



The Success Of Macmillan Education's First Subscription Site

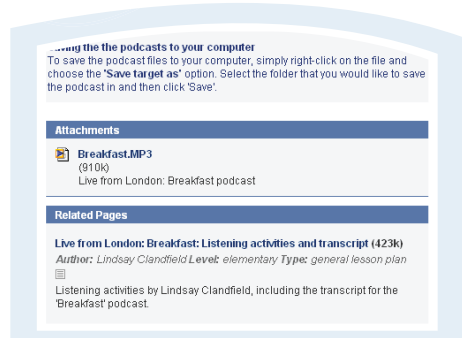


A worldwide community

Macmillan-owned onestopenglish.com is regarded as the world's number one resource site for teachers of English language. Set up by Macmillan Education in 2000, the site grew rapidly to attract, just six years later, more than 250,000 registrations from English language teachers looking for lesson plans and an ever expanding range of teaching aids.

In 2006 the site needed redevelopment and a more commercial footing, and hence the radical decision to move to a subscription model was taken. This maintained a free access level but introduced a paid "Staff Room" access level which gives subscribers access to premium content. The new site was developed by Abacus e-Media and is based on its Webstructure content management solution.

This was Macmillan's first foray into a subscription site for the education marketplace. According to onestopenglish.com publisher, Claire Pye: "Although we were going into completely unknown territory, we had the best possible start in that the onestopenglish community was both very strong and very active." Despite initial anxieties about the possibility of alienating the community, the move to a subscription model has been a great success. "We are experiencing more than substantial growth in the number of subscribers each year, and this is still going up. There are no signs that our growth is plateauing. The subscription model has enabled us to improve the quality of our resources – and the success of this can be measured by the fact that subscribers are now coming to us from ninety-three countries across the world."



Webstructure delivers

Some forty new resources are published by onestopenglish.com each month. Typically these will include two videos, ten interactive games, four news lessons at three different levels as well as specific material for young learners and business students. The onestopenglish database now contains more than 7,000 resources.

"We wanted a content management system that would be easy for editors to use, and in Webstructure we have exactly what we asked for. It's the ideal user friendly way for non-technical people to manage an extremely busy publishing environment. Three editors use it every single day to create new pages, whilst two additional members of the team use it to handle subscriptions and the Abacus Dispatch module (which is used to manage e-marketing activities)."

The second most trafficked area of the site for subscribers (after the home page) is the search facility. The 'filtered search' function, developed by Abacus, allows users to search very specifically against such criteria as age of the students, their level, and the type of lesson which is required. The search encompasses not only the text on the web site, but also all that contained within the huge number of PDF files on the site.

📌 Polls and surveys for user feedback

onestopenglish.com uses the Inform module from Abacus to conduct polls and surveys amongst their users, which have proved to be extremely informative. The number of responses to the user-wide surveys has been very high, and the reaction to the subscription model web site has been equally encouraging. For example:

“I am an EFL/ESL teacher and have been a proud user of this great website for several years now ... The latest addition in the form of a dictionary couldn't have been more timely and welcome for us teachers caught up in the thick of a busy classroom.”

“I'm just writing to tell you all how I love this site. I teach in a public school in Brazil and everything here is very helpful.”
Teacher, Brazil

“The Guardian news lessons – these are fantastic.” Teacher, USA

“The teaching materials are attractive but also pedagogically sound and graded appropriately. This means they can be used without modification.” Teacher, China

“So far my experience with Onestopenglish has been great. I have had great customer service. A human got straight back to me about my query. Thank you!” Teacher, UK

A further survey of all users will be carried out shortly which will also include questions about Web 2.0 features and other new technologies.

Inform is used to run regular surveys from the site, often to help other divisions of Macmillan with research into their course-book publishing. One such survey sought feedback on a new teacher training book and another focused on a book for teachers of adult beginners. Claire Pye: “Inform provides us with a really easy to use tool for both major surveys and smaller, more regular polls. We can carry out very specific research using Inform, and the responses are of an extremely high quality.”

📌 Expanding the subscription options

Responses to the first user survey prompted Macmillan to ask Abacus to develop an ‘institutional subscription’ option.

Stephen Cave of Abacus commented: “We wanted to ensure that even though the institution would be paying for the subscription that the users still had exactly the same access to all of the services available to individual subscribers. We had to find a way to allow users covered by an institutional subscription to be able to sign up for email alerts and contribute to the forums. We also had to provide onestopenglish.com with the ability to add and manage the institutional subscriptions both for the first-time and renewals.”

The subscription option was introduced in September 2007 and is open to teaching institutions who want to offer access to a minimum of five users. Payment is made by invoice, rather than online as is the case with individual subscribers.

A new ‘PrePay’ option was introduced in August 2008. Claire Pye: “This allows us to sell onestopenglish via distributors and is proving to be very popular in those countries where credit cards are not widely used, for example Mexico.” PrePay works in exactly the same way as a prepay phone card.

A further major development by Abacus has seen the introduction of automatic credit card renewal, which has been a “fantastic success for us. We send our subscribers an email saying that we will renew their subscription the following month, and providing



them with details of how to opt out of this. Our percentage rate for renewals is extremely high, and the automatic credit card renewal option has further strengthened this.”

The challenge here was to make the system as transparent as possible to users, whilst maintaining the commercial objectives of improving renewal rates. Stephen Cave, Abacus: “We worked hard on a number of timed automated emails which advise users that money will be taken from their credit card prior to the payment going through. We also have to deal with the submission of payments to the BIBIT payment system and automatically manage the exceptions (non payments, etc) as well as providing reporting to onestopenglish.com management.”

