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Title:

iPod tours: a new approach to induction.

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Abstract

This article is based on a presentation given at a conference organized by cpd 25 in April 2007; “The Library in the Interactive Environment: Practical use of technology to improve the student experience”. It describes the development and creation of an iPod induction tour for the Main Library at Sheffield University, with input from students. It also discusses the use and evaluation of the tour, and concludes by describing how the Library is using the experience to consider other technologies to introduce our students to library services.

The impetus for change

The Main Library (now Western Bank Library) in Sheffield was opened in the late 1950's, and houses collections relevant to the faculties of Arts, Social Science and Pure Science. For various reasons, it is a difficult building to navigate and signpost. There is no reception or information desk at the main entrance, and visitors have to go up a flight of stairs before they get to the entrance turnstile, and then another flight of stairs before they reach the customer service desks and the main reading room and book collections. There are two floors below the main reading room, and two closed access floors below that. The collections are split into a number of different sequences. Despite efforts to provide adequate signing and floor plans, most customers need some help to find their way round.

In the past, Academic Liaison Librarians provided guided tours of the library for some students, and a printed self guided tour was available. There was also a video that was used in induction talks, but this was starting to look dated. Growing student numbers in recent years were making guided tours less viable, and many questioned

the value of them anyway. A rushed tour of the library in Intro Week was unlikely to be seen as relevant or useful by most students.

Why an iPod tour?

Library tours delivered using a variety of technologies are still a popular form of induction, as Ashmore and Grogg (1) demonstrate, and audio tours are widely used in museums and galleries as well as libraries. We knew that iPods/ mp3 players were growing in popularity among students, particularly for downloading and listening to music. Other departments in the University were starting to use podcasting to support teaching and learning, the most common application being recording lectures, and an overview of current podcasting initiatives at the University of Sheffield can be found at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ldmu/can-do/media/podcasting/examples.html> [accessed 12/10/07]. We liked the idea of producing a library tour that students could download and listen to whenever they wanted, using a familiar technology, so we decided to create a tour in mp3 format and make it available as an audio download. It wasn't a true podcast, as it didn't have an RSS feed. We liked the idea of producing something very informal that students could use whenever they wanted, and because of this, felt that it would not matter if the product was not professionally recorded and produced. We hoped that it would be relatively quick and easy to do. We started to plan at the end of June 2005, and we wanted to have something ready for Intro Week at the end of September, so we had three months to put something together.

Planning the tour

The project involved staff from the Academic Services and Customer Services Groups working together. We decided at the outset that we would like students to be involved, and the Director of the Academic Services Group contacted the Education Officer at the Students Union to invite them to participate. He was able to put us in touch with two students who worked on the student radio station in Sheffield, and they were keen to take part.

A small group of staff from the Academic Services and Customer Services Groups met to discuss the content of the tour. Our idea was to record a series of conversations either between students, or between library staff and students, with the aim of conveying key messages about library services, as well as helping to navigate the Main Library. Although we wanted the recordings to sound like off the cuff conversations, we felt we needed a script, even if it would only be used for guidance. We scripted six conversations, each one designed to be listened to at a specific location in the Main Library. The locations would be marked as iPod induction tour listening points by A3 size numbered posters. We sent drafts of the script to various colleagues and to the student volunteers for comment, and made revisions accordingly. By the time the script had been finalised, the students who had offered to help were both out of Sheffield for the summer. Library staff made some pilot recordings to test the recording and editing process, and we made some further adjustments to the scripts based on this experience. We finally got together with the students very close to our deadline, and made recordings with them the week before Intro Week.

The process was much harder than we had anticipated. We recorded in the library at the designated listening points so that the students could easily see what they were talking about, and so that there would be some authentic background noise. When

