Business English

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ELECTRONICALLY SPEAKING...This column highlights the role CD-ROMs continue to play in a web-focused world, a role that is educational rather than simply informational. In contrast to web-based mega reference files, most of the titles here are aimed at a niche market of individual users who will spend hours with each disc, mastering a language, discovering new environments and cultures, or gearing up to go on the road (or into the woods).

BUSINESS ENGLISH: MEETINGS

Produced in Canada at the University of Victoria, BC. Business English: Meetings makes effective use of audio, video, and text to demonstrate vocabulary, idioms, and cultural behaviors used to communicate in the typical North American business meeting. Students learn by following a fictitious company that is considering a merger with a larger one.

The stage is set in a video clip that introduces seven characters (played by five actors) participating in a series of corporate meetings to discuss the merger. The text of their conversations displays in a window to the left of the video screen so students can read along as they listen to the dialog. Within the text, underlined words can be clicked on to get a pop-up box that shows a definition of the word and how it is used in context, and students can pause or rewind the video.

The live-action characters enunciate clearly but speak in slightly different dialects. For example, one character pronounces the word “process” as “prow-cress” and another character pronounces it as “proh-cress.” The use of differing dialects by the actors is a nice touch, illustrating the average workplace’s verbal diversity.

After the introduction, students can proceed to the first of seven “units”: “Opening a Meeting,” “Making a Presentation,” “Disagreeing,” “Interrupting.”

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“Persuading,” “Negotiating,” and “Closing a Meeting.” Within each, specific vocabulary and idioms are demonstrated. In addition, lessons cover other important elements of communication, e.g., body language, and how to use documents and graphs effectively.

The combination of audio, video, text, and interactive activities here will appeal to most learning styles. Each screen is designed simply and is fairly easy to use. There are some navigational points that could be a bit more intuitive: for instance, when you mouse-over the navigational and action icons, it would be helpful if a short description of what the button does appeared. A curved arrow icon I assumed took me back to the Main Menu (since it had done so twice), later turned out to function like a “back” button.

Another suggestion for future versions: it’s now necessary to click a “?” icon to see instructions on how to play learning games. In particular, the “scramble” word game was hard to figure out until I clicked on the question mark and some helpful step-by-step directions appeared. I’d prefer to see these instructions shown as soon as the screen opens, rather than having to hunt for them. Another little navigational change I’d make would be to make it possible to progress through the various “units” without having to go back to the main menu to start each (as you do now).

The promo literature for this product states the intended target audience is “non-native English speakers” who are at the intermediate level. While intermediate-level students will benefit from some of the exercises and activities, this disc will be most useful to advanced students of English. Even native English speakers may have to read the directions a few times for some of the more difficult lessons and their exercises.

The Bottom Line: Advanced non-native speakers of English will find Business English: Meetings remarkably helpful for learning and practicing business communication (frankly, the content covers how to behave professionally in business so well that native English speakers will benefit, too). Highly recommended for public, business, law, and academic libraries.—Elizabeth McKenzie, Access Svcs., Widener Lib., Harvard Univ.