Enhancing student revision with podcasting

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Carsten wanted to experiment with a different methodology to: engage students with individual revision planning; and to personalise the revision process

The methodology used to create a Podcast is presented in this case study. Carsten has provided ideas and suggestions for other colleagues who would like to experiment, in a similar fashion.

A total of 71% studying Carsten's computer security module reviewed the Podcast.

Introduction

Podcasting is a method lecturers can use to deliver advice verbally to students. In a simplified fashion podcasting involves recording an individuals voice as an audio track. As a result either a single MP3 file or a series of short files can be recorded. Uploading the results to BREO enables students to download the information "at will".

Creating and Producing a podcast

To create a podcast for his student group, Carsten used a freely available piece of software called Audacity.

Rationale and content of the podcast

The aim of this particular podcast was to support students revision prior to a forthcoming examination. Carsten covered a range of subjects during his 7 minute talk:

1. a brief introduction
2. reminder about the aspects of a recently completed assignment
3. key course topics
4. the examination - a brief overview
5. discussion about the various sections to be expected
6. types of question that will be asked during the examination
7. example questions from previous examinations
8. reference back to the types of question that could be asked
9. a reminder to review notes on BREO
10. summary and close

Student uptake of the podcast

One of the key outcomes for the experiment was the students utilisation of the resulting podcast. Using the statistics tracking option within BREO an analysis was performed to determine student interaction. When placed onto BREO students where able to review the podcast at any point.
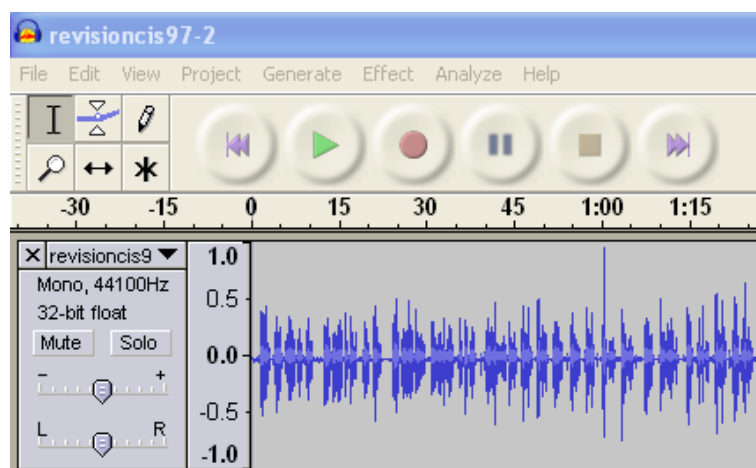

Figure 1: an example of a completed podcast, post recording. The sample shown is ready for export.
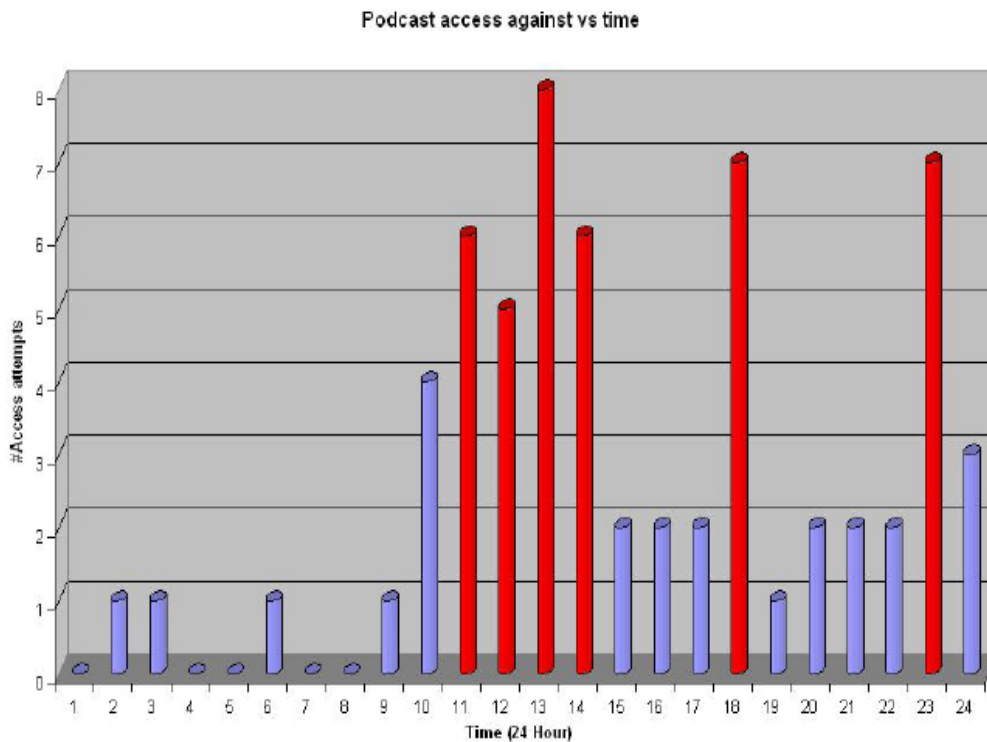
Podcast access against vs time

Figure 2: a summary of the times students accessed the podcast

Several students from the group accessed the file at times way outside of normal working hours.

When did the students access the materials?

The chart, on the next page, demonstrates that most of the activity occurred during normal business hours of the university. Two interesting peaks occur later that afternoon. Of particular interest is: 5pm; and 10pm. This demonstrates that students will take opportunities to study outside of normal class times.

Reflection on work already produced

Carsten felt the podcast was very easy to create. Something that colleagues should be aware of is disturbances. It's very easy to receive phone calls or knocks on the door. Therefore finding a quiet personal space would help make the process easier. Listening to your own voice does appear unusual. This is an initial barrier to overcome.

Further work to be completed

Using the same technique, developing a method of pre-recording lecture materials. Students would be able to play these after attending a lecture.

Suggestions for other colleagues wanting to try a similar approach

From a lecturers perspective Carsten felt it was a really useful way to "Reach and remind students about topics outside of the lecture hall". Further to this he suggested that it would be an excellent technique for other lecturers to try. A quiet and acoustically suitable area is available at Park Square. This has equipment specifically designed for recording.

Conclusion

The students had downloaded the podcast; further evaluation is required to determine the nature of usage. This suggests a course of further study would be applicable. Similar work has been carried out in other institutions; our university is slightly more unique in its student demographic.

Selecting the correct equipment

Quality is a big issue with podcasts; it is very easy to collect background audio. Utilising a midrange headset (Plantronics), background noise can be kept to a minimum. With only the speakers voice apparent. Carsten used headphones of this type for his podcast. It is worth listening closely to the recording to understand this concept more proficiently.

Support

The Learning Technology team would like to openly invite all interested colleagues to contact us to develop this technology further. We are able to offer equipment and short training sessions to enable an effective solution improving the curriculum. Please contact us directly to arrange an install of Audacity.

Internet links for software

Audacity is available from:

http://audacity.sourceforge.net/

Exporting MP3 files from Audacity require the LAME MP3 Encoder:

http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~raa110/audacity/lame.html

Further instructions

Please contact David Pike to arrange access to PODCAST101 the Learning Technologies website that deals with the various aspects of podcasting. Carsten's example is also available for download.

If you are considering:

- a larger scale project
- creating a series of professional style recordings
- developing e-Learning materials

All of these services are available via the Learning Technologies team. Please contact Richard Allen for more information:

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