

Listening to the Future: Museum Podcast Research

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Blanton Museum of Art

Audio Assets at the Blanton - blantonmuseum.org/experience_the_blanton/elounge/podcasts.cfm

Uncommon Commentary Audio Tour – created in collaboration with Acoustiguide
Music for the Blanton – music composed by Donald Grantham for the museum opening
Student Podcasts – created as part of Rachel Varon's master's thesis research

To Podcast or Not to Podcast – factors that contributed to the decision to research podcasting

- Professionally Produced Content
 - Uncommon Commentary
 - Music for the Blanton
- MP3 Player Penetration
 - US Population – Pew Internet Survey (April 2006)
 - 20% American Adults have an mp3 player
 - 26% of Internet users own an mp3 player
 - UT Population – IT Survey (Fall 2006)
 - 47% own an mp3 player
- Blanton Museum Mission & Brand: Extraordinary Experiences
 - Connecting visitors with art and ideas
 - Investing in the visitor experience
 - Pushing the boundaries
- Technology Enhanced Visitor Research Experience
 - The Blanton iTour – An Interactive Handheld Museum Guide Experiment
 - <http://www.blantonmuseum.org/itour/>
 - <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2004/papers/manning/manning.html>
- UT – Research University Resources
 - Graduate Students
 - Faculty

Podcast Research Focus

- Will visitors successfully use the museum audio on their own MP3 players?
- Advantages and disadvantages of MP3 players & random access audio wands.
- Will free podcasts marginalize audio players provided by the museum?
- Is it in the museum's best interest to provide the audio guide content as a podcast?

Podcast & Audio Research

- Test subjects:
 - Museum visitors
 - Original Target
 - Own mp3 players
 - Download podcast prior to arriving at museum
- Device Comparison
 - Each test subject experiences both devices
 - Personal MP3 player and Acoustiguide Exsite Wand
 - 2 Blanton iPod Videos available as backup
- Audio Content
 - Uncommon Commentary (31 episodes/stops)
 - Music for the Blanton (18 episodes/stops)
 - Student Podcasts (2 episodes/stops)

Podcast Download Barrier

- Requires visitor pre-planning
 - Find and download podcasts to MP3 player
- Format issues
 - Enhanced podcasts (m4a)
 - (-) iPod only
 - (-) 31 stops become 31 chapters = LARGE

- (-) No ability to customize – all or none
- (-) No easy random access
- (+) easy to get download
- MP3
 - (+) Device agnostic
 - (+) 31 stops = 31 episodes = small downloads
 - (+) customize, pick the stops you want
 - (+) easier random access
 - (-) Default download behavior – 1st episode only
 - (-) Download appears easy – but getting all episodes is not intuitive

Device Comparison

Wand

- Advantages
 - Intuitive, easy to use, user friendly, simple
 - Familiar known interface, like a TV remote
- Disadvantages
 - Bigger *
 - No headphones *
 - Can't fast forward *
 - No image *

* Based on Blanton's audio player selection. Other devices by Acoustiguide have these options.

MP3 Player

- Advantages
 - Multimedia/image
 - Smaller
 - Personal
 - Fast forward
- Disadvantages
 - Attempted download but incomplete (failure)
 - Didn't download prior to visit
 - Complex confusing compared to wand
 - Headphones/isolation
 - Menu – too many choices
 - Fragile

Podcast Advantages

- Visitor Involvement (download)
- Customizable & Personal
- Preview/Review content
- Provides more choice
- Inspiration to visit

Device Preference

Now that you have experienced the Blanton's audio content on both the ExSite wand and an MP3 Player, which would you choose to use next time?

Mp3	Wand	No Preference
61%	22%	17%

Implications & Recommendations

- Uncommon Commentary Audio Tour
 - Personal: Offer Visitor Choices
 - download podcast to personal mp3 player
 - use free audio guide in gallery
 - Device: *Keep It Simple*
 - Museum provides free random access audio wand
 - intuitive, simple
 - no headphones (?)
 - Podcast: *Just Do It!*

- Museum multi-purposes quality audio content
 - already in mp3 format
 - transcripts provided by Acoustiguide
- Music for the Blanton
 - Offer as an album, not a podcast
 - Add an audio introduction
 - Add a map

Podcast Research Summary

- Personal MP3 players successful?
 - 61% preferred them
 - podcast download barriers – need on demand access
- Free podcasts marginalize audio tour?
 - Not today. Devices continue to evolve. Visitors continue to want quality content.
- Museum provides audio guide as podcast?
 - For the Blanton? Absolutely!
 - Broader reach, more choices, personal, allows for planning, preview and review.

Student Podcast Project

Rachel Varon's Thesis: Podcasting in the Museum: Giving Emerging Adults a Voice
Students volunteered to create podcasts and were given podcast training.

- 1) Select a work of art
- 2) Brainstorm podcast ideas
- 3) Remember your audience – UT Students
- 4) Justify your claims
- 5) Minimum of 1 minute – maximum of 4 minutes
- 6) Research on chosen work of art is recommended but not required
- 7) Podcast review parties

8 podcasts created. Only 2 published on official Blanton Web Site.

Student Podcasts: The Challenge

- Discerning: Formalize a review process that encourages, constructive comments, diverse opinions, critical thinking, and evaluation with evidence.
- Quality: Set realistic expectations for official museum publishing.
- Free Thinking: Outlet for unedited podcasts.

Student Podcast Research - *selected excerpts*

Podcasting in the Museum: Giving Emerging Adults a Voice - Rachel Varon

Benefits of Student Produced Podcasts

- *Connect with art objects in a format that is familiar to them –digital technology*
- *Become actively engaged in a discussion about a work of art instead of just a consumer*
- *Uploading it for podcasting – become a guide or authority on a work of art*
- *Listen to peers opinions and understand that there is more than one viewpoint about a work of art*
- *Variety of voices and sources of information, listeners may begin to question and engage more deeply with their sources*

Producing Podcasts = constructivist teaching method

- *Learner actively constructs knowledge based on his or her experiences (Hein, 1998, Tyner 2003)*
- *Multisensory, imaginative, conversational, personal, experiential*