

Global Perspective



On-Demand English Communication Training Enables the Global Work Force

By Deepak Desai, GlobalEnglish Corporation

Technology has led business to an unprecedented era of instant communication and constant connectivity with a global reach – creating both a challenge and an opportunity for HR leaders who need to develop a global work force.

Globalization has revolutionized the way companies do business today. The global marketplace is always “on,” demanding 24/7 productivity and connectivity. For multinational corporations with project teams and customers in every corner of the world, seamless communication and common understanding are not nice-to-haves; they are fundamental, strategic business imperatives.

A Common Language, An Urgent Need

English has become the *lingua franca* of global business communication. Twenty-five percent of the world’s population speaks English; it’s the official language of more than 50 countries. English dominates the global media, cultural, and economic landscapes, as well as cyberspace – where, according to linguist and researcher David Graddol – 80 percent of the world’s electronically stored information is in English.

At multinational corporations, non-native speakers from different countries rely on English to speak with one another. In a sense, these speakers now *own* the language – the UN reports there are more people speaking English as a second language (ESL) than as a first. According to the British Council, one billion people worldwide are studying ESL today; by 2016, they predict that number will double, approaching nearly one third of the planet’s population.

Employees worldwide are feeling the impact. In a recent GlobalEnglish survey, 91 percent of employees in global corporations said that English is critical or important for their current jobs, and 89 percent indicated they are more likely to advance in their organizations if they can communicate in English. The need extends far beyond basic vocabulary and grammar; today’s workers must also become experts in soft skills. Negotiation, presentation, empathy, problem solving, and the ability to collaborate effectively with others around the world all require a common language and cultural mastery to be effective.

But while the reliance on English continues to grow, the number of employees who feel their English skills are adequate is decreasing, with only nine percent of global employees believing their current English skills are sufficient to do their jobs. Moreover, 75 percent say they need to improve these skills within the next year to remain competitive. The McKinsey Global Institute reports that only 13 percent of university graduates from low-wage countries are suitable for employment in multinational companies; the number one reason cited is lack of English skills. There is an immediate, worldwide need for improved English proficiency, and companies will not succeed in the global marketplace unless they address this challenge head-on and quickly.

Out of the Classroom, into the Workplace

Though many companies have historically provided language training for their employees, the traditional classroom setting is neither efficient nor effective in the 21st century business world, where corporations need to develop the English communication skills of employees around the world simultaneously. Forward-thinking HR professionals are capitalizing on technology and its resulting *democratization of learning* to address this critical need by enabling their employees to improve business English communication skills online.

Classroom training models are typically limited in curricular scope, disruptive to the work process, and not conducive to proactive, self-directed study. Budget considerations often limit the number of people who can be trained, and there are few options for customization of content to suit individual needs. In contrast, e-learning

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offers the flexibility, accessibility, and affordability required to address the needs of business English learners spanning a wide range of geographical locations, job situations and skill levels.

Technology Advances the Success of Mass English Learning

Online solutions provide personalized learning that is matched to the user's specific competency and pace of understanding. This is particularly important in business English learning. English is a complex language full of idiomatic expressions, rhetorical devices, and other nuances that can be difficult for non-native speakers to assimilate. Its vocabulary is more extensive than that of any other language in the world – the Global Language Monitor predicts English will reach its millionth word this year. With online English learning, users can progress at their own pace and focus on content that is most relevant to them, which optimizes their motivation and learning. Additionally, language acquisition is not a linear process; it is a recursive process that requires recycling and repetition. An online solution is ideally suited to giving users multiple exposures to new material to help them better assimilate the language.

And the bar for business English proficiency continues to get higher over time; today, an employee might need basic English skills to work on a global team or assist an English-speaking customer. As that same employee advances through the organization, he will likely need to develop more sophisticated skills to enable him to actively participate in business conversations, facilitate meetings, or handle sensitive matters with confidence. The flexibility afforded by a personalized, online learning approach ensures the most rapid progression possible, while maintaining standardization to allow for meaningful assessment of results.

Perhaps most importantly, online training allows learning to take place within the workplace as needs arise, rather than outside the work environment. This effectively shifts learning from a discrete, disconnected event to an ongoing,

integrated process. Online learners have ready access to on-the-job support, reference tools, and feedback mechanisms so they can get help when they are using English on the job. Further, user-directed learning allows for optimal utilization of one of the most valuable commodities in today's on-demand workplace – time. In a traditional classroom setting, where teachers do most of the talking and interactive time must be shared with other learners, a student might get three to five minutes of English language production time per hour-long class. An e-learning solution offers unlimited opportunities to practice speaking, and learners can jump right to the content they need, bypassing material that might be redundant, inappropriate or not relevant for them.

An online solution for developing business English communication skills is effective for learners and also meets the bottom-line needs of organizations by providing a solution that is implementable on-demand, scalable to meet the needs of a rapidly growing work force, and cost effective to implement and maintain. And in today's real-time, non-stop, competitive global marketplace, that's a language we can all understand.

About the Author



Deepak Desai is the president and CEO of GlobalEnglish Corporation, a provider of online learning and support for improving business English communication in global companies. Desai has over 20 years of financial and operating experience, most notably with Time Warner Inc., where he spent 12 years in senior financial positions in New York and Asia. From 1995 to 1999, he served as general manager and CFO for Time Life Asia, managing the children's education, ESL, and direct marketing businesses. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Commerce from the University of Bombay and an M.B.A. from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania.

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