




The Fort Montgomery Visitor's Center
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Audio Tour at Whittingham Country Park
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The Open University

Geolocated audio tours

Elizabeth FitzGerald, e.j.fitzgerald@open.ac.uk
Institute of Educational Technology

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What are geolocated audio tours?



- Information delivered through audio files (usually spoken voice) that is associated with a specific physical location e.g. a particular area with points of interest – each point of interest has an audio clip associated with it
- Location is determined manually by human being or automatically via technology (GPS) e.g. smartphone
- Often delivered as a commercial product, with either hardware (i.e. handheld devices) and/or audio content on a pay-for basis
- Commonly found in museums or tourist attractions e.g. the Roman Baths in Bath
- BUT... can also be delivered either free or very cheaply

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Why use them?



- Used extensively in mobile gaming, tourism, for educational visits and theatrical events
- Usage:
 - Direction / orientation for visitors
 - Crowd navigation
 - Give information or instructions
 - Telling a story
 - Creating ambient sound

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Examples

- Attenborough Nature Reserve audio trail (£1.50 for 48 hours access, dial number from any mobile phone then press numbers for specific sites of interest)
- Leicester City Council – Cultural Quarter (CQart) (free, PDF of map and downloadable audio files [mp3])
- National Trust audio tours e.g. Peak District (free, adult and children's audio tours available to download, also some PDF maps)
- 'To the Castle' Hidden Histories project with People's Histreh (free, PDF of map and downloadable audio files [mp3] or available via smartphone app)

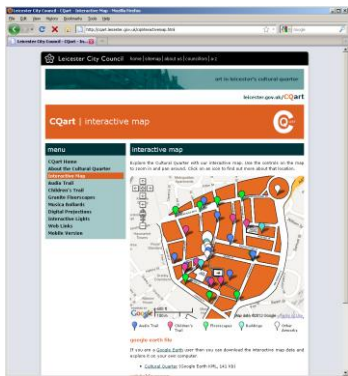


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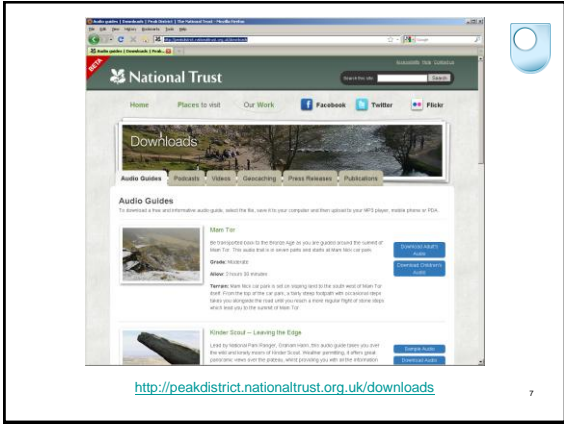
<http://www.attenboroughnaturecentre.co.uk/activities/discover-the-attenborough-audio-tour/>

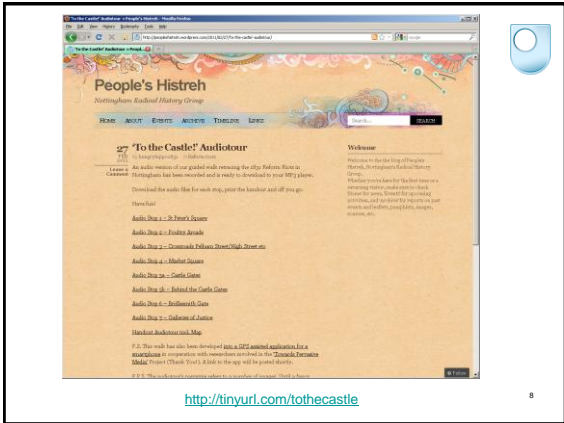
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<http://cqart.leicester.gov.uk>

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How to do them

- You basically need to consider 2 things:
 - Hardware i.e. the device to hear the audio – can be an mp3 player
 - Content i.e. the audio files themselves
- Think how to make these available to your users – commercial product (£££)? What cost/business model to use?
- Do you need to provide the hardware?
- How do you detect location? Human/manual vs machine/GPS?
- Can you record the audio in-house (or use volunteers)? How will you distribute the audio files?
- You might also want to include a map (paper-based or electronic) showing the points of interest
- The WWW is a great place to put resources and downloads!

Low-cost solution 1 – the simple way



- Assume that users have their own hardware – this could be a basic mobile phone or an mp3 player
- You need two things:
 - A map
 - Some audio content
- And somewhere for people to get access to these – probably a website to upload them to (e.g. Google Sites; Wordpress)
- Location awareness /point of interest is done by user
- Might need a basic microphone to record/edit audio
- Think about who can record it – staff, volunteers, members of the public?
- 'Audacity' software is good for editing audio – is free and fairly easy to use (download from web)

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Low-cost solution 2 – slightly more sophisticated



- Still assume users have their own device – but that it is a GPS-aware smartphone
- Use a free app to upload content and make it geo-aware/tag its location or place a marker on a map
- Smartphone uses GPS to work out the user's location and show/provide appropriate content relevant to where the user is
- Example apps include Broadcastr (www.broadcastr.com) or 7scenes (<http://7scenes.com>) (both apps available on iPhone and Android)

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Things to consider



- Use of voice – good 'storytelling' voice, use of tones, try to use someone with good narrative skills
- Authenticity – if giving information written by a man, use a man's voice – same for women, children etc.
- Think about use of regional/national accents (see authenticity, above)
- Try to use ambient sound effects to add 'immersion' where appropriate, e.g. bird song, crackle of fires burning, child laughing, axe chopping etc.
- Don't assume people will follow a particular route or trail – many of them won't! (and so you might want to have each audio clip as a self-contained snippet of content)
- Do you want to have some kind of interaction or feedback mechanism with users, e.g. website with feedback form or comments page/email address? Tie-in to social networking tools?
- Technical issues will always be a problem e.g. GPS accuracy – might be good to have some kind of back-up solution (map, signage etc)

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Summary



- Audio tours provide a different way of giving out information than handouts/booklets or using signposts
- Geolocated audio tours allow you to present location-specific information relevant to a user's geographical position
- Allow you to direct users or provide orientation
- Also helps 'crowd control' of visitors by suggesting particular routes
- Can use commercially-provided hardware and audio content...
- ... or assume users have their own hardware and just provide them with audio files and a map
- Really easy to do – just have a go! 😊

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Liz FitzGerald
 Institute of Educational Technology
 The Open University
 Walton Hall
 Milton Keynes
 MK7 6AA

Email: e.j.fitzgerald@open.ac.uk
 Web: <http://iet.open.ac.uk/e.j.fitzgerald>

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