

REVIEW OF *BUSINESS ENGLISH: MEETINGS*

Title	<i>Business English: Meetings</i>
Platform	Windows 95, 98, or NT Macintosh 7.5 +
Minimum Hardware Requirements	Windows: Pentium PC; Macintosh: Power PC processor; 16 MB RAM; 2x CD-ROM drive; Quicktime 3.x or higher; SVGA monitor (Windows)
Producer	English Language Centre, University of Victoria
Distributor	Encomium Publications 2637 Erie Avenue Suite 203 Cincinnati, OH 45208 USA 1-800-234-4831 info@encomium.com
Support offered	http://www.encomium.com/
Target language	English
Target Audience	Intermediate-level business English learners
Price	\$ 95.00 US
ISBN	4-900819-01-8

Reviewed by Pamela Couch, Boston University

Business English Meetings is a multimedia CD-ROM designed to introduce non-native English speakers to the language and culture of North American business meetings. Through the use of live-action video, still pictures, audio, and text, the program presents examples of effective oral and written business communication and provides opportunities for language practice.

The users follow the story of Victoria Springs Ltd., a fictional bottled water company considering a merger offer from a larger distributor. This plot unfolds in a series of video clips demonstrating the various language and cultural components of a business meeting. Each unit contains information on business vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, communication strategies, body language, and the use of documents and visual aids, as well as exercises that provide practice and test the language presented.

DESCRIPTION

Business English Meetings includes a general introduction and seven learning units: Opening a Meeting, Making a Presentation, Disagreeing, Interrupting, Persuading, Negotiating, and Closing a Meeting. Although users can start with any of these topics, the story line develops throughout the seven units; therefore, most users will find it beneficial to start with the first unit and progress in order. Each unit begins with a written overview of the meeting and a still picture that sets the scene for the video. Users can go directly to the video or click on various objects in the picture to get information on culture, functional language, visual aids, body language, and documentation. For example, in the introductory picture for Unit One, "Opening a Meeting," clicking on the water bottle brings up cultural notes on how a typical meeting agenda is organized, while clicking on the handshake calls up information on different forms of non-verbal communication often seen in business meetings.

In the Unit 1 video, you will watch the opening of a meeting. The meeting takes place in the boardroom at Victoria Springs Ltd., a company which sells and distributes bottled water.

Mr. John Townsend is the representative of a large distribution company, Avalon Co. Recently, Avalon made an offer to merge with Victoria Springs. Mr. Townsend has come to this meeting to explain the details of the merger offer to the managers of Victoria Springs: Mr. Carl Minski, Mr. Eric Park, Mr. Michael Lee, and Mrs. Mary Peterson. Mary Peterson is the chair for the meeting.

This video segment focuses on making introductions and beginning a business meeting. You will see casual, semi-formal, and formal introductions. You will hear phrases and

Opening a Meeting

Click on objects to view detailed description.

Crosswords Multiple Choice Fill in the Blanks

Refresh Stop Building Book Question Mark Camera

Figure 1. Opening a meeting: Introduction

Once the video icon is selected, users watch a three-minute scene illustrating the theme of the unit. The number of characters in the video clips varies according to the topic. For instance, Unit One, "Opening a Meeting," consists of five people, while Unit Six, "Negotiating," includes just two. The video clips are supported by text in several ways. Before the video begins, users can read about the context of the situation and a brief summary, as well as the language focus of the scene. Key vocabulary words are underlined, allowing users to click and read definitions. Once the video begins, users can read the script to the left of the video as it plays; they also have the choice of going to the glossary at any time to get a definition and hear a word pronounced in isolation.

Mary:
In this presentation, I'll give a short analysis of the proposed merger with Avalon. Everyone has a copy of the report highlights and final recommendations. You can use these to follow the order of the presentation and to make notes and write down any questions. We'll have discussion and questions at the end.

I'd like to start with a short summary of the situation to date, then we'll look at three action plans, and the pros and cons associated with them. I'll finish off with the subcommittee recommendations.

First of all, we must bear in mind that John Townsend's description of the merger proposal reflects Avalon's point of view. Nevertheless our own subcommittee's findings are equally optimistic, and, I think

Making a Presentation

Concentration Multiple Choice Scramble

Refresh Stop Building Book Question Mark Camera

Figure 2. Giving a Presentation: Video

Each unit includes three practice activities, which may be accessed at any point in the lesson. In Unit Five, for example, users can test their knowledge of "persuasion" language by filling in a crossword puzzle, doing a multiple choice listening activity, and playing a "golf game" that asks them to decide whether an expression is one of "expressing doubt" or "reassuring."

