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Business English

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DATABASE & DISC REVIEWS

EDITOR: CHERYL LaGUARDIA

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).

CD-ROM BUSINESS ENGLISH: MEETINGS

Encomium Pubns.
(800-234-4831;
info@encomium.com).
www.encomium.com
Windows 95+/PowerMac 7.5+. 2001.
Price: $95.

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 live 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 "praw-cess" and another character pronounces it as "proh-cess." 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," "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 McKeigue, Access Svcs., Widener Lib., Harvard Univ.*

CD-ROM THE DIGITAL FIELD TRIP TO THE DESERT

Digital Frog Intl.
(519-766-1097; info@digitalfrog.com).
www.digitalfrog.com
Windows 95,98/Mac. 2000.
ISBN 1-894682-23-8.
Price: $99.

The Digital Field Trip to the Desert uses Quick-Time Virtual Reality, color photographs, videos, text, and animation to educate users about the desert. The product is easy to load: place the disc in the drive, decide whether you want to put it on the computer hard drive or run it off the CD-ROM, and you're ready to go.

The initial page offers five options: The Field Trip (for visits to five desert areas in North America), Desert Types, Desert Study (organic and inorganic), Mechanisms of a Desert (environmental conditions and climate), and Human Impact. After taking some time exploring the digital desert, I returned to this screen to take the multimedia Quick Tour, which repeatedly piqued my interest to keep going back and trying a new path or option. It was astounding to "see" all the bells and whistles here.

I started with the Field Trip and clicked through a number of maps (of the world, North America, and California) before "arriving" at Death Valley. Once there, I found a spiral notebook labeled "field notes" along with a picture of Death Valley. Numbered "posts" at the screen bottom showed my progress through the section and my relative location on the terrain identified in the picture above.

Even better, I was able to explore this location virtually. The options to "Click and Drag to look around," "Shift to zoom in," and "Control to zoom out" allowed me to take a 360° view of the desolation of Death Valley. Wow! In the field notes were links for terms, such as "water deposition," which then took me to a screen with further details, such as an Introduction (definition) and links to additional related terms: wadis, alluvial fans, playas, and hardpans. Each term includes further details, with a picture of the described formation clearly labeled.

The disc is chock-full of other interesting tidbits, and the navigation is addictive. Navigational tools include options to move to maps, bring up contextual help, and find topics. I searched for "organism"

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LEGEND
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