8-2009

Rosetta Stone

Ed Rock
Clemson University, erock@clemson.edu

Recommended Citation

Please use publisher's recommended citation.

ADVISOR REVIEWS—STANDARD REVIEW

Rosetta Stone

Date of Review: August 15, 2009

Composite Score:	★★ 3/4	Reviewed by: Edward J. Rock R. M. Cooper Library Clemson University P. O. Box 343001 Clemson, SC 29634-3001 <erock@clemson.edu>

Pricing Options

The three main pricing options considered here are for the classroom edition offered for college and university libraries. The first is a ticket option available with the minimum purchase of 25 tickets. Each ticket, once activated, is for use exclusively with a single language once. Tickets have a shelf life of twelve months from the time of activation, but must be activated within the year of purchase or expire.

The second option of annual subscription named-user also requires a minimum purchase of 25 seats and offers the flexibility to change the language, but only once. During the subscription period, the seats can be activated or deactivated as needed, but all expire at one time. Both the ticket and named-user subscription options offer differing activation code modes that can be set-up in advance with Rosetta Stone and include activation by a preset list of codes or by user generated accounts at a site especially set-up for that purpose by Rosetta Stone.

The third and last option is for an annual site license that offers unlimited access to all languages (or a selection of these) with pricing based on institutional FTEs.

For the first and second options, purchases above the minimum 25 normally receive price breaks as the volume of the purchases increases. At this time, the verbal quote received from Rosetta Stone for the minimum 25 ticket option was $1,875; for the minimum subscription option the price was $2,375. At Clemson University, using an FTE of 16,500 for the third option of site license for all languages offered, the quote received was $125,000, but that was during the third quarter of 2007, almost two years ago. Rosetta Stone has indicated that the price would probably be higher now, but no sample quote was obtained as this cost would not be a realistic one.

Product Description

Rosetta Stone (RS) is a market leader in multimedia language learning. Having begun in the early 1990s as a privately held company offering CD-ROM products from the Shenandoah Valley near Washington, D.C., Rosetta Stone is today a global and ubiquitous presence online and in airport terminals and at shopping malls around the United States. After a stunning recession-era IPO just this past April 2009, the now public company offers 31 languages for personal, homeschool, organizational, and institutional, including governmental, use: Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Danish, Dutch, English (British), English (American), Filipino (Tagalog), French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latin, Pashto, Persian (Farsi), Polish, Portuguese (Brazil), Russian, Spanish (Latin America), Spanish (Spain), Swahili, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Welsh. Most of the languages are available in at least three levels, with levels four and five recently released for

Latin American Spanish and American English. Rosetta Stone holds several patents on its products, including the well-known (and heavily-advertised) Dynamic Immersion approach, which is characterized by an absence of translation and purports to surround the user using "images," "intuition," "interactivity," and "instruction" in a total language learning experience. Initial configuration requires checking your computer system; before purchasing or licensing an online version, it is imperative to make sure your system will meet the requirements for Rosetta Stone. Even upon initial use, the user will be prompted to make several systems checks and to verify that the headset/microphone being used is correctly configured for the Speech Recognition feature. (Note: RS also sells a particular USB headset/microphone, but it is possible to use others.) Extensive Online Support and Requests and Systems Requirements is available online for review <http://www.rosettastone.com/global/support/b2b>.

Critical Evaluation

Rosetta Stone is an excellent product. It is a product not only for personal or homeschooling use, but also for organizational and educational settings as well. In fact, it may well be the language learning system best suited to meet the needs of users in academic settings. Although the Classroom edition is designed to be deployed there and includes access to teacher and administrative tools, Rosetta Stone is willing to offer it to college/university libraries. Because it does require a certain initial investment of time and energy to navigate, it may also be best suited to the types of users in higher education. In addition, the academic user may be more inclined to willingly submit to the heavy self-instruction, application, duration, and intensity of study that would lead to immersion success, rather than a more casual user of a beginner-level product like Mango Languages.

