Podcasting in library environment

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Examines the uses of podcasting technology in libraries and identifies the various podcasting activities taking place in LIS sector. Reveals that podcasting is spreading rapidly in LIS field and that the technology can be used to promote library services and products, library instructions and contents to the users.

Web enabled technologies have broken physical barriers and are playing a key role in disseminating valuable information in different formats. Web 2.0 technologies comprise an array of web enabled services which are used for diverse purposes. Podcasting is one of the Web 2.0 applications, which enhances the new ways of information communication, especially content information. It is used in the web-based environment for broadcasting audio. A number of synonymous terms such as audiocasting, audioblogging and webcasting are used for podcasting. Vodcasting, on the other hand consists of video and broadcasting that turned as a popular medium due to video sharing sites like Google Video and YouTube. According to Wikipedia, “podcasting” term was used for the first time by Ben Hammersley, a journalist, in his article “The Guardian” on February 12, 2004.

Libraries and other information provider agencies are also incorporating podcasting technology into their services by creating, editing, linking and disseminating owns and other podcasts to their users. Podcasting offers new opportunities to deliver information contents more effectively and with flexibility to access them anywhere and at any time users want or have desire to listen.

Podcasting is often referred to as ‘push’ technology because information publishers/ agencies are pushing information contents directly to the users.

In 2007, Apple Inc. reported that the popularity of podcasts has exploded over the last two years probably due to widespread availability of broadband and increasing access to the internet at home, with more than 100000 podcasts listed on the iTunes Store as of August 2007.

Meaning of podcasting
A podcast is an audio file made available on internet. It is a combination of two words broadcasting (the term used for the transmission of television and radio) and iPod (a well known portable media MP3 player developed by Apple computer Inc.). In the podcasting technology, the audio is syndicated, through RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed that was adopted from blog community. Anyone can subscribe to RSS feed for any specific podcast that facilitates downloading new contents of the podcast automatically when a new podcast is produced.

The term podcasting leads people to think that an iPod is mandatory to download and to listen to podcasts. But podcasts can be downloaded and listened through any MP3 format supported media player or on personal computers and even can be burned on CDs/ DVDs directly and heard on CDs/DVDs players.

Review of literature
Most of the literature regarding podcasting in library field is on how to create podcast, history of podcast, overview of podcasting and tools required to develop as well as listen to podcasts. Mahjouri and Purnell provide essential steps to create podcasts for a library. Fetaji described the role of podcasting as to produce and distribute electronic content and enhance the communication level...
among various readers through a case study that was initiated in the South East European University. Some authors recommended inclusion of podcasting technology in libraries to enhance their services. For instance, Kraft urged to integrate podcasting technology into library collection and asserted the ways about how a library could find, organize, evaluate and incorporate the podcasts programme into their collection by setting an example of South Pointe Medical Library podcasts. Janes emphasized that podcasting needs to be adopted because it supports library goals. Murley describes podcasts as important for law librarians and discusses ways in which podcasting may be helpful to law librarians to deliver library services.

The use of podcasting technology is increasing and podcasts are being developed by various libraries for different purposes. Libraries and information centers are also distributing iPods to their users to intensify their podcasting services and resources.

Jowitt studied current levels of podcast usage and perceptions of library instructional podcasts by six sample podcasts that were made available via New Zealand’s UCOL (Universal College of Learning) website in MP3 format. Barnes provided a model for creating podcasts to promote academic library resources and services, especially emphasized on government documents collections by the Mississippi State University (MSU) Libraries’ project. Jowitt defined how podcasting technology could be used to provide instruction sessions by the librarian and for promotion of information communication. Worcester and Barker expressed that podcasting is a recent phenomenon on the internet that explores possibilities to act as alternative tool for academic and public libraries through a description of the University of Texas at Arlington Libraries’ experiences.

How podcasting works

A podcaster records and edits using suitable software and produces an audio file often in MP3 format that may contain lectures, interviews, instructions etc., and posts the final audio file on internet server. Thereafter, RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed is added in audio files through any RSS feed generator software like Feed Burner/ Feed for All etc., or with the help of any blog software. The audience of the podcast uses address of the RSS feed file to subscribe the podcast by using any podcast reader/ aggregator/ podcatcher software such as iTunes, Jiuce, iPodder etc. Once subscription for podcast is setup, the podcatcher software will automatically check the new MP3 files recently added within subscription. If there is any update found, podcast reader starts to begin downloading these new files and other accompanying files also. The audience of podcast has option to synchronize and download podcasts with other multimedia devices such as a mobile, MP3 player and iPod etc., to use them any where during their leisure time.

