

# GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

## Involving People

### Podcasting

Recording audio files and putting them online is called Podcasting. Video files can also be put online.

Many organisations now record their lectures and make them available as podcasts enabling those unable to attend the lectures the opportunity of listening to the files online or downloading the files to their computer or iPod or similar device to listen to later. Lectures presented at the RHSV can be listened to as podcasts at <http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/podcast.htm>.

Increasingly organisations are also providing audio tours that can be downloaded and listened to while the user undertakes a heritage walk visiting the sites described in the audio tour. Examples of podcast walks can be located on the RHSV podcast page listed above. Other examples are St Kilda audio walk – From *rags to riches and back again* – <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/heritage/projects-and-programs/multimedia> and *iwalk City of Perth audio trails* – <http://www.cityofperth.wa.gov.au/web/Visiting/Activities/Audio-Trails/>. These audio tours can also be listened to as podcasts providing information about a place if the user does not want to go on the actual walk.

Audio tours are also often provided to provide background information for people viewing exhibitions or visiting museums, art galleries or some tourist attractions.

The blog, *Information technology and local history*, – <http://itlochist.blogspot.com/search/label/Podcasting> – provides information relating to the podcasting projects undertaken at the RHSV. The blog posts describe what we did as we learned to record, edit and publish audio files online.

### Equipment

Digital recorders are readily available and not expensive to purchase.

- Make sure that the recorder is easy to use – the buttons on some players are small and not always easy to distinguish.
- Check how the data is transferred to the computer – some have a USB attachment to plug directly to the computer. Some have a cable with a USB attachment.
- Check the size of the file that the recorder will record and the storage on the recorder.
- What batteries are required to operate the recorder?

- Separate microphones, particularly a lapel microphone and or a microphone on a stand, may be needed. There are many different types of microphones. Ensure that the microphone is suitable for recording spoken words.

Lectures can be recorded from a fixed microphone with a lead plugged directly to a computer and recorded directly into an audio recording and editing program. This can work well providing that the speaker stays in one place and does not wander off to point to something on a screen. If an amplified microphone is used at a talk it may be possible to record directly from the amplifier to the computer (if the amplifier has the facility to do this).

### **Editing audio files**

Basic editing of audio files follows the same principles as editing a word document but instead of selecting a word or a section of text you select a section of the audio file (a series of wavy lines representing sounds) and then cut, copy, paste, duplicate, delete etc.

When editing you listen to the sound and watch the lines, stop the program where an edit is required, edit the program and move on. Sections of the file can be removed completely or moved to another location in the file or into a separate file. Where there is an unwanted pause between sections of the recording - usually indicated by a straight line, part or all of the pause can be removed

A program often used for editing audio files is *Audacity*, an open source, free audio editing and recording program available from SourceForge – <http://sourceforge.net/projects/audacity/>.

When files are edited in *Audacity* they are saved as Audacity Project Files (aup) files. Podcast files are usually MP3 files. In order to save Audacity files as MP3 the LAME MP3 encoder needs to be downloaded from the SourceForge site - <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/help/faq?s=install&item=lame-mp3>.

Large files take a long time to download and can pose a problem for those without a broadband Internet connection. Another program, *MP3Tweak* – <http://mp3tweak.com/> – can be used for compressing audio files. This is a shareware program.

### **Putting audio files online**

Audio files are saved as MP3 files and then sent to the server hosting the audio file using ftp (file transfer protocol). The size of the audio file will depend on the amount of time it runs for and whether the file has been compressed. A thirty minute spoken word podcast could be approximately 5.3 MB. How many podcasts you can have on your website at a time will depend on the amount of space allotted to your website on a server.

On the Internet there are a number of sites for hosting audio files. Some sites are primarily for storing and publicising music though they may also host podcasts. Many of the sites are 'free' but may contain advertisements, band width restrictions etc.

However they may be suitable if you want to publish a number of podcasts and have limited storage on your website.

Search Google for the term – Podcast hosting

Examples include:

- How to choose a podcast host - <http://labnol.blogspot.com/2006/08/how-to-choose-podcast-host-compare.html>
- How to Podcast – Podcast hosting – <http://www.how-to-podcast-tutorial.com/21-podcast-hosting.htm>
- Our media – a non profit community site allowing free storage of media files – <http://www.ourmedia.org/>
- Lybsyn – Liberated Syndication – [monthly charge] <http://www.libsyn.com/>

Wherever the podcast is hosted you need to be able to link the podcast to a page on your website where information about the podcast is stored.

Podcasts can be downloaded from the Internet and saved to a computer or media player by clicking a link and downloading the file. Many websites with podcasts also allow the user to listen to the podcast online via an inbuilt media player. The RHSV podcast pages provide examples of both of these functions – <http://www.historyvictoria.org.au/podcast.htm>.

When setting up information about the podcasts on the website it is important to remember that browsers do not obey the same rules. Code that works with Internet Explorer does not necessarily work in Mozilla Firefox. This is particularly the case if you want the users to be able to listen to the tape from the webpage. It is necessary to include two sets of code for this action – one for Internet Explorer and one for Mozilla Firefox.

It is useful to include a page providing information about how to listen to and / or download the audio files to help users who have not previously used audio files online.

## **RSS**

The other page that had to be created was the XML page containing the RSS feed information. The information recorded in this page allows podcasts to be accessed automatically when someone subscribes to the RSS feed.

There are strict rules to follow when setting up the XML. When the page is saved and then opened any errors are noted and the text on the page will not be displayed. Particular care has to be made that there is no white space - empty lines - in the code and that characters, such as ampersands, need to be coded - eg. instead of the symbol (&), the symbol (&) followed by the combination letters (amp) and a (;) is used (no brackets of course in the actual code).

There are programs that will write RSS feeds. Sites are also available for validating RSS feeds. Search Google for – RSS validation – or – RSS code editor – to locate links to websites including:

- Feed For All - <http://www.feedforall.com/> - program for creating and editing RSS code [not free]
- Feed Validator – <http://feedvalidator.org/>

The RSS coding chosen for the RHSV podcast project is the coding used by iTunes. Details of requirements can be found on the iTunes Specifications page – <http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/specs.html>.

### **Copyright consent forms**

Podcasts for historical societies will often be audio files of lectures. Speakers at meetings should complete a consent form for recording and publishing the audio file online and using the content of the talk or sections of the talk in any other media. If questions from the audience are included in the podcast those asking questions should also complete consent forms.

### **Podcast Walks**

Preparing a self guided walk as a podcast has a number of similarities to preparing a paper based self guided walk.

All projects require a great deal of time in planning and research. Extensive research from a variety of resources is required in order to compile any self guided walk.

After collecting information about possible buildings and sites of interest to include in the walk, a draft map should be prepared. Time should be spent revising both the walk information and the route the walk is to take before making the first draft recording.

Once the first recording is made the walk needs to be tested, preferably by independent people not initially involved in the project. In any project - article or book, exhibition, website etc, the author / designer can become too close to the work so it is useful to have the work reviewed by another person providing another perspective to ensure that nothing has been omitted or might be clearer if expressed in a different way. The text for the walk may need to be revised and rerecorded and retested a number of times

A sound, a chime for example, should be added to the audio file to indicate the end of each section so that a person using the podcast on a walk can pause the digital player until arriving at the next place described in the recording.

A few bars of music can introduce the heritage walk podcast. A number of sites on the Internet make music freely available.

Other resources to go with the podcast might include:

- A page on the website prepared for the podcast walks
- A slideshow of buildings and sites described
- A map of the route – Google Maps can be used to create the map
- A list of websites relating to sites on the walk