



Educational Testing Service

The Measure of Success in the Global Marketplace: Designing a language profile

As companies become increasingly global, there is a growing need for a common language in which to conduct business. Today, that common language is English. Some companies address this need through internal language training units. Others simply seek to hire the most proficient English speakers without committing themselves to in-house training. Regardless of which approach is used, more and more companies are relying on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC®).

For more than 25 years, TOEIC has been used to measure the ability of nonnative English-speaking people to use English in everyday work activities. With more than 3,4 million test takers last year, the TOEIC test is the standard for workplace English-language proficiency worldwide. It is designed and administered by nonprofit ETS (Educational Testing Service), which has its headquarters in the United States, with international offices, including Europe.

The example of Renault-Nissan

An excellent example of effective in-house language training comes from the global company Renault-Nissan, which wanted to facilitate international mobility for its employees by ensuring language competence in multiple languages.

At Renault-Nissan, both English and French language competence are required for many business activities. As a result, employees are encouraged to improve their English and French skills, thereby enabling the company to compete more effectively in the global environment. New recruits are also selected with the desired language skills in mind.

In the 1990s, Renault-Nissan decided to administer the TOEIC test to all management recruits. It also adopted the test as a core element in its recruitment procedure, with a minimum score of 750 points required for management positions. In 1998, the CEO of Renault extended the TOEIC test's use by making it the means of evaluating the thousands of French managers working for the company.

Specific English-language training programmes were developed to increase the overall level of English competence. Learning objectives were set based on the results of a first round of TOEIC testing. On an ongoing basis, monthly reports were provided to management to ensure that results were being obtained.

With English-language training in place, Renault's focus shifted to French and the Test de Français International (TFI).

Also developed by ETS, TFI is a sister test of TOEIC and the world standard for French proficiency testing. Renault-Nissan adopted TFI to ensure that staff throughout the Renault group, including in its international subsidiaries, could communicate in French as well as English. Local Renault staff in Human Resources determined minimum TFI scores, based on the particular French-language needs of their local offices.

By consistently using the TOEIC test and the TFI test, Renault-Nissan has been able to achieve higher levels of job mobility and to increase its chances of success in foreign missions. Use of both tests also saves money and time in the company's hiring process, for it helps ensure that newly hired employees possess sufficient proficiency levels to do their jobs. This goes a long way toward avoiding costly mistakes, miscommunication, and poor job performance. .

The case of Packard Bell

In the case of the French firm Packard Bell, the impetus for change resulted from a need for professionals who could compete effectively in the global marketplace by communicating in English.

Packard Bell's solution was to require employees and new job applicants to achieve certain levels of English proficiency, depending on their particular positions. The company determines if English requirements are met by comparing applicants' actual TOEIC scores with scores set for certain jobs. For example, a quality technician needs a TOEIC score of 650, while a buyer must have a TOEIC score of 850.

By using TOEIC in this fashion, Packard Bell has been able to streamline its business practices and save money in the hiring process. As with Renault-Nissan, by ensuring that newly hired employees possess sufficient levels of English proficiency to do their jobs, Packard Bell is able to avoid costly mistakes, miscommunication, and poor job performance.

A Local company with international objectives

Some companies may be locally based within a country but offer products on the international market. This type of operation brings its own challenges: Does everyone in the company need to speak English? If not, who does and to what degree of proficiency?

A machine tool company with 180 employees based in a provincial town launched production of powerful machines that were to be installed in factories producing specialised steel products. The high degree of specialisation left the company with only two principal competitors internationally. The machines could thus be sold to industrialists anywhere around the globe. The average price per unit was in excess of 1 million Euros.

The manager sought to develop a linguistic policy that would help him establish the company as the world leader in its field within three years. Working with TOEIC staff, his managers defined their English-speaking requirements for each department, including how many people should speak English and at what level.

The resulting analysis showed the following needs for the company's four principal departments:

(1) The design office had a permanent need for six or seven people who could talk with clients and prospective clients. Staff also needed to be able to speak with technicians on the Computer Assisted Design Software hot line in order to resolve problems. As the anticipated discussions were essentially one-on-one, a level of 600 required TOEIC points was assigned.

(2) The production staff had little need for English on a day-to-day basis; however, since two teams of qualified workers might be required at any time to install machinery anywhere around the world, the managers determined that basic English was needed and assigned a level of 400 TOEIC points for those who might need the language skills. A level of 600 points was identified, however, for those who would be managing the worker teams and who, in turn, would likely need to handle more complex situations.

(3) The sales staff needed to adapt their language to the needs of different customers. They also had to be able to respond spontaneously in English during conversations. And more than having to follow conversations in meetings, they also needed to be able to make convincing presentations themselves. For all these reasons, a level of 800+ TOEIC points was chosen for this group.

(4) Administration needed to be able to send marketing information to international clients and to relay information back to sales, development and production staff. The minimum level of 600 TOEIC points was set, with a 350 minimum reading sub-score.

Personnel were informed of the company's English requirements. Key staff were informed they would be tested, while other staff were told that additional career opportunities may be available to those having appropriate English levels and that, if interested, they could sign up for voluntary testing. A language training plan was established, and local training organisations were invited to submit their offers.

Results of the first administration of the TOEIC test made it possible for the company to form training groups; regular test sessions and each subsequent year of training makes it possible to verify that the company's objectives were being achieved

About the TOEIC test

The TOEIC test is a paper-and-pencil test that consists of 200 multiple-choice questions divided into two separately timed sections (Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension) each with respective sub-tests. Although the actual testing time is approximately two hours, examinees must complete the biographical questions on the answer sheet and respond to a brief questionnaire about their educational and work history. Therefore, it takes approximately two-and-a-half hours to take the test.

The TOEIC test is highly reliable and accurate, available on demand, features rapid test scoring and reporting, and provides a quantifiable standard of performance recognised around the world. Learners find the TOEIC test an excellent means to apply for new positions, to obtain credentials, and to monitor their own improvement in English.

Corporations, from small businesses to multinationals, rely on the TOEIC test to document progress in English-training programmes, to recruit, promote, and hire employees, and to implement a common standard of measurement across multiple corporate sites. Government organisations and agencies also rely on the TOEIC test to document progress in English-training programmes, and to recruit, promote, and hire employees.

“Personnel and Human Resources directors face a daunting challenge,” explains Philippe Grosskost, Managing Director of ETS Europe. “Some simply need to hire competent English speakers. Others need to determine who gets promoted or changes jobs based on their English language abilities. Still others want to measure progress in learning English or determine the effectiveness of their language training programmes. TOEIC answers all their needs.”

For further information

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