

What is a Podcast Feed?

A podcast feed is a way of sharing files over the internet. It involves the use of a small, machine readable file that is regularly updated to reflect changes in the files available for downloading. The internet addresses of these files are embedded into the feed file and can be automatically downloaded when wished. At this time, podcasting tends to refer to the use of feeds to share only media files. Podcasting originally occurred as a way to share audio mp3 files, and has only recently begun incorporating video into podcasts. However, the technology that allows the files to be shared is not limited to such media files and there is no reason that other files may be shared via podcast in the future.

Today, however, a podcast feed tends to refer to the use of a feed to share media files. Most podcasts are done with audio files, and the individual files that are created and shared are called episodes. These audio files may contain a variety of things; there are music, comedy, news, technology, even podcasts about wine. Podcasting, because of the low entry cost, especially for audio podcasting allows nearly anyone who believes they have something to say to broadcast it over the internet. Even more established groups have found that audio podcasting works well. Some radio stations podcast portions of their content, sharing it over the internet to allow listeners who missed a specific show to catch up on it later. NPR now does this with its news breaks, and the NPR show "This American Life" offers a podcast of its shows to subscribers who pay a small fee.

One of the newer innovations in podcast feeds is the vlog, or videoblog. These blogs usually contain a feed that distributes a video, rather than an audio file to feed subscribers. Although that would not have been feasible a few years ago, growing numbers of broadband internet subscribers has meant that most users are able to download large files, even video files, relatively quickly. These video podcasts have been readily accepted by mainstream news organizations. They have

found that podcasting portions of their content is a way to share their tape and reach a wider audience. The BBC currently does this with parts of its news content. Pieces of the news show that is played over the airwaves is taken and placed online, along with a link to the content placed inside the RSS feed. Those who subscribe to the BBC feed can download the news clip and watch in from the comfort of their home computer.

In the future, podcast feeds may be used for a number of purposes besides simply sharing media files. Some analysts predict that the feed system could also be used to share software updates, or any of a myriad of other file types. For now, however, podcasting is dominated by small audio and video files.

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