



Webstructure.NET for
Macmillan's onestopenglish.com

The brief

- To improve the speed, efficiency and flexibility of managing the site's content
- To improve navigation and searchability
- To incorporate Web 2.0 features and functionality such as ratings, a better forum and external feeds
- To update the design

Following an initial remit to refresh the onestopenglish.com site with a new look and feel, the decision to undertake a major overhaul and move to the new Abacus Webstructure.NET content management platform has met with unqualified approval from the 750,000 registered users, the editorial team and the owners, Macmillan.



Lucy Williams,
Commissioning
Editor for
onestopenglish.com

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Vast resources, small team

Onestopenglish.com provides essential, everyday teaching resources – including lesson plans, videos, audio files, flashcards and in-depth articles – to some 750,000 English language teachers in more than two hundred countries worldwide. The site contains a bank of over 8,000 downloadable teaching resources which is added to every single week of the year. Each month up to twenty-five new resources are added. This vibrant community and vital teaching resource, the largest of its kind in the world and regarded as a ‘jewel in the crown’ by owners Macmillan, is serviced by a very small team, consisting of two editorial staff, two marketing staff and one customer service administrator in-house. Making their task not only possible but also as slick and efficient as possible is the latest version of Abacus e-Media’s content management system, Webstructure.NET.

Lucy Williams, Commissioning Editor for onestopenglish.com, and her colleague Giulia Merlo, gave an overview of just some of the tasks involved with running the site: commissioning new material and working with authors, uploading new material, carrying out user-wide surveys, marketing the site’s resources across the globe, not to mention responding to the often very vocal requests of users. Lucy Williams: “We really are a small team for the amount of material we produce and for the number of subscribers we have.”

After taking the radical step in 2006 of moving to a subscription model for the site, the number of subscribers and registered users has continued to grow. Giulia Merlo points out that users of onestopenglish.com come from a wide range of teaching backgrounds: “from trainee teachers, who are currently studying for their TEFL qualifications, to a significant number of English language teachers with more than ten years’ experience”.



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Lucy Williams

The makeover option

Four years after the last major change to the site in 2006 the time had come for a redesign. A more modern look and feel was needed. Or at least that was the start of the plan. Numerous relatively small developments had been completed which over the years had tended to make Webstructure an increasingly ‘bespoke’ solution for onestopenglish.com. However, it was the need to dramatically improve the navigation and searchability of the site which had become of paramount importance. Lucy Williams: “Our users were telling us that it was becoming difficult to locate exactly what they wanted amongst the growing mountains of available content. We also wanted to incorporate some Web 2.0 features, allowing us to introduce a commenting and rating system for articles and a better forum, together with additional RSS and other feeds which our users could subscribe to. Achieving these aims would enable us to continue to attract more subscribers.

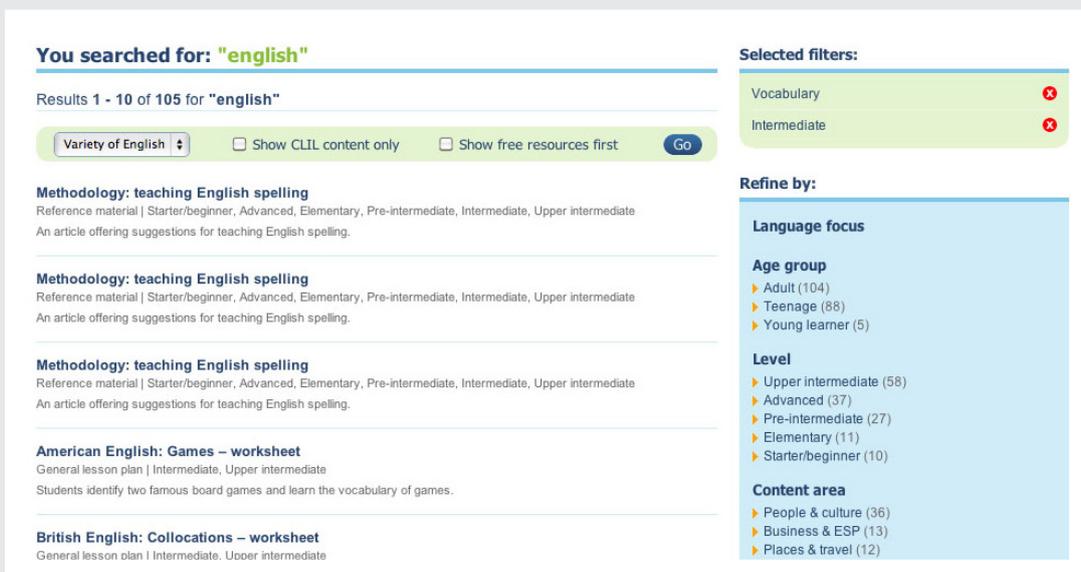
And as well as thinking about the needs of our users, we also needed to focus on our work as editors. We spend a lot of time uploading new content; anything that could make this process faster and more efficient would be invaluable.”