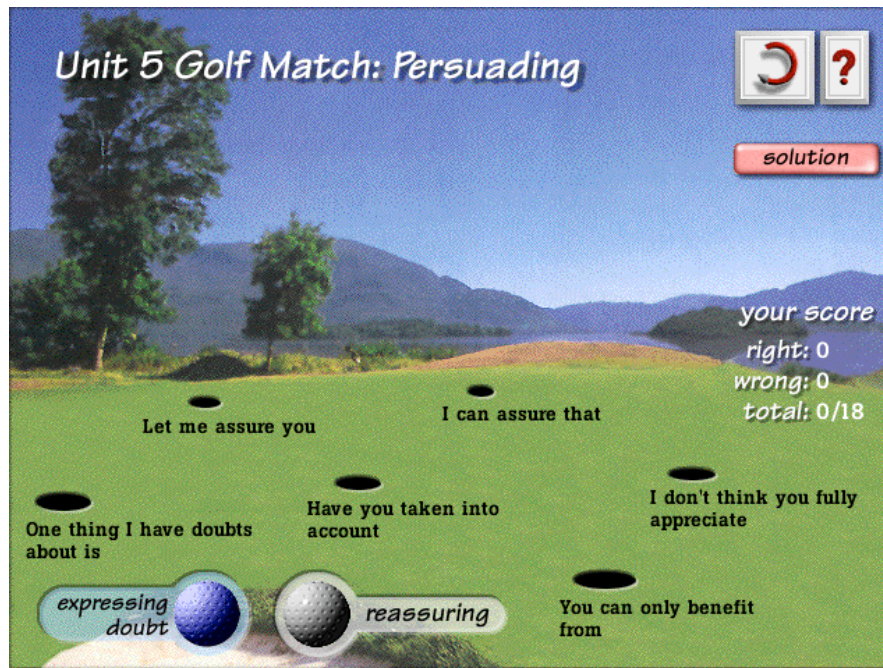


Figure 3. Persuading: "Golf Match" Activity

The program concludes with the final unit, "Closing a Meeting," in which Victoria Springs announces its decision on the merger proposal.

EVALUATION

Business English Meetings offers a wealth of language practice and cultural insights for non-native English speakers planning to conduct business with North Americans. The program includes many examples of functional language for business interactions, clearly differentiating between language for oral communication and for written documentation.

Language Usage and Variety

The program presents the functional language necessary to increase oral fluency and communicate more effectively in business situations. For instance, "Negotiating" includes a wide variety of expressions used to get a negotiation started, make an offer, make conditions, and reject or accept an offer. In addition, the language notes explain the importance of stating a condition in an optimistic manner to ensure a positive impact on the interaction, giving examples of both negative and positive ways to express the same idea.

The language presented is natural-sounding, full of commonly used expressions for business transactions. The users are presented with many alternatives for expressing their own ideas and their reactions to others' ideas. The accents of the speakers vary slightly, exposing users to different North American dialects without overwhelming them. Furthermore, the actors in the video exemplify the cultural and gender diversity found in most North American workplaces. The program includes examples of the small talk and informal exchanges that often take place at the beginning of an exchange. However, the emphasis is on the more formal aspects of business interactions, so the informal side of communication is touched on rather lightly. Although there are examples of friendly exchanges between colleagues and clients, the

program does not demonstrate purely social interactions, nor does it include the use of humor. (The next CD in the series, due out in 2004, will focus on social situations.)

Ease of Navigation

The navigation is simple and fairly intuitive. The language practice activities are clearly marked, and it is easy to control the video sequences. Users can choose which unit they wish to study and progress through the program in any order. Unfortunately, the program does not allow moving directly from one unit to the next; this change requires returning to the main menu.

One slight navigational difficulty can be found in the links to the supplemental material. I had trouble remembering the correspondence between some of the objects in the picture and the material connected to them. For example, a water bottle is seemingly unrelated to North American culture; the phone could just have easily been used. In addition, the introductory picture for each video is different, so it isn't immediately clear what kind of supplementary material is available in that unit. I would find it easier to access this material if the mouse-over function brought up a brief description, or if the notes were listed in a more conventional manner, such as a clearly-marked button.

