



◀ Speak2Me Inc., a subsidiary of Lingo Media Corporation is designing software for the sponsoring agency of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, specifically for testing and training its 80,000 volunteers.

当前位置: 首页 >> 英语测评 >> About the Expo(关于世博)



Just as with the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the sponsoring agency of 2010 Shanghai World Expo is eager to acquire training services from European or American companies. Lingo Media, headquartered in Toronto was chosen as a testing and training provider. Lingo Media will design English education software specifically for assessing 80,000 volunteers, who are then to be trained to speak fluent English to not only introduce Shanghai Expo facilities but also to meet and greet the 20 million foreign visitors who are expected.

Michael Kraft, President & CEO of Lingo Media said: "The largest problem for Chinese English speakers is insufficient practice. Chinese teachers have limited spoken English skills and Chinese learners lack the confidence to speak to foreigners. We introduced www.Speak2Me.cn to China, a scalable test practice platform with free real-time interactive lessons, making spoken English learning more interesting for the young generation".

Mr. Kraft hopes the young netizens learning English on Spea2Me's free online service will attract corporate advertisers to sponsor and embed their ads within the lessons. His team will develop interactive English lessons focused on different subjects to attract young professionals working in governments and large corporations. The above initiatives target the US\$4 billion per year market for English training in China.

Volunteers for Shanghai World Expo Are Learning English

Special Training by a Canadian Company



▶ Michael Kraft's years of experience in publishing English textbooks in Mainland China along with the strong support from China's leading state-owned education publisher, People's Education Press, are all favorable conditions for Lingo Media.



- I have been single for a long time.
- What a coincidence! Me too.
- Are you traveling to Shanghai?
- Yes, I'm going to visit the Shanghai World Expo.

The above situation is two people meeting each other on the street. But now the beautiful girl one talks with is a virtual character on the computer. The Mingpao reporter, Michael Li, after talking with "the beautiful girl" finds it quite similar to a real life situation. "She" answers quickly with clear pronunciation via the computer.

With 70 million tourists estimated to visit Shanghai for the World Expo, 20 million foreigners are expected, who cannot speak Chinese. During the Expo, 80,000 volunteers are needed as interpreters to show visitors around the Expo and answer foreigners' questions. Because of the large numbers of foreign tourists, the volunteers' spoken English level has to be fluent to communicate. The Shanghai Expo Organizing Committee will cooperate with Speak2Me and its local partner, Windream Inc., to provide an on-line testing platform. Volunteers will be selected through a customized test. The most interesting parts of this assessment platform are its utility and diversity. The Organizing Committee will select 80,000 from more than 200,000 expected applicants to receive special English training. Speak2Me is designing some interactive courses, targeting the daily work of volunteers, such as visitors asking for directions to the Expo and about restaurants. The courses will also teach volunteers to answer questions regarding China's politics, economy and culture.

Such topics including, locations of the Yangtze River and the Yellow River, key points about China's dynasties even Chinese contemporary socialism, theories of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping about economic developments, will all be addressed. This Expo specific software will even teach volunteers how to respond to the sensitive topics. It's important to note that this Expo software will also be offered to government officials, taxi drivers, policemen and emergency service staff, who will use it to prepare for the Expo.

Speak2Me for example created a virtual tour for the launch of Mercedes Benz smart car, where users can chat with hosts and hostesses from various countries with local accents and learn about different cities.

Scenario Simulation, Learn English for Free

300 million Chinese are now learning English, and large numbers of them are young professionals.

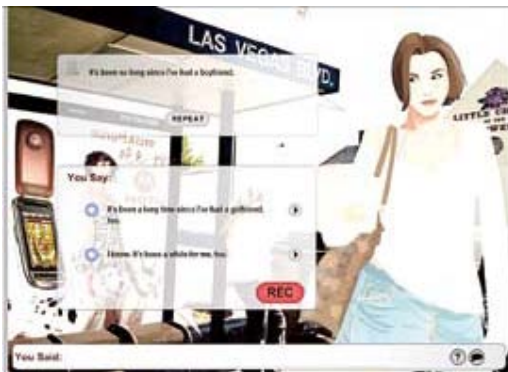


In order to address Chinese young professionals' pronunciation and lack of confidence, Michael Kraft and his team developed the first online scalable communicating platform to combine speech recognition and animated avatars to help users improve their spoken English through actual conversations with virtual avatars.

Many other English courses charge hundreds to thousands of dollars for live training with an instructor. Moreover, it requires students to schedule time with trainers, which is not inconvenient. Students also find it boring to buy CDs and listen to them on their own.