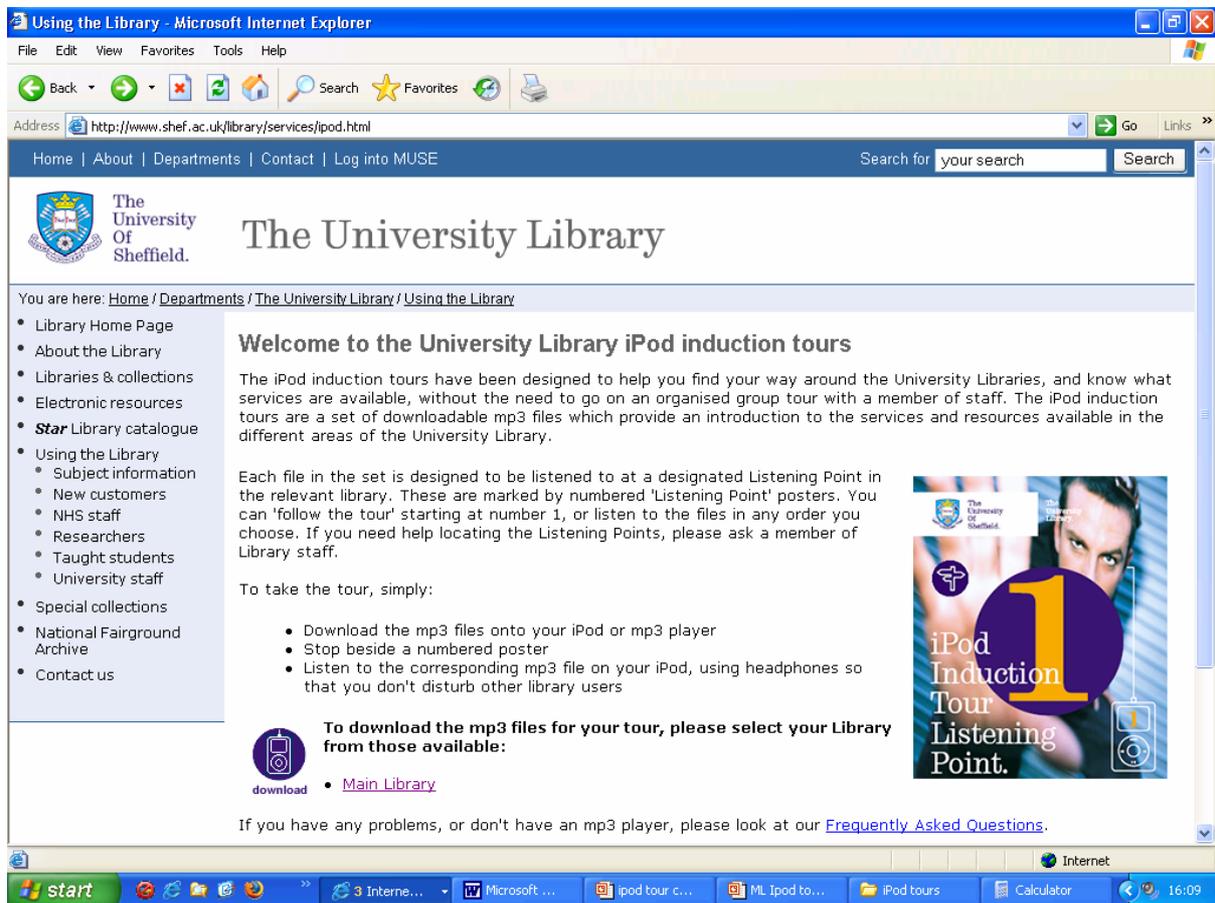
we made the pilot recordings, the staff who took part were nervous and self-conscious, and it took a while to get material that we could use. Fortunately the students were far more professional, probably due to their radio experience. It was quite difficult to achieve natural sounding conversations that didn't sound too scripted, but included all the relevant points. We made several recordings of each conversation, and the best ones occurred when the students used our scripts for guidance, but improvised. The students were happy to help out for the experience, but if we ask students for help in the future, we would try to organise book vouchers as a thank you.

Recording and editing

The recordings were made using a 20GB iPod and a Griffin iTalk voice recorder, which recorded in WAV format. The recordings were then converted into mp3 files. The files required a considerable amount of editing by the Academic Services Development Team using Peak 4 audio editing software on an Apple Mac. Later edits were made using Audacity software. Sections from different recordings were stitched together to get the best possible versions, and we edited out quite a few “umm’s and err’s”, and unexpected sounds like doors banging. We had to deal with variable sound levels, and adjust the volume due to the relatively poor audio quality. Although it was obvious that our tour wasn't professionally recorded, we felt that the end product was good enough for our purposes, and the DIY approach allowed us to meet our tight deadline.

Promotion and publicity

The mp3 files were made available for listening and download from web pages designed and created in house.



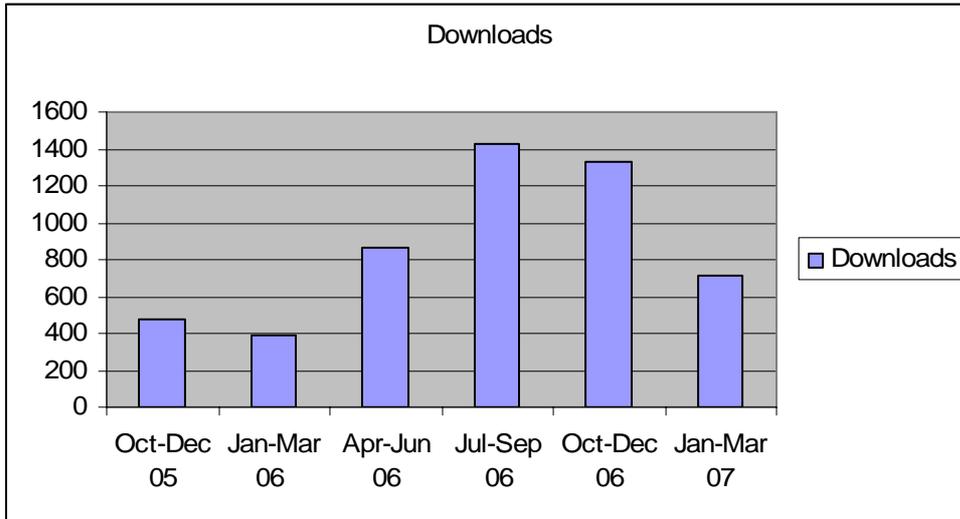
The web pages featured the design of the listening point poster, and the pages were designed so that further tours could be added in the future. The site included a set of FAQ's, and an online evaluation form was added in September 2006. The pages were originally hosted on a separate server provided by the university computing service, which allowed us to monitor usage using AWStats software.