Objectives of the study

- To examine the use of podcasting technology in libraries;

Fig.1— Working of podcasts (Adapted from a model of podcast publication and subscription presented by Margaret Maag)
To identify the podcasting activities taking place in online resources in library and information science area; and

To review some prominent podcasting websites available in LIS sector.

Methodology

An extensive search was conducted through three search engines, viz., Google, Yahoo and MSN using a combination of different search terms such as library podcast, library podcast blog, library podcast database, and library podcast journal. A few resultant podcasts relevant to LIS field were retrieved through above search engines, Apart from this, podcast directories like Podcastalley, Podcastdirectory and several online resources such as databases, journals, websites, and blogs etc., were also searched to access podcasts in library and information science field. The identified podcasts were thoroughly examined to know the possible use in libraries and podcasting activities governed through various online resources. Finally, a few selected podcasts in each category of online resources is reviewed.

Use of podcasting in libraries

Presently, many libraries and information centers are using podcasting technology for various purposes. Roberts pointed out the uses of podcast for information literacy. Alden Library podcast on the Ohio University libraries web site gives information regarding entire library in 15.3 MB (about fifteen minute audio) with necessary direction floor by floor. Lunar and Planetary Institute Library – What’s New Podcast highlights new additions to the library collections, tips on using library services and resources for information about library tour and instructions. Georgia Perimeter College Library Listen Up! produces podcasts on monthly basis since 2005 that focuses on library related news, events and promotion of library services. OPAL podcasts deal with library staff development including training sessions for conferences, tutorials and training sessions. South Huntington Public Library has published various audio books. “Talking with Talis” website is imparting information in podcast format about conversations held among different technical leaders on the latest technology issues like web 2.0, library 2.0 and semantic web for lectures, interviews and resource guides. Lib Vide website provides news in podcasts format about what is happening in the library and literary world for professional development and learning tool.

However, use of podcasting technology can vary from library to library where each library develops podcasts according to their information needs or focusing an area of the services. By using podcasting technology in library services, users have another option to get readymade information in portable format that promotes mobile learning environment.
In the following sections, a few selected podcasting sources relevant to LIS practitioners and professionals are discussed.

Podcasting website

There are many websites that contain podcasts on various subjects. For example, http://librarygang.talis.com/ (Fig. 2) provides a podcast named as “The Library 2.0 gang” on library and information science which is a monthly roundtable podcast which has been joined by several contributors (professionals) from libraries worldwide to discuss the technological issues/topics of the day that influence them. Each month, the library 2.0 gang is joined by a guest for a discussion on a topic of interest. It is produced by Talis and syndicated by Library Technology Guides. Each entry has the title, host name, date and time of entry posting, time duration of podcast and details regarding podcast but does not mention the length of the particular podcast. Its first entries were made on March 11, 2008.

Library website with podcasts

The Mississippi State University (MSU) during the Fall (August) 2006 semester, began a project to develop podcasts that promote the Library’s numerous resources and programs to the university’s students, faculty and staff. Through this initiative, the library’s various departments submit podcast scripts on their materials and services to the Podcasting Committee, who then record and edit the scripts before posting them on the Library’s website at http://library.msstate.edu/podcast.html (Fig. 3). Additionally, the Committee creates a podcast named as “This Week @ Your Library,” which contains information on upcoming events taking place throughout the MSU Libraries. Another podcast entitled as “Didgiknow” imparts information regarding services offered by MSU libraries. Beside this, several episodes on various topics like College of Veterinary Medicine Branch Library, survival skills, MSU faculty authors podcast, access services and Government documents, microforms, and current journals department are also listed in the form of podcasts in (.mp3) and (.m4a) formats. The government documents and microforms (GD/MF) department views the podcasting initiative as an opportunity to bring the library’s United States Government and United Nations collections directly to patrons. The “Podcasts @ Your Library” web page is the gateway to the MSU Libraries’ podcasts. This web page provides a brief description of what podcasts are, as well as instructions on how to access and play them on either a computer or MP3 player, and links to both RSS feeds and podcast files from individual library departments, but, the above web page do not provide any information regarding posting date, time duration, length/size, and transcript of the any podcast.
Database with podcast

Emerald, a well known database/publisher in management and other fields, offers its management contents in podcasts form which are drawn from review of its database namely "Emerald Management Review" that is updated on monthly basis with independent reviews of articles in the worlds top management publications. The podcasts are available at http://info.emeraldinsight.com/learning/podcasts/index.htm (Fig. 4) in MP3 format. The podcasts can be browsed subject-wise that include accounting and finance, human resource management, marketing and logistics, information management and technology, quality, operations and production management. Each of its podcasts provide brief summary, facility to view transcript and a image but does not contain the length, time duration and date of posting. A brief guideline regarding downloading and playing podcasts is also given.
Journal related podcast

