



Ohio State HCS News

HORTICULTURE & CROP SCIENCE IN VIRTUAL PERSPECTIVE - THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Podcasting Delivers Educational Content



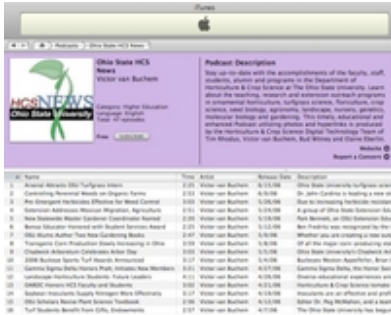
HCS Digital Technology Team members Tim Rhodus (right) and Victor van Buchem are using podcasts to deliver educational content to students, industry and the public.

For Dr. Tim Rhodus and the HCS Digital Technology Team, the Internet is a tool for communicating horticultural information to a broad audience. Podcasting is a powerful tool for creating, disseminating and delivering educational content to students, industry and the public. More than just a new way to access web-based content, podcasts are personalized, portable, narrowcast, multimedia educational packages.

Since November of 2005, Rhodus and Horticulture & Crop Science Communications Coordinator Victor van Buchem have evolved the Ohio State HCS News into podcasts. With more than 100 stories being written a year, van Buchem's narration and photography is creating a mobile collection of stories that are pleasing to both the ear and the eye.

Podcasting depends on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) technology to deliver content directly to those who subscribe to a feed of content. RSS web syndication is thus similar to a newspaper being delivered to your house each day. Web developers have extended RSS standards to now include audio, video and graphic attachments, in addition to text, and call this a podcast. With automatic updating via a subscription, users now "catch" syndicated packages, instead of searching/browsing websites for new content. Subscribers to the Ohio State HCS News podcast

automatically get the latest news story podcast downloaded to their computer.



50 enhanced podcasts of Ohio State HCS News stories are available for download.

For more background on RSS and Internet feed capabilities, read the HCS Digital Technology Team article "Web Syndication: New Tools for Accessing and Delivering Information."

Rhodus points out that podcast files are going to be valuable for a long time because each one is an educational, multimedia package which is reusable from project to project. "We've gotten a lot of mileage out of digital photography because, years later, we're still using photos of plants when writing tips or training materials for gardeners and students. That kind of recyclable content is perfect in the ever-growing Web publishing environment. We're also thinking that way with each podcast story, so now it becomes something we can use in later life."

Another advantage of podcasting is the portability of the files. Through the transfer of podcast files to an mp3 player (such as Apple's iPod), podcasting allows educational content to be accessed anywhere. For example, students can watch a replay of or listen to a class lecture at their desktop computer or take the lecture with them using an iPod. "In the past, the iPod has been thought of as a just a music device," Rhodus said. "I feel it is more like a multimedia learning system. You are able to extend your computer's digital resources through an iPod connection and start carrying your music, movies, slideshows, and blogs wherever you go."



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Rhodus foresees podcasts as modular content that can be inserted and utilized in web publishing applications separate and apart from their original publication series. "Just like we insert plant photos or audio/video files describing proper pruning techniques into a wide variety of digital fact sheets, garden calendars, and diagnostic databases, so too we can insert episodic podcast content. A podcast episode that describes a new rose cultivar can be just as valuable in a digital catalog as it can be in a landscape maintenance guide. We just have to think of digital content, no matter what it was originally created for, as being flexible units that can be reorganized and inserted into unforeseen projects for the future."

Rhodus, van Buchem and HCS Digital Technology Team members Bud Witney and Elaine Eberlin are working with the OSU Turfgrass Science program to develop a distance-education, podcast-based Sports Turf Management Course. The plan is for the lectures of the online course to be delivered via podcast technology. The team also works closely with the American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS) to make horticultural content available via podcast technology. The current project includes recording and podcasting educational presentations from the ASHS Annual Conference in New Orleans.



The team is designing many new podcasts using the wealth of digital assets contained in PlantFacts.osu.edu. Tapping into the image archive and illustrated glossary provides many content items a second life - in fact, an extended life through podcasts. Future podcast opportunities include narrated plant walks, virtual garden tours, diagnostic tools, and technical turfgrass management tips.

For more information about podcasting and the horticulture content currently available via podcasts, please read the 8-page PDF of the "Podcasting! What's All the Buzz?" article published in the May 2006

issue of The Buckeye.

Story and web publishing by Victor van Buchem. Rhodus photo by Kevin Fitzsimons. Witney photo by Victor van Buchem.

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