There was a prominent link to the tour web page from the library home page, and the url featured on the listening point posters in the Main Library. We had business style cards printed to promote the tour, and these were given out by Liaison Librarians during induction talks. The Main Library operates a welcome stand just inside the main entrance during Intro Week and the first week of semester, and we had a

computer at the stand so that students could download the files there and then if they wanted to. The Library also has a stand at the annual Student Union Freshers Fair, which takes place in the first week of semester, and this was another opportunity to promote the tour. There was a concern that students who didn't own an mp3 player would be excluded from using the tour, so we bought two iPod Nanos to lend from the Main Library enquiry desk. These were barcoded so that they could be issued to the students library account, and students were also asked to sign a form accepting responsibility for loss or damage, and agreeing to a replacement fee of £200. Several training sessions were held for library staff to familiarise them with the tour, and with the mechanics of using the iPods and downloading the files. The original Main Library tour recorded in 2005 required some updating in preparation for induction 2006, mainly due to the establishment of a large collection of books that would eventually move to the Information Commons, a new learning resource centre, during 2007. Access routes into the building for disabled students had also changed during the year. Fortunately, one of the students involved in the original recording was still in Sheffield, and in fact had been elected as Education Officer of the Student Union. He did some re-recording with us, and the Development Team did all the necessary editing. We also devised an evaluation form, which was made available via the web site, and given to students who borrowed iPods from the enquiry desk.

Use and feedback

AWstats software was used to collate detailed use statistics from the web page from October 2005 to March 2007.



The graph shows the total number of clicks on the download links for the 6 files in 3 month blocks. It was apparent that some people didn't download or listen to all 6 files. The increase in use in Oct-Dec 06 compared with Oct-Dec 05 was very pleasing, and probably partly due to the fact that in the second year of operation, the University recommended the tour to academic departments in its guidance on induction. The total number of hits in Oct-Dec 06 was 1326, and to put this in context, the University welcomed around 7000 new taught course students in autumn 2006. The high volume of use in Jul-Sep 06 was probably partly related to the fact that staff listened to the files a lot when planning the updates in preparation for September 2006, and partly to coverage in the professional press in the first 6 months of 2006.

We attempted to collect feedback about the tour to evaluate its success by providing an email address on the website, and from October 2006, an online evaluation form. Unfortunately, no feedback was received from either of these. The loan iPods were borrowed 12 times in Sep/Oct 2006, and 8 customers completed an evaluation form. Their comments were generally enthusiastic, and the main suggestion for improvement was to make the listening points more obvious. We realised that a lot of

people were probably listening to the files via the web site, not downloading them to listen to at the designated listening points in the library, as we didn't have hordes of people gathering at the listening points. This was taken into account as we planned for induction in 2007.

New developments for induction in 2007

The Information Commons <http://www.shef.ac.uk/infocommons/> [accessed 12/10/07] is an innovative new learning facility managed jointly by the University Library and Computing Services. It opened in April 2007, and has rapidly become the primary study resource for students on taught courses. In the light of this, we felt that new materials should be developed for induction 2007. The Main Library tour was again out of date, and as the Main Library will undergo further changes during 2007-08, we agreed not to update it, and it was removed from the web site during the summer of 2007.

We were keen to try new approaches and to make use of new software in our preparation for 2007. Using Captivate and Audacity software, we developed and recorded a short series of screencasts and audio files designed to help students start to search for library resources. Like the original iPod tour, they are conversational in tone, and are based on typical student enquiries. Unfortunately, due to time constraints we were not able to involve students in recording these, so a member of staff plays the student role, but we will seek student reaction and feedback, and will hopefully be able to use students again in any future recordings. A useful case study on the use of Captivate in this context is provided by Patalong and Llewellyn (2). Another new resource for 2007 is an audio visual tour of the Information Commons produced using Audacity and Windows Movie Maker. These new resources are

available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/services/ipod.html> [accessed 12/10/07] and have replaced the original Main Library tour. We look forward to using these and other technologies to develop further materials and services to support students as they start their studies in the forthcoming year.

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