

The Internet and Business English

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The technological revolution of the last decade has affected the way in which Business English is taught in a number of ways and on many different levels. It has influenced the content of a lesson – new vocabulary items, neologisms, activities in which students practise composing e-mails, etc., are more and more often integral parts of Business English (and General English) courses. It has also shaped the way we teach. With the rise of web-based training materials and CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) additional possible teaching tools have come into practice.

Without doubt, in this day and age any language teacher needs to be Internet-aware. The Internet increasingly dominates students' lives. It is also impossible not to see how dramatically the Internet has been changing the ways in which English can be taught and how it is changing the language itself. Barney Barrett and Pete Sharma, the authors of *The Internet and Business English*, stress the fact that in the last decade the use of computers in teaching has moved into the mainstream and analyse countless reasons for such a state of affairs – instantaneous access to an

inexhaustible range of language materials and the ability to communicate with other users around the world are among the most obvious ones. There is, indeed, a wide range of reasons why the Internet should be used in teaching. If we can use a text, video clip or audio-cassette, why not choose to incorporate the Internet into a course or lesson simply for variety? It can be used as part of face-to-face language lesson, as a stimulus for a self-study activity or as a means of communication between remote users.

The Net is also a valuable source of materials, as it allows teachers (and learners) to find a useful or relevant text from practically any area of knowledge. For many learners such authentic materials can be truly motivating. Besides, there is an issue of immediacy – materials from the Web can be really up-to-date. Many Business English learners frequently use the Internet in their private and professional lives – certain tasks can be replicated during language instruction. Appreciating the key role of the Internet in business today the authors claim that no Business English course can work without it.

Although the rationale for using the Internet in Business English is so obvious, there are still many teachers who do without this irreplaceable medium during their lessons. Indeed, using the Web effectively and efficiently to create motivating activities poses a major challenge, which combined with rapidly changing technologies, the constantly growing number of websites, and so many potential pitfalls discourage many a teacher from using it altogether. Let's face it: for many the Internet may be still too daunting to get to grips with. Fortunately, we have been given the Internet book which provides a truly comprehensive and practical introduction to the Internet for Business English teachers and introduces us step by step to the world of websites and browsers. It concentrates in particular on the use of the World Wide Web in Business English classroom teaching but can be also used for self-study. In fact, a number of ideas presented in the book can be applied to any general English course as well.

It does not focus on on-line teaching. The title is easy to work with not only for technology-savvy users but also for those completely inexperienced or relatively new to the field who either have a background in the business world or not. The book is available in a printed format, with support provided on the Internet. As websites are updated or changed with alarming frequency, information on such changes is given on the Summertown website (<http://www.summertown.co.uk>).

Barrett and Sharma start with a brief analysis of what in fact Business English is. By looking at its defining characteristics, the authors try to demonstrate how enormously helpful the Internet can be in designing a course.

The book is divided into three parts: The Internet, Practical Ideas and Reference. From the very start the reader is guided step by step, so that no problems arise and everything is clear.

Part 1 of the book, devoted to the basic concepts connected with the Internet, can in fact be skipped by more experienced teachers but it is indispensable for those who do not have a strong background in using technology and are relatively new to the field. It covers essential technical features and vocabulary, clarifies what the Internet really is and explains the key terms used in the book. For those who wish to explore the topics further, lists of useful websites are provided.

Next the authors concentrate on the World Wide Web, not only presenting different definitions and its history but also looking at how various aspects of Business English teaching can be practised through integrating the Web. The explanations are exhaustive and clear enough even for a complete layman to comprehend. To ensure successful presentation of the topic simple analogies are often made such as the one in which a website is compared to a book, made up of pages with the front page featuring some sort of contents list. The authors describe the design and usability of different websites and then go into details of using browsers, outlining reasons for the various technical choices concerning them. All step-by-step tips are accompanied by images of a computer screen with simple explanations provided accordingly, which will undoubtedly help avoid frustrating moments in front of the computer or fruitless search.

What follows is a presentation of some ways in which the World Wide Web can be used in language teaching in the classroom (on-line and off-line, presentations, projects, specific pre- and post-lesson tasks, etc.), in self-study using sites expressly created for language learning, and in "blended learning" allowing it to take place at a distance as well as in the classroom. Understanding that Business English teachers work in a variety of situations instructing groups or individual learners in-company, in a language school, or running seminars in a conference centre, the authors devote several pages of the book to the problems connected with incorporating the Internet into the course/lesson depending on the location and availability of computers.

