Greg Kessler's

Technology

Breaking News English

In a recent issue I discussed podcasting. This popular technology allows teachers and students to share and/or access a wide variety of audio and video materials that can be used for language learning. Podcasts may come from traditional news outlets, and ESL publisher, or even the teacher down the hall. One unique quality of podcasting is that it allows users to save the audio or video file so that it can be distributed through any number of methods. It does not require an active internet connection if the file has already been downloaded. Teachers can make these files available to students through email, a USB drive, a CD ROM, a server, a course management system or even a floppy disk. Apple's free iTunes software (www.itunes.com) is probably the best podcasting software to use for both Mac and Windows. It has an organized collection of podcasts that can be searched or browsed.

One of the most exciting new ESL/EFL web-based resources that include podcasting is BreakingNewsEnglish.com. This unique site offers much more than a collection of audio recordings. It is rather an entire series of news related content and instruction that teachers can take directly to the classroom for interesting and varied exploration of current events.

Breaking News English – Apple iTunes sees billionth download (Feb 27, 2006)

http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0602/060227-itunes.html

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Apple iTunes sees billionth download

An American teenager made a little _____ of music history yesterday when he downloaded the billionth song from the Apple iTunes music store. The _____ 16-year-old spent 99 cents to purchase a digital version of *Speed of Sound* by British _____ Coldplay. The track's title seems an appropriate _____ of the breathless pace at which innovations in the industry are moving. Apple's online store has only been in _____ for three years and to sell a billion songs in that time is nothing _____ of phenomenal. At the turn of the millennium, _____ a soul would have known what an mp3 was and iPods were yet to make their ubiquitous mark on digital culture. By _____, sales of more traditional formats such as CDs have halved in many parts of the world.

operation
barely
unsuspecting
short
piece
reminder
contrast
rockers

The teenage record maker, Alex Ostrovsky from Michigan, _____ a bag of digital goodies to mark the milestone. A representative from Apple _____ Alex in the _____ hours of the morning to congratulate him and tell him he was soon to receive an iMac computer, 10 iPods and a $10,000 gift card for the iTunes store. He initially _____ it was a prankster and was about to give him a piece of his mind. Alex said: "I was really _____. I didn't even know there was a competition. But the guy knew the details of my mum's credit card." Apple CEO Steve Jobs was _____ happy. He said the billionth download represented "a major _____ against music piracy and the future of music distribution as we _____ from CDs to the Internet".

skeptical
phoned
force
presumed
move
scored
equally
wee

I have always been a fan of using current events for instruction, but this has meant that I had to create everything from scratch with each lesson. I did so for a long time using resources such as National Public Radio broadcasts and student subscriptions to Newsweek magazine. However, these approaches meant that I had to spend a lot of time preparing materials to accompany the content each day. The only alternative was to rely upon current events that were already out of date.

As the author (Sean Banville) states on the site: "All of these current events and business English lesson plans contain a news article, listening (MP3 file), podcast, communication activities, pair work, discussion, reading and vocabulary exercises. Classroom handouts are reproducible in Word and PDF."

It is particularly nice to see a site like this that provides instructional materials through the internet, but does not require all students to have access to the internet in order to use them. This combination may be ideal for a number of teachers who do not have computer labs available. It is worthwhile to also mention that Breaking News English.com is free and provides a new topic every couple of days. Each lesson is available in two levels of difficulty: easier and harder. Topics cover a wide range of interest.

Some recent topics include:

2006-02-25: Iraq undergoes biggest unrest in two years
2006-02-23: US Supreme Court OKs drug tea
2006-02-21: Retirement age may be extended to 85
2006-02-19: World's first spaceport announced
2006-02-16: Workers in microchip implant trial
2006-02-13: Denmark recalls diplomats over cartoons
2006-02-11: Britney Spears admits baby driving mistake
2006-02-09: Britain's sick day culture
2006-02-06: Americans spending at record rates
2006-02-03: Obesity could be catching
2006-01-31: A rocky road ahead for Hamas
2006-01-26: London whale died from dehydration
2006-01-22: Amazon tribe passes geometry test
2006-01-21: Osama bin Laden calls for a truce

While one of the most exciting aspects of this resource is that topics are up to the minute, it is also beneficial that archived topics are available.

The podcasts associated with BreakingNewsEnglish are also downloadable by themselves and can be scheduled using an rss (Really Simple Syndication) feed. This technology allows users to schedule updates of podcasts, weblogs and news sites (among other things) to be automatically downloaded and/or updated according to a schedule.

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