Podcasts

In Chapter 7, you learned about webinars and their impact in delivering content while fostering engagement within an online learning environment. Webinars are an effective tool in online learning to create a personalized connection between educators and learners similar to what is available in traditional learning. With many free and paid options available for computers and mobile devices, webinars are within reach of anyone who desires to use them.

Learner engagement is a critical component to the online learning experience. No two learners learn the same. With many different and affordable content options available today than in the past, educators have more tools at their disposal to help with engagement. With more learners utilizing mobile and wearable devices than ever before, educators need more flexible solutions. One of those solutions is podcasts.

Podcast Basics

Podcasts have been around for a long time. According to howstuffworks.com, in 2004, podcasts were originally created by former MTV video jockey, Adam Curry, and software developer, Dave Winer, after Curry wrote a program called iPodder to download Internet radio broadcasts to his iPod. Other developers enhanced his code and podcasting as we know it skyrocketed.

1https://computer.howstuffworks.com/internet/basics/podcasting.htm#pt1
Based on its name, many people incorrectly associated podcasts only with Apple’s iPod devices. However, most people commonly use many different mobile devices to listen to podcasts because they are portable and can be listened to on the go. For example, Apple’s Podcasts app can be used to listen to podcasts on iOS devices (Figure 8-1). Previously on iOS devices, podcasts were included within the iTunes app. On Android devices, podcasts are available from the Google Podcasts app (Figure 8-2).

**Figure 8-1.** Apple’s Podcasts app available on iOS devices
Other podcast apps available on both iOS and Android devices include

- Pandora
- Spotify
- Amazon Music
- Stitcher
- Deezer
- TuneIn

Podcasts are a series of audio files called episodes with content tailored to a podcast’s theme. The files are available on demand from podcast directories online or from any mobile device. Most podcast episode lengths range from 30 minutes to 1 hour. Typically, a podcast format follows that of a radio talk show where a host conducts an entire episode or invites guests. Every podcast has a file associated with it called really simple syndication (RSS). The RSS feed provides podcast information to programs called RSS readers along with

Figure 8-2. Google Podcasts app available in Google Play Store for Android devices to locate and listen to podcasts
podcast directories so that potential subscribers can discover and listen to podcasts. Podcasthosting.org reported that as of July 2020, there are over 1,000,000 podcasts available with over 29 million episodes. Some popular education podcasts today include:

- The Google Teacher Tribe
- The Book Love Foundation
- Flipped Learning Worldwide
- House of #EdTech
- The 10 Minute Teacher

Podcast Advantages

Podcasts are good tools to use in traditional and online learning. For starters, podcasts are currently available on any subject. If you visit any podcast directory and search on a particular topic, you will find numerous podcasts. With so many podcasts already available, you do not have to recreate the wheel which saves you time and effort. Next, you always know when new content is available. Once you subscribe to a podcast, you receive notifications via your podcast app when new episodes are released which saves time from checking the podcast directory for new content. Since they are free and easily available in podcast directories on the Web, you will never run out of invaluable learning resources.

To include podcasts within your online learning environment, you would need either the podcast's RSS feed or the podcast episode URL which can be found on the Web. Once you have these, you can either send out weekly announcements to learners from your learning management system, include in weekly lectures, or send emails notifying students of the podcast or podcast episode. Most learning management systems allow RSS feeds to be easily inserted within announcements that are sent to learners within the LMS or via email.

You also can start a discussion post in your learning management system and include the podcast episode URL to not only supplement your course material but also spark discussion. Furthermore, you can create assignments based on a podcast episode URL shared with learners that reinforces the lesson. Since learners are always on their mobile devices, students can benefit from podcasts flexibility and portability of being available via the Web or apps on mobile or wearable devices to enhance not only the course content but also their learning experience.

---

2[https://podcasthosting.org/podcast-statistics/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIt6zArPvw6gIVWw1ICR1xUSC6EAYASAAEgJpePD_BwE](https://podcasthosting.org/podcast-statistics/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIt6zArPvw6gIVWw1ICR1xUSC6EAYASAAEgJpePD_BwE)
Although most podcasts are audio, they can also include video which will further supplement learners’ understanding of the material. As we discussed in Chapter 4, video podcasts can be another way to support audio and visual learners. Video podcasts are saved in the .mp4 format as opposed to .mp3 which is strictly audio. During the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing, video podcasts can easily be recorded remotely with free tools such as:

- Zoom
- Microsoft Teams
- iMovie Maker
- OBS Studio

Once your video podcast episode has been recorded in .mp4 format, it can easily be shared on YouTube, social media platforms, and blogs for great visibility and promotion.

Podcast Planning

You do not have to depend on others to create podcast episodes for your online learning needs. You can inexpensively and easily do so yourself. If you decide to create your own podcast, you need to do some initial planning. This planning will consist of answering some basic questions about your podcast:

- What will be the theme or topic of my podcast?
- Will it be an audio or video podcast or combination?
- What will be the duration of a podcast episode?
- How often will podcast episodes be released?
- How will you promote your podcast?
- Will you solely conduct the podcast episode or invite guests?
- Will you have an introduction with or without music?
- What will your podcast image look like?
- How will you end your show?
- How will you structure your podcast episodes?
Podcast Creation Equipment

For beginners, an audio podcast is the fastest and cheapest way to begin because you probably already own the necessary items. For the items that you do not have, many are available for free or inexpensively.