To meet the market need, Lingo Media established an online service, Speak2Me (www.speak2me.cn), where users can select from more than 350 lessons that meet their own interests and match their capabilities. Every registered user can directly communicate with virtual characters, with programs designed to repeat, to recognize pronunciation mistakes and to take quizzes. In addition, the users can make friends through the online platform as they do with Facebook, and they share learning experiences; even win prizes after the quizzes. According to Michael Kraft, Speak2Me is a unique on-line English test practice platform.

► Do you have a boyfriend? One needs proficient English to go on a date with foreign girls. Now students can first practice their dating English on Speak2Me.



► At a simulated dancing party with friends, one can see popular stars and telephone advertisements in this interactive lesson.



After using Speak2Me, many university and college students said they enjoyed the direct communication based on actual situations. For example, traveling, asking for directions, even asking a girl out. Michael Kraft commented, interactive lessons are great for interactive advertisements. We introduced Conversational Advertising™ in the interactive courses by offering companies an opportunity to embed ads in dialogues and settings. For example, students can visit a mobile cell phone store and interact with the sales person and learn about Motorola's new phone, or meet a tour guide in beautiful cities around the world sponsored by Mercedes Benz smart car. This not only attracts users, but also provides sponsorship revenues for Speak2Me's free-to-consumer platform. Michael Kraft admits that this online platform has required millions of dollars of investment, but it has not yet generated significant revenue during the initial phase according to Lingo Media's third quarter report.

Large Potential in Mainland China

Michael Kraft confirmed that Mainland China's English training market has great potential. University and college students are the entry point for Speak2Me into China's market. According to market research, nearly 70% of the 18-35 year old category are young professionals, which represent the largest market segment for Speak2Me.

There are 3 million university graduates in China every year, among them, less than 10% are able to find jobs in foreign companies. The reason is their poor English. We realize that college graduates are eager to learn English, as they want to get better jobs or want to work for large multinational companies. Moreover, according to China's Human Resources Network, employees with advanced English level will earn a salary 72.5% more than those with a beginner or intermediate level. In order to secure a better salary or future, they are willing to spend money and time to improve their English language competence.

At the same time, Michael Kraft thinks Canadian English has advantages in the English training market. The Chinese are prepared to work with a Canadian company like Lingo Media to help improve spoken English. One of the reasons is that Canadians do not have strong accents such as the Americans, Australians or British. The students can listen to and simulate the Canadian accents in an easy and clear way and the Canadian accents are neutral.

English is an international language in business. In order to help users practice English with different accents, Speak2Me also designed English lessons with Italian or French accents. This will enable users to recognize the different English accents and prepare for actual real life communication.

The annual English training market is estimated to be US \$4 billion, and the internet market on the mainland of China is rapidly developing (338 million Netizens in China surpassing 223 million in the US), so training English via an internet platform like Speak2Me, is a prevailing trend. Now the training market has different skill focuses, some emphasizing words, some stressing writing. But oral communication is the key market need. A person communicating with foreigners in English can apply the vocabulary one learned for years from studying from textbooks.

Chinese Lacking Confidence in Speaking English

Michael Kraft thinks that the largest issue for Chinese to learn English is their lack of confidence and no opportunities for them to practice speaking. Chinese students all work hard on learning English, being able to read books in English, using a dictionary, watching television programs in English and writing English. They are excellent in vocabulary, in reading and in writing. But they do not have enough opportunities to communicate, so they have disadvantages in accents and pronunciation. The problem is that the Chinese lack confidence in speaking English and they fear being embarrassed and losing face.



◀ Lingo Media started off by publishing textbooks, now it has developed an online spoken English platform.

▶ Besides the free online English learning platform - Speak2Me, Lingo Media under Parlo is designing special courses for professional applications. For example, Parlo is designing English training courses for China Southern Airlines for its flight attendants, focusing on serving international passengers.



China has a very large English training market, and demand for spoken English training exceeds the supply of English speaking teachers and trainers. Due to severe shortage of English speakers, Chinese students have no one to practice their English with and limited real life communicating experience.

Even during English courses, most Chinese teachers speak Chinese when they teach English and what they teach is words rather than real life situations or dialogues. In cases where the teacher does not have standard pronunciation and fluent English, the students cannot learn colloquial English.

The large number of students in each class is another problem. In our experience, learning English requires 30 minutes of practice every day. When students only have a few minutes, how are they going to improve their English?