With the original version of Webstructure almost “bursting at the seams” the onestopenglish.com team was delighted in the spring of 2010 when Macmillan confirmed they would endorse and invest in the new version of the Abacus content management system, Webstructure.NET. Lucy Williams: “We now had to gear ourselves up for a major redevelopment project and a launch timescale of just six months.”

The .NET project

Webstructure.NET brings together Abacus’ experience in working both for the public sector and for major publishing groups. An intelligent editing experience combines with a flexible and dynamic

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The screenshot shows a search results page for the keyword "english". At the top, it says "You searched for: 'english'" and "Results 1 - 10 of 105 for 'english'". Below this is a filter bar with a dropdown menu set to "Variety of English", checkboxes for "Show CLIL content only" and "Show free resources first", and a "Go" button. The main content area lists several search results, each with a methodology and a brief description. On the right side, there are two panels: "Selected filters:" which shows "Vocabulary" and "Intermediate" with red 'x' icons to remove them, and "Refine by:" which includes sections for "Language focus", "Age group" (with options: Adult (104), Teenage (88), Young learner (5)), "Level" (with options: Upper intermediate (58), Advanced (37), Pre-intermediate (27), Elementary (11), Starter/beginner (10)), and "Content area" (with options: People & culture (36), Business & ESP (13), Places & travel (12)).

website framework which allows page layout and the creation of new sections to be undertaken both quickly and easily. The unique ‘SPIN’ technology supports innovative drag and drop functionality.

A tight-knit project team, comprising Lucy Williams and her technical project manager worked with a project director and project manager from Abacus. Weekly update meetings were held and a powerful online issue tracking system “worked really well for us”, said Lucy Williams. “We gather feedback from our users on an ongoing basis and we were confident – given their strongly expressed views – of what we had to deliver.” In the last few weeks of the project, together with some in-house resources, an external testing company was employed to put the new site through its paces.

The old site had featured twenty one different categories in the left-hand navigation bar. With the decision to move to top navigation and mega drop-down menus, the number of top level categories had to be significantly reduced. This became the task of Lucy Williams, who successfully created just twelve categories, which are “pedagogically

more sound and much easier to navigate, opening up the wealth of content available in each section.” The mega drop-down radically increases the ease with which users can browse the structure of the site, and makes more than five hundred items available to users without having to navigate to another page.

The new navigation structure was implemented on the old site – giving users a chance to become accustomed to it – before the ‘switch-over’ to the new site on 16th November 2010.

Lucy Williams: “The project went extremely well and we were very pleased with the performance of the Abacus team throughout. We did a lot of work with our users to prepare them for the changes and the reaction has been almost unanimously positive.”

Assessing the change

Lucy Williams: “There are numerous relatively little things which make a real difference to the team’s everyday work. For example, the

pre-programmed categories feature in .NET allows new categories and the requisite metadata to be added much more quickly than was previously the case.”

The new web analytics tracks content far better than previously whilst search engine optimisation (SEO) is also much improved both from the point of view of onestopenglish.com staff and its users.

Enterprise searching, using SOLR which offers faceted filtering, has proved enormously popular in a site containing so many resources. Users are able to filter materials progressively, seeing at a glance how many resources there are for each category, content focus, age group and level, whilst also giving them the choice to browse the whole site.

A measure of the success of the redevelopment is that the subscription rate has increased since this process was made easier. Already, far more people are using the new search facility and they are searching and exploring the site for longer than they used to – even in the notoriously quiet period at the end of the year.

Conclusion

- Faster, easier and more efficient content management for onestopenglish.com editorial team
- New and improved search function
- Vibrant new design with completely new navigation system
- Easier subscription system leading to increased number of subscribers

The SPIN function in Webstructure.NET has “made a big difference and has resulted in those items with the SPIN functionality attached to them becoming the most popular and most shared on our site. The homepage is now much more flexible and works far better for everyone.”

Exploiting the power of Web 2.0 has enabled the creation of a brand new forum which is more intuitive, making it easier for users to exchange opinions and tips.

Unlimited potential

There is a long list of forthcoming projects for onestopenglish.com – now armed with the power and flexibility of Webstructure.NET, the possibilities for exploitation are seemingly endless.

Lucy Williams: “Webstructure.NET provides us with a wealth of new functionality and flexibility. I can already see there is lots of opportunity to change the way that we do things to really capitalise on the strengths that the system provides both to us and to our users. Now we can do exactly what we want.”

Working with



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