International Delivery Experiences by:

The British Council

Presentation Transcript & Profiles

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Introduction

The following is a transcript of a presentation by Jermaine Prince of the British Council at the 7th Annual Surpass User Group Conference in Amsterdam in 2014.

All the views expressed by the interviewees are their own.

Video Links

Presentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qDShhy4fi0

Transcript

Jermaine Prince

My name is Jermaine Prince, I'm the Operations Manager at the British Council for the product of Aptis. So I'm just going to cover four key areas to help you understand the international delivery challenges that may potentially be faced, which would be: who are we, as the British Council?; what is Aptis? Because some of you may not be familiar with what Aptis is; global delivery challenges that we have faced, potentially faced, and solutions of how we've gone about resolving them; as well as the benefits of our support service for our clients.

Now I've just put up a small part of the mission statement, which I'm not going to elaborate on but you can actually see the slide, from the British Council, and it's showing you how broad our clientele is, and what it is that we actually cover. But, this morning, and from where I am for my actual position, I will be talking about Aptis, which is one of British Council's products that uses Surpass to deliver English assessment.

So, what is Aptis? Some of you may be asking yourself 'what is it?', 'what are you delivering?' Well, to get you to have a better insight of what it is, I have a video that would answer those two key questions. It only takes about three minutes, but it's very engaging, very informative, so just please just take the time to sit back and watch the presentation.

{Plays Aptis video, available here: http://www.britishcouncil.org/exam/aptis }

Okay, so all of that has all actually been delivered through the use of the Surpass Platform. Now, I'm happy to say that within, we've just recently celebrated two years of using the Surpass Platform and facilitating these English assessments for the last two years, and it's been delivered in approximately about 68 countries right now. In terms of the delivery of this product, it's conducted by the client. I'm not talking about the delivery of Surpass at British Council premises or equipment, but the test and the facilitation of the assessment is conducted by our clients at their venues themselves, as that video has highlighted.

So, moving on to global delivery challenges. That's what the session this morning is predominantly all about. Well, over the course of two years, not two years exactly there for me, but obviously I've been doing my role for a period of time. I'm going to touch on just some of those areas, and some of

those areas that I'm going to mention are fairly similar to what Marie has actually mentioned there as well.

So, the challenges. Internet speed and the quality, so that's in terms of the connectivity in terms of the various locations and that lot, obviously the internet and the speed and the quality to deliver the Surpass test. For our clients, it can vary. As you can understand, we're dealing with many countries that have many schools that would want to facilitate this test, so obviously connectivity is a key area in this. And, the centre infrastructure, which we touched on there earlier, and I think that is a common and renowned problem, especially when you're dealing with anything which involves technology, so we have the things such as the equipment, in terms of does the location meet the necessary system requirements? Is there particular things that are preventing the Surpass Platform from functioning in order for them to do the assessment in terms of a firewall or antivirus? Or they may have configurations in the back end of their computers which are just preventing the programme itself from running. Then obviously there's the computer literacy of our target audience. Understandably so, this is going to vary in different countries, but a key thing that we have to focus on in the delivery is not to assume that because of the location where it's being delivered, that their understanding of computers essentially, whether a positive one, a medium one, a negative one. So, the adequate time before live testing. Now, this has been a common thing which we've faced, and I was speaking there with somebody as I've been speaking with various colleagues of you there whilst I've been here, that sometimes you would have centres that would try to essentially install SecureClient, set up necessary keycodes of components, and then try to attempt to run the test on the same, that's highly not recommendable. They key challenge that we face in delivering the Aptis product is the lack of 24/7 support service, because understandably so you see we're dealing with a global network. Because we're dealing with a global network, in some cases with the time zones, weekends may actually fall from a Thursday rather than a traditional weekend would be a Saturday for us in the UK.