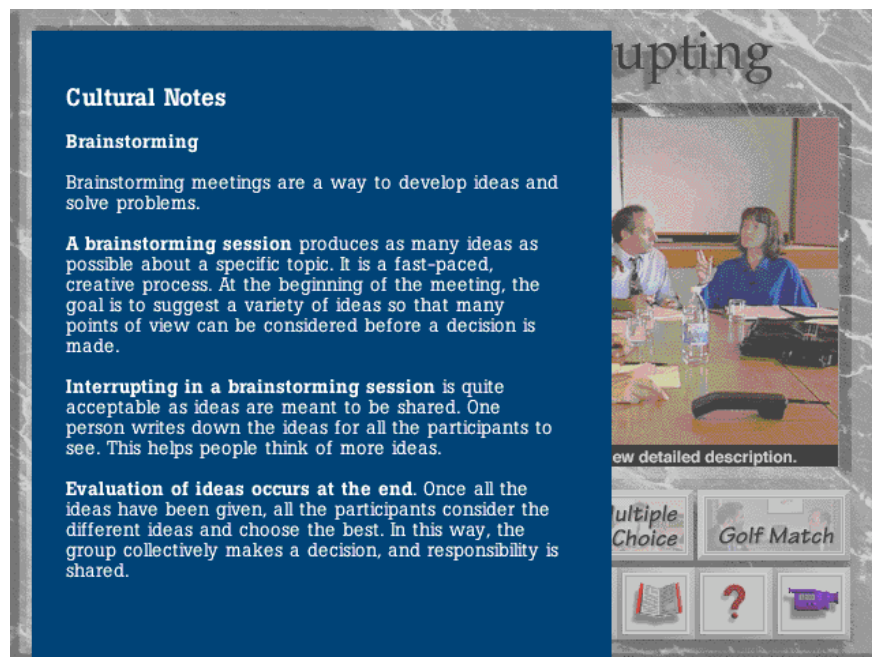


Figure 4. Interrupting: Cultural Notes

Another small suggestion I have for future versions is to provide users with the option of closing the script while watching the video. This would allow learners to listen without seeing the text, which some might find a distraction, especially upon repeated listening.

Usage

Business English Meetings can be used as self-study, in a multimedia laboratory, or in a business English classroom. The program offers many practice exercises to help learners develop listening comprehension and vocabulary, but does not offer direct practice in the productive skills of speaking and writing. Therefore, an instructor may wish to develop class activities such as role-plays and business writing assignments to help learners apply the content they have studied. One drawback to the program is that the supplemental materials cannot be printed from the screen. This would make it difficult for a teacher to incorporate the functional language into a class, as well as for a learner to study those expressions when away from the screen. The users to whom I showed the program wanted to hand copy the functional

language to practice it outside of the computer environment. A supplemental print package or downloadable PDF files would be a welcome addition to future versions.

The program is designed for intermediate-level learners of business English. Although the program would work best with this level, it would also lend itself to more advanced language learners who still need work on specific language for business interactions.

I showed the program to Asian graduate students in an international MBA. Although they are quite proficient in English, they were eager to look at the information on written documentation and learn the functional expressions, many of which were unfamiliar to them. They also liked the video sequences and the audio listening practice; the latter can be completed with or without textual support, which allows learners to adjust the level of difficulty.

Comparison

When searching for business English multimedia materials, teachers may want to compare *Business English: Meetings* to other programs that offer video listening and language practice activities. One such program is *Longman English Interactive, Level 4*, which is not targeted for business students but presents language in the context of a fictitious marketing campaign. *Longman English Interactive, Level 4* features a cast of young actors who depict characters at the beginning of their careers. Therefore, it may have a greater appeal for students who have not yet entered the job market. Furthermore, *Longman English Interactive* offers practice in a wide range of skills, with exercises on grammar, speaking, and writing as well as vocabulary, reading, and listening.

Business English: Meetings focuses on real-life situations faced by business people in North America. The actors in the story are appropriately cast in terms of age; in other words, they are people in their thirties and older, who might find themselves in this situation. Users follow the story of a potential merger and learn vocabulary and cultural information that will help them handle similar situations in their own business interactions. Although the program does not offer practice in all the skills, it provides a clear overview of business language and culture and will appeal to learners who want a focused approach to business English.

SUMMARY

Business English: Meetings is a good program for non-native English speakers who want to learn the communication strategies necessary for successful business interactions in North America. The program covers all aspects of communication: formal and informal spoken language, non-verbal communication, visual aids, and written documentation. It also provides the cultural information that underlies these interactions and is vitally important to communication. Although the program description states that *Business English: Meetings* is for intermediate-level English learners, more advanced learners will undoubtedly find it a valuable resource as well. This CD-ROM program is part of a series. The next CD, *North American Culture and Etiquette*, will be released in early 2004.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Pamela Couch teaches in the International Teaching Fellow Program at Boston University and the English for Foreign Students program at Boston College. She has taught Business English in Boston University's International Management Programs in Kobe, Japan, and Shanghai, China.

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