
Internet 2: Towards a High Speed, Academic Network

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Have you ever tried to use sound or even video to support language learning experiences over the Internet, only to hear phrases like "There's not enough bandwidth" or "The net is clogged"? Maybe there is a better future just around the corner.

Since 1996, a group of university and corporate researchers in America¹ has been working full time in what has come to be known as the Internet 2 Project². Each member in the project does what they know better: academics are developing instructional content and applications, corporate members are developing the software and hardware needed to support those applications.

The basis of the Internet 2 is its very high speed -hundreds of times the actual speed- which will allow for the existence of interactive, real-time instruction between remote computers; the creation of digital (video, audio) libraries; the use of shared virtual reality environments, and every other research and learning activity you may think of.

The backbone of this superhighway is the Abilene Network³, which runs from coast to coast in the United States, linking universities nationwide⁴. Only academic and research centers can be part of this network, which is seamlessly connected to the current Internet. This means that:

(a) both the current Internet and Internet 2 coexist and work together, but

(b) only universities connected to the Abilene Network benefit from this high speed, and

(c) only universities can create content for the Internet 2, making it a purely academic network (i.e. no e-commerce will exist there).

Although distance learners at home will not benefit from this high speed, at least those attending classes at participating universities⁵ will be able to engage in collaborative, interactive activities that will overcome the limitations of audio and video broadcast over the current Internet.

There are, thus, some limitations for those outside campus, or in non-university settings: they will need to be on-campus if they want to take advantage of Internet 2. Also, for those universities outside the United States, the Internet 2 will not be available, until they create a local high-speed backbone (similar to Abilene), and connect it to similar backbones in other countries.

However, things are moving ahead quickly, and there are a number of Internet companies from around the world⁶ already lined-up to work with the Internet 2 project.

Thus, as soon as the international academic world is interconnected, there will be real possibilities for teachers of English in university settings to design

and implement Internet 2-related language learning experiences. It is up to those teachers to start contacting their local Internet 2 groups, in order to get involved and take a proactive role in the use of this new medium.

¹ [<http://www.internet2.edu/html/who.html>]

² [<http://www.internet2.edu>]

³ [<http://www.ucaid.edu/abilene/>]

⁴ [<http://www.internet2.edu/html/members.html>]

⁵ [<http://www.internet2.edu/html/members.html>]

⁶ [<http://www.internet2.edu/international/>]