So, the solutions. How have we gone about dealing with some of those few challenges there that we've faced? Well, it's to understand the challenges through first-hand experience. I personally have learned and understood the challenges that our clients there potentially face by visiting the locations. It's very easy for me to be in my office in London and say that everything's working fine on my side of things, but I think it's very important and an integral part in terms of our service delivery that we're offering to our clients by visiting the location in order to help us identify clearly what problems it is that they are facing. The solution that helps to facilitate that is to have a strong client partnership, which is to have clear communication and understanding, because we have clear understanding and if we can communicate frequently, it will make things a lot easier as we deliver what we need to deliver in order for these assessments to be conducted. I have on there, 'internal sharing of lessons learnt'. Now this internal sharing of lessons learnt is knowledge shared between British Council centres that help with the administering of these tests that take place at the actual location. So what happens there is it's not a matter of maybe somewhere in Europe that would have that information, but obviously there in the Americas as well as in the Middle East, the knowledge is actually shared so everybody has a fair and clear understanding of things that they may potentially face, and ways of going about resolving them. And, training local client administrators and invigilators: this is very key. It's one thing to install an application, and it's one thing to install software, but if you don't fully know how it functions, how can you facilitate it? And obviously a key part in actually then delivering these assessments is for the client administrators on location to actually have an understanding of the system that they're using in order to deliver this. And the key thing, as I've touched on there earlier regarding the 24/7 support. We've heavily invested in our own

24/7 support, and why was that? Well, the reason being was that because, as I've touched on before, in the Middle East there for an example, when I was out there recently, a weekend starts on a Thursday. Obviously then for us, because we have to then facilitate and then meet the needs of our clientele, we want to ensure that there is some way, somehow, that they can share or make known what problem they may potentially be facing, in order for us to then help facilitate and fix that problem which they may potentially be having.

So by us they're heavily investing in increasing on our supports that we offer to our clients. The benefit of this is that there is 24/7 availability to log and pass on a problem that they potentially face. Then at least this way, then it can easily be resolved by common queries which may be being raised, and that they can also be able to know that wherever it is that they are, whatever time zone it is that they are in, that they have the ability to log that problem that they are having. So, with that in mind, users in different time zones can then have a clear process and have a clear understanding that there isn't any limits on where they are, but they can then report the problem that they are facing. The new support model that we have put in place in order to help facilitate this, it has an active monitoring and measurement and capabilities in place, so we can then see what is being active, what is open, what's being resolved, just through the support that we actually there provide. And, the bigger picture of all of this is that by making this support available to our clients, there's always the continuous room for service improvement. So as more and more things that come in, there's more things that we learn, it enables us to then improve the service that we offer. Thank you for listening.

About the presenter

Jermaine Prince, Assessment Services Operations Manager – British Council

Jermaine Prince works as the Assessment Services Operations Manager at British Council where he oversees both technical and administrative support to their global network to facilitate the delivery of Aptis tests. He manages the production and delivery of paper tests and the piloting and roll out of new products. He often takes part in site visits or to new testing centres to ensure they meet the required specification and standards of British Council. He acts as a key interface with service teams and technology providers to aid with technical support and assistance, training and knowledge transfer of information regarding Aptis.

About The British Council

"The British Council creates international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and builds trust between them worldwide. We call this work cultural relations." The British Council are on the ground in six continents and over 100 countries. BTL started working with The British Council in 2012 for the Aptis global English language service.

"In October [2012], we launched our first variant of Aptis, Aptis for Teachers, designed specifically for the education sector. Aptis has been used in a wide range of projects across the world including large-scale English development projects in Rwanda and Tanzania, workforce development in Poland and

Egypt, and student training courses in Singapore and India. We're working with UK partners, including University of Bedfordshire and the University of Birmingham, to develop Aptis further."

Example Assessments: http://www.britishcouncil.org/aptis/what-aptis/try

Statistics: Contract since 2012. The British Council work with 10.9 million people face-to-face each year. 116 million people each year participate digitally with The British Council each year. Aptis is being used in more than 85 countries. (Source: http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/d554_annual_report_final.pdf)

Website: http://www.britishcouncil.org/