



An Overview

The inspiration for English, baby! came to co-founder and CEO John Hayden during his tenure teaching English and learning Japanese in Tokyo, Japan. While many English as a Second Language (ESL) programs instructed students in proper grammar and usage, John found that students confident of their abilities in the classroom would return from trips abroad dissatisfied with their inability to communicate effectively with their peers. Missing from instruction programs was insight to how popular culture colors language and reflects how people really speak to one another. Witnessing the tremendous demand for knowledge of the English language overseas and the Internet boom of the late 1990s, John became convinced that teaching colloquial American English online presented a unique business opportunity.

English, baby! was born as a website of non-traditional American English lessons. Rather than focusing the curriculum on grammar and memorization, students were virtually immersed in American language and culture as if they were living in the United States. Capitalizing on the global popularity of American movies and music, lessons were drawn from these sources. English, baby! did not pretend to be a source of grammar instruction, as English students around the world could learn the rules from textbooks. Instead, the site provided English learners a chance to see and hear real examples of the language as well as a place to put their knowledge to practice.

In 1999, the first version of English, baby! was launched from Japan. Later that year, John returned to the U.S., wrote a business plan and raised a small amount of capital. English, baby! was formally established in 2000 in Portland, Ore. As the company felt pressure to find revenue sources, universities were approached as potential users of the distinctive lesson plans, but it was clear that a greater value was placed on international student relationship management software. After 9/11 and a significant drop in international student enrollment, colleges and universities needed more effective ways to market their ESL programs and stay afloat. For the next five years, English, baby! focused on university software, while the online ESL site grew organically. In 2005, Versation, Inc. was established as a parent company and English, baby! remained the company's ESL social networking website.

With profitability achieved by 2003 and business lines developing satisfactorily, more attention and resources were returned to English, baby!. As an experiment, a number of Web 2.0 features were implemented, and membership rapidly increased in 2006. Today, English, baby! boasts 600,000 users, an archive of more than 2,000 English lessons, a vocabulary database exceeding 15,000 words, and unlimited quizzes to gauge progress. In addition, the site provides a social network where English students can chat, participate in forums, share photos, create lessons and otherwise practice English skills in the online community.