Microphones

At the heart of any good podcast is the sound quality. To have good sound quality, you need a quality microphone. A good, quality microphone will improve the quality of the recording. To be taken as a professional, you want to provide your potential subscribers with not only quality content but also quality sound. An inexpensive quality microphone for podcasting can be purchased for around $100. The Blue Yeti is a good beginning podcasters microphone with good quality sound that is used by podcasters (Figure 8-3).

As your podcast needs changes, you can always upgrade to a premium microphone such as the Heil Sound Pro and other equipment such as sound interfaces which are more expensive. However, for beginners, the basic podcast equipment will work fine.

Podcast Creation Apps

Mobile apps can be used to create podcast episodes. Many of these apps can also publish the completed episode to your chosen podcast directory. These podcast creation apps vary based on mobile devices.
Backpack Studio App

The Backpack Studio app (formerly Bossjock) for iOS is an all-in-one podcast app. iOS users can record a podcast episode directly from their iOS devices. If you have an Apple iPhone or iPad that uses the lightning connector, you will need a lightning adapter that fits your microphone’s adapter type. For instance, most microphones have either a USB or an XLR port, so you will need an adapter for that particular port. Backpack Studio will also allow you to do livestreaming to any station via Icecast or Shoutcast for a fee. With Backpack Studio, you can add in sound effects from cloud storage services such as:

- iCloud
- Dropbox
- Google Drive

You can also record your own sound effects from your iOS device through Backpack Studio or add existing ones from your iOS device. You can also add your show notes directly within the Backpack Studio Notes section to help you stay on topic while recording your episode. Once your sound effects and podcast introduction have been loaded into the soundboard, you can begin recording your episode within the app. Once your episode is finished, you can add your episode title, artist name, and description to help others locate your episode. After entering that information, you can either export your episode to a designated location or save it within the Backpack Studio app. You can also create an audiogram for your podcast within Backpack Studio to share either on YouTube, your classroom, or social media platforms.

Online Audio Recording

Another podcast recording option is online-voice-recorder.com. It is free and can be used within a web browser to make an audio recording. It only requires a microphone and saves the recording as an mp3 or mp4 file. With an easy-to-use interface, you can quickly create an audio recording file that can be imported into another recording application such as Audacity for editing if needed.

Recording Software

Many recording software applications are available to assist you with your podcast. Some are free and open source which works well for limited budgets.

One open source solution is Audacity (Figure 8-4). Audacity is a free cross-platform, open source, digital editing and recording software application available on the Web. It allows users to not only record audio files but also
import them. You can also export files into various file formats such as mp3 or mp4. It also allows you to enhance your audio recording’s sound quality before exporting it.

Another option for Mac and iOS users is GarageBand. It is available for free in the Apple App Store. GarageBand is another all-in-one solution for your podcast needs. With GarageBand, you can record your audio podcast as well as make music for it. GarageBand contains music loops that can be included within your podcast. If you are a musician, you can connect a musical instrument such as a keyboard or guitar to create music to add to your podcast. If your iOS mobile device is newer, it will require an Apple adapter to use equipment with USB ports (Figure 8-5).

Figure 8-4. Audacity recording software available from www.audacityteam.org/
Podcast Hosting

Podcast directories such as Buzzsprout.com provide free and paid podcast hosting (Figure 8-6). These directories will not only store your podcast files but also generate the RSS feed needed to submit your podcast to other podcast directories. However, free accounts provide limited features. For instance, free plans typically include advertisements that will not be removed until a paid plan is purchased. In addition, many free plans will not allow you to use your uniform resource locator (URL). Your URL provides more branding and marketing opportunities than using a pre-generated URL. Until you are ready to start paying for more advanced podcasting features, it might be a good idea to stick with free podcast hosting. Other podcast hosting that offer free and paid hosting include:

- Anchor.fm
- Podbean.com
- Spreaker.com
Once you select your podcast hosting provider, you will need to give your podcast a title, description, artwork, and category. If you are not artistic, Canva can help you create your artwork. Canva provides templates that you can use, or you can create your own design. Some of the other podcast settings you will need to configure include:

- Podcast type
- Website address
- Episode limit
- Keywords
- Artist name
- Contact email address

Once you have recorded and uploaded your podcast episodes, you will need to periodically log in to your podcast hosting to review your podcast stats. These stats will provide valuable insight on your episodes. Some of the insights you will gain about your listeners are:

- Download numbers
- Geographic location

Figure 8-6. Buzzsprout.com provides podcast hosting for podcasters
• Devices used to listen
• Apps used to listen

Once you have your podcast’s RSS feed, do not forget to submit it to numerous podcast directories to increase your discoverability.

**Summary**

Podcasts are another tool to help boost your online content while keeping learners engaged. With many podcasts widely available on the Web for free along with being easy to create, they are a perfect fit for any size budget as well as online learning. They also allow learners the flexibility to listen and learn at their convenience and on their preferred mobile and wearable devices. The most important thing to remember is to make incorporating podcasts into your online learning fun and engaging.