iPod as a Visitor’s Personal Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, use of mobile devices for various purposes has increased. Apple released its first iPod on October 23, 2001, a breakthrough MP3 player. Today, Apple’s fifth-generation iPod is available which can be considered as a portable media player that focuses on the playback of digital video, as well as storing and displaying pictures and video (see apple.com). Since then the iPod has been successfully and effectively used for various purposes including as a media player, bootable drive, external data storage device, PDA replacement, and for podcasting.

Academia and tourism are two areas where the use of mobile devices are encouraged to gain benefits from the technology. For academic use, the iPod’s recording and storage capabilities have been explored by some educational institutes across the United States. According to the Duke University iPod First-Year Experience Final Evaluation Report, the iPod supports individual learning preferences and needs, and easy-to-use tools for recording interviews, field notes, and small-group discussions. The tourism industry is also identified as a potential area to use mobile technologies. Recently, Dublin Tourism, Ireland discovered the use of the iPod as a portable tourist guide; Ireland’s neighbor Scotland followed (see Physorg, 2006).

Sales of interactive portable MP3 players have increased explosively in the last few years. Information Media Group predicts that sales will continue to increase at the rate of 45% for next six years (Macworld UK, 2005). The iPod is currently the world’s best-selling digital audio player and increased its popularity in Australia sevenfold in 2004 (see apple.com). Greg Joswiak, the worldwide vice president of iPod marketing, said: “As of August 2005, market share in Australia is 68% of [the] digital player market.”

With the increasing use of digital media together with the handheld devices, this iPod application will eliminate the need for human guides and will provide an entertaining experience to visitors. It will be very useful for landmark tourist destinations such as aquariums and museums, and there will be a huge demand with the increasing flow of tourists in Australia, which according to Tourism Australia (2005) was an increase of 5.4% from 2004 to 2005, with tourists numbering 5.5 million in the latter year.

BACKGROUND

Tourism is an important activity for human life as a source of pleasure and during the holidays. We visit various places every now and then, including tourist destinations such as a museum, commercial destinations such as a stock market, educational institutes such as a university, or public places such as a shopping mall.

Every new visitor suffers from preconceptions and anxiety from their lack of knowledge about the visiting site. This acts as a barrier and must be overcome before an effective visit can take place. As for visitors’ preconceptions, the authors of this article encourage visitors to address their anxiety and introduce excitement before they start the tour. The tourism industry so far has promoted the various communication mediums such as maps on the board, written information about specific locations, and now display video screens.

Tourism has been a popular area for mobile information systems (Cheverst, Davies, Mitchell, Friday, & Efstratiou, 2000) and other PDA-based systems. Audio and video has been neglected or underused as a leaning medium in recent years (Scottish Council for Educational Technology, 1994.). The general view is that video is a better tool for leaning than audio. Animation and interactive media like simulations can attract attention, but they proved to be expensive. Hearing is an astoundingy efficient skill according to Clark and Walsh (2004).

Portable media players such as PDAs and iPods can provide information anytime and anywhere. These devices come with their own hard drives and eliminate transportation of storage devices, which is a requirement for video communication. The iPod, with built-in speakers and microphone, makes it easier to record and playback information stored into its hard drive. Clark and Walsh (2004) stated that besides its popularity and ease of use, listening to an iPod and similar devices at public places is socially accepted.

At Box Hill Institute of TAFE, we realized the use of an iPod as a part of our “Innovation Walk” project. The “Innovation Walk” is developed with the aim of showcasing the institute’s prized innovations. Career teachers, overseas visitors, students, industry and government dignitaries, and member of the community can undertake the walk independently or as a guided tour.