

# Podcasting

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Podcasting is powerful technology involving the selective subscription of media content which is delivered over the Internet. Podcasting is an amalgam of two words, 'iPod' and 'broadcasting' and represents a method of publishing online content such as audio, video, images, or text files, and allows users to receive the content in an automated fashion. This last feature distinguishes podcasting from the traditional method of acquiring online information. The traditional method requires users to locate the desired online information and 'pull' it to their computer every time. The newer method only requires users to seek out the information, in the form of a podcast, one time only, where a user can subscribe to an RSS feed. An RSS expansion feed is the heart of every podcast, making possible the automatic syndication and aggregation of new media content; any future additions to the podcast or 'episodes' will be 'pushed' to the user's computer. This method is similar to subscribing to journals, magazines, or newspapers in that the subscriber automatically receives materials. Subscribing to a podcast is typically free (the term "subscription" refers to signing up for new episodes) and no payment is required. An individual subscribes to content that can be viewed on a computer or mobile device.

Depending on the type of podcast, users can view the content on either a computer or audio mp3 player/or video-enabled iPod unit. Types of podcasts include:

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- Audio podcast**—music, lectures, news broadcast
- Enhanced podcast**—synchronizing images (PowerPoint/Keynote slide presentations with audio files, only available with Macs)
- Video podcast or vodcast**—video clips formatted to play on computers or vide-enabled iPods or MP4 players
- An attachment**—class notes, word processing documents, PDFs, spreadsheets and photos

## **Advantages of Podcasting in Teaching and Learning**

Supporters of podcasting see a number of advantages in this relatively new teaching technology.

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- Some educators promote podcasting on the basis of the power of the spoken word, which can appeal to auditory learners.
- Podcasts also are promoted on the basis of offering anytime/anyplace learning, also referred to as mobile or mLearning and personal on-demand instruction. Using the free podcatching software 'iTunes', students can view podcast episodes multiple times for review on their computer or download them to portable media players.
- When effectively implemented, podcasts can lead to a deeper understanding of course content by providing students opportunities to review material.

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*...NIU faculty and staff using Blackboard...are now able to take prepared content and create a course Podcast for each of their classes using Blackboard.*

- Podcasting requires little investment of expensive hardware and software. Typically, all that is necessary to develop a podcast is access to the Internet, a computer and podcasting software.
- Podcasts require considerably less bandwidth than standard videos.

### **Drawbacks of Podcasting in Teaching and Learning**

- Critics of podcasting charge that this form of instruction is not the same as actively engaging students with material in class, where learning occurs through a process of interacting by critical questioning.
- By making lectures and class notes available for download, students will be less likely to attend class sessions. Advocates respond by noting that pedagogically, podcasts should be integrated into the existing curriculum and used as supplemental rather than as stand-alone teaching units. Podcast material could be preparatory work for class sessions such as having students view video clips, listen to music pieces, or read in-class assignments, saving more time for face-to-face instruction.
- Faculty concerned about students missing classes might choose to implement a class attendance policy. Students could still benefit from viewing notes as well as listening to lectures following class.
- A major faculty concern of implementing podcasting is the level of commitment and support provided by one's institution. NIU's Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center is at the forefront in podcasting for education and offers workshops on podcasting and related technologies such as RSS Feeds and Podcasting in Blackboard. The Center staff also can consult with faculty and teaching staff on effective ways they can be successfully used for teaching and learning.

### **Using Podcasts in Blackboard**

In conjunction with the upgrade of Blackboard from version 8.3 to 9.1, NIU has installed a building block to Blackboard that affords the hosting and management of podcasts in Blackboard. As a result, NIU faculty and staff using the Blackboard course management system are now able to take prepared content and create a course Podcast for each of their classes using Blackboard. Visit the FacDev Web site for further information on podcasting in Blackboard at

<http://www.facdev.niu.edu/blackboard/resources/podcasting.shtml>

### **Summary**

Podcasting can be an effective new way of delivering information in today's media-rich, on-the-go teaching and learning environments. With careful planning and development, podcasts can provide another method of information delivery for online and blended/hybrid courses in any academic discipline.