Reviewer’s report

Title: Interactive Content for the iPod - its Production, Design and Potential Use: Technical Advances

Version: 1 Date: 20 April 2007

Reviewer: Vicki H M Dale

Reviewer’s report:

*General*
---------
I think this paper has quite innovative components (the technical aspects) and merits publication but the authors will need to make major revisions to the content and structure before it can be accepted for publication.

It reads to me as if they have submitted a draft and not the polished work. I look forward to seeing the final, much improved version.

*Major Compulsory Revisions*
---------------------------
I’m confused by the way the article is written as to the actual purpose of the study – it seems to me that they are publishing their technical methodology (which I’m sure will be appreciated by technical readers trying to replicate their methods) and the results of some (quite limited) formative assessment into student attitudes. Clarification is needed, and I’ve made suggestions below.

Additional pedagogical input is also required.

The title and abstract need to be reworded.
For the title, I’d suggest something like “A method for creating interactive content for the iPod, and its potential use as a learning tool as perceived by final year medical students”.

The abstract needs to include more details. I’d suggest something along the following lines:

Introduction: Podcasting is rapidly gaining popularity as a means of providing ‘any time, anywhere’ education, across a range of disciplines including medicine. However, it can be argued that the passive nature of most podcasts limits their effectiveness as an educational tool. In response to this challenge, the authors have developed a technical specification for creating interactive content, reproduced here.

Materials and methods: To gauge student opinion about the value of interactive iPod case presentations, 50 medical students at the University of Adelaide were asked to complete a (paper-based?) questionnaire on the potential uses of this technology, before and after a 20 minute presentation of an interactive case study on the iPod.

Results: X% of students responded. The results indicate a favourable shift in student attitudes after viewing the interactive case, with the majority of students positive about access to interactive iPod content (57%) and using it whilst traveling (59%).

Discussion/Conclusion: The technical specification for creating interactive content for the iPod is feasible. Initial formative evaluations suggest that students view interactive iPod cases as having value as an additional learning resource.

Literature - Re: paragraph two in Background, there is some literature that the authors can cite to back up their statements, if the authors do a Google Scholar search, on the pedagogical benefits of podcasts e.g. about its portable nature. Most of these are PDFs accessible via the web. There is also an existing article on podcasting in this same journal by Boulos (2006) which the authors might like to cite.

Technical specification - I think this should be published in a grey ‘box’ like a figure, using steps 1 to 5 as headings with the text underneath each heading, rather than as a list and then again e.g.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION FOR CREATING INTERACTIVE CONTENT
1. Provide a case title
Careful naming of the case is required, as titles are displayed in alphabetical order on the iPod. Basic HTML coding is used to mark up the text as a heading e.g. <b>Example</b>.

...
The methodology just needs to be referenced in the body of the text e.g. A five-step process, described in Figure X, involves providing a title for the case, adding content (e.g. text and images), linking images to the case, allowing students to make choices, and building in appropriate feedback to students’ selections.

Proposed revised structure - As for the abstract I’d suggest:
• Introduction
• Materials and methods (focusing on the student evaluation aspects)
• Results
• Discussion
• Conclusions

Other things I’m not clear about
• Fifty students were surveyed – was this the total no. of students in the year, or a biased sample representative of those attending the lecture on the day? (please specify).
• I would like to see reference to the actual questions asked, even refer the reader to the table of results: (‘The questions asked are listed in Table X’).
• 5-point likert scale questions – which was most positive – 1 or 5?
• You need to be careful with “20% of students downloaded podcasts” – you don’t know this. You can only say “20% of students claimed to have downloaded podcasts.” Also be careful of using the word significant when it’s not in relation to statistics. I’d say ‘A sizeable proportion’, or ‘the majority’.
• Also be careful of starting sentences with ‘It is noteworthy’ if you’re not prepared to say why it’s noteworthy
• 1-4 rankings on different educational methods – again, does 1 mean the best method, or 4?
• I think you’ve put some of your discussion in with your results e.g. “This indicates that the idea of using an iPod resonated strongly with the students” – I think this is more your commentary on the results and therefore fits in better with the discussion. There are a few examples of this in your paper. Results should just be a summary of the data and results of any analysis, no commentary.

More suggestions
• I’d incorporate the previous year’s results into a table beside this year’s ones, for direct (and easier) comparison. Also make it clear why you’re including the results from last year – to show that more students have access?
• iRiver Clix etc. – please add web references.
• In your conclusions, I’d avoid being trivial e.g. number of traffic accidents (which some of your readers may have tragic experience of), and students’ bank balances, which you could rephrase as ‘with students increasingly paying fees, it may not be realistic to expect all students to purchase iPods to support their learning’.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Minor Essential Revisions
-----------------------------------(such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

There is poor punctuation throughout, with full stops omitted at the end of sentences. Also ‘20 min’ should be ‘20 minutes’. There are also commas missing.

Use of figures - Some of the figures were difficult to view, possibly because of the way they were auto-converted into a PDF? However, I think seven figures is excessive. I would include figures 5, 6 and 7 only (maybe four screenshots in total?)

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Discretionary Revisions
-----------------------------------(which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major
compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests.