

Podcasting and the Museum Experience

Introduction

While in only its second year of existence, podcasting has become the biggest thing to hit the internet since blogging. Although undoubtedly popular, the question remains: what does the podcasting phenomenon have to offer museums?

What is podcasting?

Podcasts are audio files stored online in an MP3 file format that can be downloaded and played on a computer or a portable music device. They are created by recording audio via microphone on a personal computer. This makes them very inexpensive to create: all that is needed is a computer, free software that allows you to record your voice and a microphone. The audio files are saved in MP3 format, and then uploaded to your own Web site, or to one of many sites that hosts and indexes podcasts. When a user wants a podcast, they download it to their personal computer, and listen at their convenience. Many listen to these files on a portable music device such as an iPod.

Although precise data are not available on the podcasting audience in Canada, data collected in the United States suggests that demand for podcasting is about to skyrocket. A recent report by researchers at The Diffusion Group revealed that the US podcast audience will climb from 840 000 in 2004 to 56 million by 2010. The same report predicted that over this same period of time, three-quarters of all people who own portable digital music players will listen to podcasts, up from less than 15 per cent last year.

What does all of this mean for museums?

Podcasting represents an inexpensive and increasingly popular means to connect with physical visitors and potential visitors. There are many ways that museums could use podcasts to enhance the experience of their visitors, or to attract new visitors, such as:

- Create recorded tours of collections;
- Create detailed audio tours of pieces in different collections that are linked by themes;
- Create audio content to market collections and pieces of collections to potential visitors;
- Invite visitors to create their own audio commentaries on collections or specific pieces that can then be shared with other visitors.

When creating a podcast, it is important to remember several things:

- Decide upon exactly how you will want to use your podcast. A podcast that is intended to attract visitors will be much different than one that is meant to be used as an audio tour.
- Podcasts that are designed to attract visitors to your institution should be short and describe highlights of your institutions' collection.
- Podcasts that are intended to accompany visitors as they tour collections should allow gaps in narration where users can pause the

recording and take additional time to view a particular part of a collection.

- Consider approaching a local music organization for background music. Licensing of music for a podcast is an issue, so be sure that you have written permission to use any such material.

Podcasting represents an opportunity to provide content that is accessible online and can be brought to the museum by visitors who own portable music devices. Some institutions, such as the [Museum of Modern Art](#), are already [posting podcasts of objects in their collection](#) on their web site. As the popularity of podcasting grows, this is a trend that will undoubtedly continue.

Additional Resources:

[Podcasting History and Information Wikipedia](#)

[Podcasting for beginners](#)

[How to create a podcast](#)