads podcasts as a content management tool.

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Susan: Thanks for joining us. Remember you can always get video archives and transcripts of all of our shows at Techtalk.umn.edu. Be sure to tune into our next show. We'll be talking about portable computing. Devices are getting smaller and more powerful than ever before. That's next week on Tech Talk. Until then, I'm Susan McKinnell.

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