First Monday podcast, at http://www.firstmonday-podcast.org/ (Fig. 5), is a monthly online audio programme featuring stories on all aspects of the internet, investigating the recent trends, standards, technical issues, educational uses, political and social implication of the internet. The periodicity of the First Monday podcast is similar to its first peer review journal First Monday focusing on novel ideas of the history and current use and future of the Internet. First Monday podcasts lead users behind the scenes to meet the people, targeting students, educators, researchers, and professionals in the field of information technology, library science, computer science, communication and any users who are associated with political, legal and educational issues attached with the internet. The aim of the First Monday podcasts is to provide reliable, credible review of technology and information science podcasts based on a set of criteria suitable for unique attributes of online audio media that are adopted from a research article published in the journal Libri in December, 2007 named as “Developing criteria for podcasts" written by Joy Austria and a set of criteria used by “Edgy review from that podcast show”.

Its review criteria contains three main parameters viz. (1) Content, (2) Presentation, (3) Technical aspects. Each main parameter also consists of many specific sub parameters and each sub-parameter comprises several questions related to assess quality of technology and information science podcasts.

First Monday podcasts contain title, brief summary, month and year of the each podcast available in MP3 format, describing length and time duration along with its related transcript view. Its extra features lead users to its concerned references from where podcasts are selected. The archives of past podcasts are also available. First Monday’s podcasting began in August 2007.

LIS podcast on blog

The blog OPAL (Online Programming for All Libraries-all Users) available at http://opalpodcast.blogspot.com/ (Fig. 6) imparts information such as interviews, book discussions, current happening/events, library training, memoir writing workshops, and virtual tours of special digital library collections in the field of library and information science. OPAL was founded in 2003 by the Alliance Library System, the Mid-Illinois Talking Centre, and the Illinois State Library Talking Book and Braille Service and administered by TAP information services. It contains various podcasts with brief summary, length of podcast, time duration, recording date, labels and has facility to post the reaction regarding any podcast of any user in the form of comments. OPAL also comprises related link, previous posts and archives since March
2005. The frequency of OPAL podcast is irregular and a huge gap was found among the entries, for example, the last three entries were posted on August 20, 2008, January 23, 2009 and January 30, 2009.

Podcasting for education and training

Some schools of library and information science are also involved in podcasting. They are generating various podcasts on library and information science subject. For example, http://sirls.arizona.edu/recordings (Fig. 7), the School of Information Resources & Library Science at the University of Arizona is a pioneer school in distance education since 1985 offering various courses in library and information science including master’s level for the library and information professions focusing on services and technologies for the creation, organization, management, access and use of knowledge and information resources in libraries and other information settings and environments. The School of Information Resources & Library Science (SIRLS) podcast page offers podcast on educational events, lectures of guest speakers and other kinds of live presentations combined with in audio, video and supplementary presentation material, for the use of students, faculty, alumni, staff and others in the SIRLS community. Began in March 2006, the site provides guidelines and software required to play and download each podcast. It depicts the abstract, date and time of posting, title, and producer name of every podcast but does not denote length, time duration and format of the podcast in each entry. Apart from this, navigation, calendar and events, guided exportation to browse or search podcasts by audience, people, course, task, topic and guided keyword and access to past podcast archives of SIRLS facilities are also available. The currency of podcast is monthly but sometimes two podcasts are also posted in a month and all podcasts are categorized year-wise.

Advantages of podcasting

The following are the advantages to libraries as well as users:-

1. On demand availability (anywhere and anytime) of information is the key feature of podcasting technology.
2. It could be an interactive and learning tool especially for distant users.
3. Cost effective as this technology can be managed with minimal hardware and software.
4. Its portability attribute enables users to carry and access without much peripherals and promotes mobile learning environments.
5. The developing staff and users of podcasts can use any operating system to create and listen to podcasts as they are compatible with almost all operating systems (Windows/ Mac/ Linux).
6. Repeated listening flexibility enables users to get better understanding and control on the information.
Conclusion
Podcasting is spreading rapidly in every field. Libraries and information centers and other information publishers/agencies are including this technology into their products and services to provide exact information in new and mobile format. In India, many online resources such as websites, journal and blog etc., are available on internet in library and information science domain but none of the library/information agency/resource is found engaged with podcasting activities. It is suggested that information agencies should make their podcasts attractive and more informative so as to build a remarkable product for users that enables them to approach information contents to listen anywhere at any convenient time to those they have subscribed via RSS feed and set podcasts as a reliable source of information for various purposes which could helpful in saving users’ valuable time.

References