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Auralog's Tell Me More

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ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Auralog's Tell Me More

Date of Review: February 15, 2010

Composite Score:

★★★ 1/2

Reviewed by: Edward J. Rock

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Pricing Options

[Note: the pricing examples here are for academic libraries, but Auralog notes that library pricing is available, upon request, for any library setting or other institutions or businesses and even individual users.]

Auralog's Tell Me More is available in a Library Edition with pricing based on institutional FTE or user population. Tell Me More one-year licenses include unlimited online remote access to all six different language modules (at least two of which offer different dialectal versions); the modules may be accessed in at least one of 16 different interface (portal) languages of the client's choice and at no extra charge. This one-year pricing option allows library users to create accounts, at will and as needed, during the license period. Notwithstanding this typical type of license, Auralog is open to discussing particular institutional needs and tailoring a contract for specific time periods or language modules. For example, although Clemson Libraries received an initial quote of \$16,000 for a one-year unlimited site license, an additional quote was requested for a made-to-order set of 25 licenses, for a 90-day period, for only the French language module. The total of \$1,250 (or \$50 per license) covered a specific group of users in a graduate program that needed French instruction, but wanting to do it on their own from remote locations rather than in credit-bearing, classroom courses. Libraries in college settings could do the same to support other specific user groups. Just as a note, Auralog has offered access to a British English (ESL) module at no extra charge with a one-year FTE license and others may receive a similar offer at the time of a negotiation. Lastly, forthcoming modules in Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese should be accessible at no extra site-license charge, once available, according to an Auralog representative.

Product Description

Auralog's Tell Me More (founded in Paris, France, in 1987) is a market leader in online language learning, particularly in Europe and Latin America. Auralog has American/Canadian offices in Phoenix, as well as offices in China, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and Spain. The company is also well-known for individual, consumer-oriented CD-ROM products, including *English For Kids*, that include a 24/7 online adviser and content compatible for on-the-go learning with iPods and other MP3 devices. According to its Web site, Auralog was recently selected for a multiyear contract of some 380,000 licenses by the Mexican Ministry of Education. In addition, the Goethe Institute recently announced an expansion of its Auralog agreement, in existence since 2006, to provide German language classes online for it. Although there are plans for expansion, Tell Me More presently offers six languages for institutional online site license: Dutch, English-ESL (American and British), French, German, Italian, and Spanish (containing both Latin American and Castilian modules). Interface or

portal languages include many more: Brazilian Portuguese, Chinese Simplified Mandarin, Chinese Traditional Mandarin, Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish. Allowing a user to select the language of the portal is an attractive feature and is comparable to Rosetta Stone, which does the same. (Note, however, that individual online consumer access is available only in French, German, Italian, and Spanish at this time.)

Auralog says it stresses a communicative approach in its materials by using real world situations that address all areas of language learning like speaking, comprehension, reading, writing, grammar, and cultural knowledge; and it claims to have five times the content of other leading brands (for example, Rosetta Stone). According to a recent article in *Library Journal*, the product program includes "37 different activities, including phonetic exercises, that use three-dimensional animated diagrams . . ." Tell Me More is known for being a pioneer in integrating into language learning purportedly the most advanced speech recognition technology on the market. Auralog calls it the S.E.T.S. (Spoken Error Tracking System) for significantly improving pronunciation by pinpointing incorrectly articulated words. Users who need it can find extensive Customer and Technical Support online; support is also available by telephone and e-mail, and includes Support FAQs for addressing common problems. For example, the voice recognition does not work with the Firefox or Safari browsers, and Internet Explorer is required because the Active X plug-in needed by Tell Me More is compatible only with IE. Users also have to make sure that the Pop-Up Blocker is properly configured, because when it launches, Tell Me More opens in a new window. Quick Start Guides (PDF), including one for Libraries which explains how to check the computer's configuration and select the learning language, are also available and could be readily made into user handouts <<http://www.tellmemore.com/about/aboutus/support>>.

Critical Evaluation

Tell Me More is another excellent product in the library market for online foreign language learning and should be considered with along with other products like Mango Languages and Rosetta Stone. As it has an established reputation among business and government users, it should come as no surprise that many homeschoolers and educational institutions also purchase access. (The personal CD-ROM products were not tested for this review as the licensing is not appropriate for libraries.) In higher education, for instance classrooms or foreign language labs, it is normally used in a Classroom Edition that, according to Auralog, includes more features for an instructor like participation tracking. There is also a Library Edition (a "light" content version of the Classroom Edition) that has less instructor custom-



Auralog/Tell Me More Review Scores Composite: ★★ ★ 1/2

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★

Contains over 37 activities like word games and multiple choice questions that randomize through the Complete Beginner, Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced levels. Also includes cultural texts. Over 10,000 unique vocabulary words are part of each language module. Some videos are available in the advanced levels.

