

Business Territory 1

Business Territory 1 is a CD-ROM package based on a series of authentic video interviews at a Cambridge electronics company. It is a multimedia product, incorporating audio, video and text. I found the program easy to install and - as far as I can see - admirably free from glitches.

Video clips

The video clips are all of a reasonable length for pedagogical purposes, so that they do not require extensive ability to memorise what one has watched. The sound is of good quality, and the authentic accents can only be of benefit for learners of English. The video element is accessed by clicking on a face in the initial screen, which opens up a new screen with the same face attached to several "cards", each of which has a summary text on it, e.g. "Role Martin". Clicking on the card produces an audio question, and then, a trifle irritatingly, one has to click on the "play" button under the screen in order to view the video extract. If the student views the video clip twice, s/he can then have access to the text of the clip, which includes excellent links to hypertext dictionaries containing both lexical and cultural information, some of which is conveyed orally - a very good and original idea. A further, very minor irritant here: the two viewings must be consecutive; if the learner views the clip once and then goes to look at something else, this initial viewing is not remembered.

Tasks

This package distinguishes itself, firstly, by good, authentic video input, but also, secondly, by extensive exercises attached to the video sequences. Tasks include: gap-filling (quite demanding and really only possible after several viewings of the relevant video clip), role-plays, information-gathering and evaluation, oral presentations, groupwork and written work.

It should be added that the course is clearly designed to be used with a teacher in the background, which is not to say that it is useless for self-study. The gap-filling and text work can be done on one's own, but the remaining exercises require a teacher for part of the time.

A couple of complaints here. Firstly, a minor one: it is mildly irritating that one is forced to use the mouse to navigate within the texts; there is no obvious reason why the cursor or the page-up/page-down keys should not also be usable. Secondly, potentially a major irritant: users are not allowed to type wrong answers, all wrong input being greeted with a loud "peep" and a refusal by the machine to display the offending letter. This characteristic does not encourage people to do this particular exercise (gap-filling), nor does it function in a very communicative way, since, arguably, synonyms could easily be accepted and possibly commented on, a procedure which would make this exercise more enjoyable and less stressful. In my opinion, this could profitably be re-thought, even if the possibility of re-hearing the appropriate extract or skipping the item in question makes it possible to avoid becoming bogged down in a circle of wrong answers and rejections.

Support for teachers

Business Territory 1 contains a very useful database of materials of all sorts whose function is to support the teacher (called "Teacher's Territory"). This is a kind of electronic teacher's

book, and contains, for example, “Background information”, which includes a host of tips on how to get the best out of the package and even runs to pedagogical items such as “Teacher as facilitator”. Naturally, it also includes standard chapters such as transcripts of the video clips, but also a useful selection of task sheets and an excellent “Learning review” for the student to chart his/her progress.

Summary

While not technologically world-shattering, *Business Territory 1* is noteworthy because it seems to have actually been designed by teachers for teachers, and is well suited to use in the classroom. It is a well-assembled course, with a good range of tasks and use of resources.

I think the use of authentic language is a very good idea, since students are thus exposed to English as it is spoken in everyday life and the video clips are thus more authentic and more interesting than they would if they were acted. Indeed, this aspect of the package could probably be used outside the context of the course itself, e.g. in a course on communication skills. The authentic language should provide a good stimulus to ensuing authentic communication, and this is one of the main strengths of this course, that, unlike so many competing products, it aims to stimulate communicative activity.

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