Four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing are examined in connection with the Internet and the possibilities it offers. The Internet can be the "means" through which speaking takes place, such as during desktop video-conferencing or while making telephone calls. It also provides a variety of materials which can be used as a springboard for discussion. As far as listening is concerned, the Internet offers exposure to native speakers, presenting a range of accents and giving the learner an opportunity to be in charge of listening practice thanks to sliders and transcripts or related texts.

Yet another important aspect is that the Internet affords many opportunities for the study of grammar. There are countless sites which offer practice in discrete items of grammar, such as work on tenses, prepositions and conditional forms. The authors suggest a few websites offering grammar practice activities and a site answering students' questions about grammar. Finally, the Internet provides a rich environment for lexis exposure. Again, the URLs follow for specialised vocabulary, translation tools, collocations, and on-line dictionaries.

A large sphere that provides a wealth of useful material which can be used to work on the different skills and that should not be overlooked is Web radio and Web TV. Although because of their size there may arise a need to make certain technical compromises in order to deliver these files over the Web in some sort of useable form, one should not be discouraged from exploring these formats. Again, the authors provide us with useful tips on streaming, compression and connection speed as well as the best places to look for established radio stations and television channels.

As the book specifically focuses on the Business English learner, this section also analyses the way the World Wide Web can be helpful in teaching some core business skills such as giving presentations, attending meetings, negotiating, telephoning, or writing. It also looks at a range of elements which are features of many Business English courses (ESP, simulations, games, intercultural training, tests, examinations).

In the final section of Part 1, the Business English teacher will find an overview of the professional support available on the Internet. Up-to-date sites are suggested that can serve as an equivalent of reading *The Financial Times* or *The Economist* or watching business news programmes. Here we can also find sites offering a range of activities and downloadable Business English worksheets as well as supplementary web-based materials for course books. These are accompanied by sites with on-line Business English courses, journals and newsletters. Interestingly, the authors do not forget about less obvious ways of finding interesting things on the Web and advise teachers to keep their eyes peeled when looking through newspapers, magazines and other websites and not to neglect the value of word-of-mouth or e-mail. They suggest developing a habit for collecting useful-looking website and page URLs.

The main part of *The Internet and Business English* concentrates on practical ideas which can be implemented into lessons/courses. It starts with the realisation that many learners need help and guidance with Web skills. Before using the Web as part of a course, the teacher may feel it is necessary to introduce elements of learner training to enable the learners to use it effectively in their language training. Some practical ideas for helping learners become familiar with terminology and with using the Internet are given. Next, a range of practical teaching ideas follows in the form of 30 activities with clear description of the procedure complete with variations on the task. They cover different business areas and have a clearly defined aim, specified level and time. These are multi-level tasks – each task either incorporates the use of the Web, or has a Web-based theme. There is a bank of grammar practice activities, tasks designed for vocabulary enrichment but also activities simply practising business skills and fluency. A lot of them are supported by framework material and questionnaires (both included in the book and available on the Internet). The good thing is that the tasks and materials are flexible and can be easily adapted to different teaching situations.

Part 3 of the book, entitled "Reference" is a data bank divided into two sections, with section 1 relating to specialist areas such as insurance, finance or law. Within each subject area, the authors suggest key sites which are recommended for a number of reasons: as a source of articles which may be of interest to learners in that particular field; as a source of information to be used by these learners after they have finished their language course; and as a stimulus for practical tasks. Section 2, complete with a useful list of Web addresses for major companies, is designed to help teachers access sites which may prove helpful in their teaching.

Teachers wishing to incorporate the Internet into their teaching will find here a range of useful tips such as how to download images or plug-ins. There are some suggestions of how to read common types of websites in order to be able to navigate the information you want as quickly and smoothly as the website allows and technical advice for common problems. The final chapter presents two glossaries: a list of technical terms and a list of pedagogical terms (such as, for instance, 'blended learning').

Although *The Internet and Business English* is designed primarily for teachers, it can also be of use to pedagogical management such as Directors of Studies, Teacher Trainers and Heads of self-access centres. The book features a bank of teacher training ideas to help develop Business English teachers in the area of the Internet, and enable them to integrate the Web into their training programmes.