User Interface/Searchability: ★★★

Easy to navigate via a pleasant light purple and gray portal that may be boring to some users. A few color photographic motifs are included, but the interface is not as varied as other platforms like Rosetta Stone. Speech recognition is provided by the proprietary S.E.T.S. (Spoken Error Tracking System). Modules allow users to pick-up in the lessons where they left off.

Pricing Options: ★★★

Site license annual option is realistically priced for libraries based on either user population or FTE and comparable to other Web products on the market. Libraries can also ask for pricing based on a set of language modules and for shorter time periods. The vendor is open to offering volume discounts, but libraries should inquire.

Contract Options: ★★★★★

Site license option allows unlimited access, but only to library population or FTE, if in an academic setting. Available in a Library Edition that does not contain the same teacher/administrative functions of the Classroom Edition. Made-to-order sets of licenses can be put under contract.

izable content for each language; however, as a self study resource, the Library Edition makes a very good choice for library collections. Tell Me More's extensive exercises with grammar and reading and other activities (Word Searches, Picture/Word Association, The Right Word, Crossword Puzzles, Fill-in-the-Blanks, and so on) make it similar to Mango Languages for practicing, although the Mango interface is more colorful. In fact, some users may find Tell Me More boring-looking since it is in only two colors.

On the other hand, the phonetics exercises are the most powerful part of Tell Me More. Individual sounds are not only orally modeled with several word examples and wave diagrams, but the user can also visually record on a wave diagram for comparing the same sound and words. In this respect, Tell Me More is like Rosetta Stone and is no surprise. However, part of the phonetic practice allows users to study

animated cross-section drawings of the mouth (in both frontal and lateral views) in order to understand the correct placement of tongue and lips and their relation to the palate and the passage of air through these areas and the throat in an authentic pronunciation. This kind of precision helps the user pinpoint incorrect articulation and makes Tell Me More superior to Rosetta Stone because it offers the user a way to track pronunciation. A written description of the correct phonetic placement also accompanies the drawings and a score is kept as the user progresses through the exercise.

Tell Me More may well be best suited to meet the needs of users in academic settings because of its number of activities and depth of content. It does require a certain investment of time and energy to initially navigate and especially to fully use the phonetics component. As the *TCA* review of Mango Languages noted (Volume 10, No. 3, January 2009), Mango may be best for beginner users; more advanced learners may prefer a product like Tell Me More. On our campus, the Classroom Edition is used exclusively for phonetics and pronunciation practice in the foreign languages lab, and that is Tell Me More's outstanding strength (among its other strengths). There is definite interest among library users for remote online learning, whether for languages or other topics; this makes CD- or DVD-ROM sets less attractive. Although Auralog's name may not be as familiar as Rosetta Stone's, the quality of its product will ensure high user satisfaction among libraries subscribing to it. The cost of Tell Me More is extremely reasonable when compared to Rosetta Stone's and more in line with the expectations of librarians for online platforms. A major drawback for some libraries is that only 6 major world languages are

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offered in Tell Me More; Mango Languages offers 9 major languages and 3 ESL versions, and Rosetta Stone offers 31 languages, which makes them both a better deal for some library communities from the point of view of language variety. Auralog also employs some annoying elevator-type music on the main screen between exercises, but that should not detract from an overall quality user experience when doing the exercises themselves.

Contract Provisions and Authentication

Access to the modules purchased via site license is available only to the population the library serves. Use statistics are available from Auralog via a tracking portal the library would access to retrieve the total number of users and total hours of study and sessions, listed by month. The statistics are available in Excel.

Users accessing Tell Me More via a Library Edition site license would use a referring URL hosted on the Auralog/Tell Me More server to create individual user accounts.

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About the Author

Ed Rock is Languages and General Education Librarian at Clemson University. He holds an M.S. in Information Sciences from the University of North Texas and an M.A. in French from the University of California—Santa Barbara. Previously, he was Humanities Librarian/Digital Reference Coordinator at Tulane University. ■



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