**Article:**

Mawson, Maria, Moore, Helen and Pacheco, Jenny (2006) Creating an iPod library tour.
ALISS Quarterly, 2 (1). pp. 20-22. ISSN 0265-2587

**Creating an iPod library tour**
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Over the years, traditional tours of the Main Library for new students had become unviable, primarily because of the huge numbers of students on many programmes and the short induction period. The value of such tours had also been questioned and most Liaison Librarians had replaced them with presentations to large groups in lecture theatres. A printed self-guided tour had been available for some time, but was looking dated. The concept of the iPod tour provided the opportunity to supplement other induction activities with something that students could download and use when they chose to, using innovative technologies. Planning for the project started towards the end of June 2005 and the deadline was Intro Week towards the end of September.

A small group of staff met initially to discuss the content of the tour. The idea was to record a series of conversations between students and library staff, to convey key messages and highlight important services. We developed six conversations, each one designed to be listened to at a specific location in the library. Numbered posters would indicate the listening points. The intention from the beginning was to involve students, and we contacted the Student Union Education Officer to ask for his help. He put us in touch with two students who were involved in the student radio station, and they agreed to help. We made some pilot recordings with library staff and then made further recordings with the students in September, adjusting the conversation scripts as we went. The best recordings were made when the students used the scripts for guidance, but held natural conversations with one another.

The recordings were made in the library, at the designated listening points, so that the people involved could see what they were talking about, and would therefore sound more natural, with authentic background noise. We used a 20GB iPod, with a Griffin iTalk voice recorder. The recording process was much harder than anybody had anticipated, as we were nervous and self-conscious, and there was a tendency at the beginning to dissolve into fits of giggles! The students were far less nervous than the library staff. It was quite difficult to achieve a balance between natural sounding conversations, which meant not reading from a script, and ensuring that all relevant information was included.

To edit the audio files, we used a Macintosh laptop and BIAS Peak 4 LE audio editing software. The audio files were recorded in WAV format, and were converted to MP3 format so that students would be able to download them onto their MP3 players. The files required a good deal of editing to remove all of the 'ums and errs', and stumbles over words, as well as sudden noises such as doors banging. The audio levels had to be adjusted to a uniform level, because the two speakers had been standing at different distances from the microphone. Additionally the volume on the files had to be increased, as the sound recorded via the iTalk was very low level.

The iTalk did not record very high quality audio, which meant that the MP3 files had a certain amount of static interference, especially in sections where it was necessary to increase the volume during editing. However, we felt that the audio produced was of a good enough quality to provide the service we were looking for, and allowed us

to have a much more hands-on approach than if we had employed sound professionals with more sophisticated equipment. It also gave us the flexibility to meet our tight deadline.

Once edited to satisfactory standards, the MP3 files were uploaded to the iPod Tour web site http://www.lbasg.group.shef.ac.uk/downloads/index.html  Students can either listen to the files from the web site, or download them onto their own MP3 player.  The MP3's were also pre-loaded onto two iPod Nanos, which we made available for loan from the library enquiry desk, so that students who did not own an MP3 player could take the tour.

The web site was developed outside of the main Content Management System used by the University, and is hosted in a separate web hosting service provided by our Computing Services Department.  Hosting the site in this way allows us to monitor usage statistics, using AWStats software.  We are able to see how many page hits we get, and how many times the MP3 files are listened to. The web site was designed to accommodate further tours in the future, and a set of FAQ's helps students download the files and use the tour.

Statistics collected so far show that hits on the web site, and downloads of the MP3 files have continued throughout the academic year, indicating that there is demand outside of the induction period in September/October.

Publicity for the tour included A3 size listening point posters, and small business cards with brief details and the web site url. Some images used on the publicity materials also appear on the tour web site. The tour web site was linked from the Library web home page, and other appropriate pages. Liaison Librarians promoted the tour during introductory lectures and presentations. The business cards were handed out to students at the Library stand at the Student Union Freshers Fair and at the Main Library welcome stand during Intro Week. A PC was available at the welcome stand so that students could download the files there and then if they wanted to, and training on downloading the files was provided for Library staff.

One of the concerns raised by the Student Union Education Officer at the time was that students who did not have an iPod or MP3 player would not be able to take the tour, and would therefore be disadvantaged.  With this in mind, we took the decision to buy two iPod Nanos to lend out from the library enquiry desk, with the tour files pre-loaded. There were obvious security issues to consider, but we took steps to ensure that the iPods would be returned by cataloguing them and assigning barcodes so that they could be issued to the student library record. We also designed a booking sheet and asked students to sign to say they accepted responsibility for the safe-keeping of the iPod and to agree that they would be liable for a replacement fee of £200 if the iPod was lost or damaged.  We held several training sessions for enquiry desk staff so that they understood the iPod loan procedure, and could help students to download the tour files to their own MP3 players if necessary.

The project was relatively inexpensive, as we relied completely on the skills and resources available to us in house. The finished product could have been more polished if we had used professional sound recording equipment, experienced actors

etc, but it would also have been considerably more expensive. Costs included the iPod and voice recorder (£600) and publicity materials (£350). Something we underestimated was the amount of staff time required, and this has not been quantified or costed.

We are in the process of updating the tour for September 2006, and this will involve editing out some dialogue, and re-recording some segments. Fortunately, one of the students involved originally is still in Sheffield, and will be working with us again. This time, more effort will be made to evaluate the impact of the tour, by including an evaluative questionnaire on the web site. This will also be given out to anybody using an iPod borrowed from the enquiry desk. We are hoping to develop further tours for other service points, including the Information Commons, due to open in 2007.