Probably the greatest strength of Rosetta Stone is that it can prepare the user to go, with confidence, into the "real" speaking environment of another language and function at a reasonable, basic level, without having ever been there before. Most libraries have other multimedia language learning products (CD sets and DVD-Roms from many publishers and purchased at very reasonable cost, the new Transparent Language Library Edition USB keys as marketed by Recorded Books, LLC, being an example), but making available an online product of the high profile of Rosetta Stone could lead to high user satisfaction ratings with overall library services, and the acquisition of this product is likely to be viewed favorably.

However, notwithstanding the positive perception of the product and potential value of adding it to a collection, the site license version of Rosetta Stone (probably the preferred version for academic librarians because of the ease of administration) is greatly overpriced. In fact, it is my distinct impression that, though the company is amenable to

Rosetta Stone Review Scores Composite: ★★ 3/4

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

Content: ★★★★★

Excellent content in Levels 1, 2, and 3 for the user wishing to build confidence and ability to travel and be ready for a real immersion experience. Levels 4 and 5 sound promising in offering more advanced vocabulary and language practice.

Searchability: ★★★★

Easy to learn to use and navigate. Using the Speech Recognition is the core of the Rosetta Stone experience. The user must pronounce correctly in order to progress through exercises and is audibly prompted to repeat, if wrong, or progress, if correct. An Adaptive Recall feature tells the user what exercises to review based on individual responses. Overall, the graphics and feel are pleasingly modern and up-to-date although some photographs are used in more than one language. Does have fully searchable Knowledge Base in the Rosetta Stone Support Center, as well as many downloads for User and Network Guides among others.

Pricing Options: ★

Ticket and named-user subscription options seem more reasonably priced for an online product, but probably only if properly used for many hours of in-depth practice. The site license option is out of reach and unrealistic for libraries, however attractive the full remote access to all languages and all levels may be. The vendor does offer volume discount price-breaks.

Contract Options: ★

Very limited because public libraries are excluded. The online options for annual subscription tickets or named users may require special administration beyond that normally required for an unlimited use, annual site license preferred by college and university users and librarians.

---

making a Rosetta Stone package for the library user via the Classroom edition, it is not truly interested in libraries as customers. In fact, Rosetta Stone actually received a TCA "About Face Award" in October of 2008 for its decision to discontinue online access for public libraries. Having eliminated a library edition speaks louder than any words to this fact. That is too bad. Although there is definite interest in language learning among academic library users and they are well-familiar with this brand name, it may never be truly cost-effective or even easy for college/university libraries to bring it to them. It may be necessary for librarians to continue asking other vendors to develop their products for remote access to meet user expectations at a reasonable cost for library budgets. Mango Languages has already announced a 2.0 version for release soon and the totally new BYKI Library Edition is now available from Recorded Books. Tell Me More/Auralog also has updates this year.

Contract Provisions and Authentication

The "Agreements, " "Terms of Use" and other documentation can be found at < http://www.rosettastone.com/global/agreements>.

Normally, users can go directly to the vendor's server at a specified Web address using the required logins as determined by the library and allowing users remote access. Little customization may be possible or available from Rosetta Stone for the classroom edition.

Author's Selected References

Jeske, M. "Mango Languages." *The Charleston Advisor* 11, no. 1 (2009): 50–51.

Kolodny, L. "Going Public in the Throes of a Recession." *New York Times* (2009) July 1, 1. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed August 13, 2009).

Machovec, G. "From Your Managing Editor: Eighth Annual Readers' Choice Awards." *The Charleston Advisor* 10, no. 2 (2008): 3-3.

Vesselinov, R. "Measuring the Effectiveness of Rosetta Stone." January 2009. Available upon request from Rosetta Stone.

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 at Santa Barbara. Previously, he was Humanities Librarian/Digital Reference Coordinator at Tulane University. ■

Contact Information

Rosetta Stone
Arlington, VA   22209
Phone: (800) 811-2755
E-mail: <sales@rosettastone.com>
URL: <http://www.rosettastone.com>