

ZON

TEACHERS' MANUAL



2009
ZON TEAM

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Part I. Overview

Learning a new language is a tedious task and if the learning needs to happen at a place away from the target language (foreign language learning settings¹), the task becomes even more difficult, as one might not be able to find the motivation and practice opportunities to learn a new language. Moreover, in these settings, if you are to study from an unattractively designed textbook full of boring stories, the level of motivation may drop down even more sharply.

In this era of advancing computer technology, especially technology in education, the problems of foreign language (FL) teaching environments seems to be alleviating with the help of promising prospects of computers and the internet. It is known that research and practice seem to suggest that successful language learning can only occur when four conditions are met: 1) high quality input; 2) ample opportunities for practice; 3) high quality feedback; and 4) individualized content. Looking at foreign language teaching settings from this perspective, one may easily argue that

- the quality of the input is limited with the textbooks and teachers,
- opportunities are limited within the walls of the classrooms,
- quality of the feedback is limited with the time of the teachers, who generally have to deal with lots of students, and
- content individualization is almost never feasible.

Therefore, online language learning environments stand out as unique places that might offer a solution for the problems inherent to foreign language learning settings.

Zon is a multiplayer, online learning environment designed to teach Chinese language and culture through game play. As a web-based site, Zon provides real-time, on-demand connection to interactive learning activities and authentic cultural information. Zon users are provided with the ability to interact with engaging story-driven plot lines, online language tutors, and fellow players towards the goal of learning about Chinese language and culture.

Zon is also a task-based game. Instead of following a class schedule, users can self-pace their learning. Elementary, secondary students and adults are all suitable for this program. Zon starts from beginner level and ends at intermediate level. It can be used by individual learners, as well as schools, as supplementary learning materials to teach Chinese.

The game is based on the travel stories (see storyline section for details) of a tourist who comes to China for the first time. As the game continues, the user will be able to choose to become a resident, even a citizen in this virtual Chinese world, depending on their success at the game. Each scene contains several learning units, including language and culture points. By interacting with other players and engaging in the activities in the game, users learn to use Chinese language and become familiar with

¹ Foreign language teaching is different from Second language teaching in the sense that in second language teaching situations the target language is spoken outside the school setting, therefore giving an advantage of immersing in the target culture easily.

Chinese culture. The structure of the language in the game is based on the level structure laid out by Hanban Curriculum.

“Why” and “How” of Zon

Zon is designed to teach Chinese language in both Foreign and Second language settings by giving the learners opportunities to interact, providing them with authentic language materials and giving them a chance to “virtually immerse” themselves into target culture. In this sense, Zon

- is a multiplayer, online learning environment designed to teach Chinese language and culture through gameplay,
- provides real-time, on-demand connection to interactive learning activities and authentic cultural information,
- motivates the learners by not only their intrinsic desire to learn more about Chinese language and culture, but also the ability to interact with engaging story-driven plot lines, interesting characters, and fellow players,
- allows for players to learn from both the designed game elements and other players,
- provides social and environmental scaffolds to support player learning.

Therefore, by putting the learners in real-life situations and providing them ample opportunities for authentic language and interaction, Zon provides the learners of Chinese with a unique environment to learn the language.

Language and Culture

Throughout the game, at every step the learners are provided with culture elements that potentially help them understand Chinese culture better. Starting from the first scene, the airport, the learners are given the feeling of “entering” the target culture. At every scene, the learners are presented videos of Chinese culture in specific settings. For example, when you enter the restaurant, you can easily learn how you could go about ordering food in a restaurant in China.



Figure 1. Ordering food at a restaurant

Moreover, this culture learning process might be turned into a language activity, as well, since the videos provide the learners with authentic language input. This option is also available in “hotel rooms” where the players can watch informative videos on Chinese Culture, phonetic instructions and other culturally informative videos.



Figure 2. Zon TV

The Examiner, who is present in most of the scenes, also functions as a “culture expert” and tests the learners’ cultural knowledge. As a motivation tool, if successful, the learners earn points at the end of the quizzes.



Figure 3. The Examiner

Simply put, a person, regardless of her age, cannot successfully learn a second or any language without sufficient exposure to authentic, diverse, comprehensible, and demanding linguistic and cultural materials of the target language. In this regard, Zon provides the learners with these language elements by helping them to “get a feel” of the Chinese culture and language.

Language and Interaction

Interaction is a key element in language learning. However, it is not always authentic and feasible to achieve genuine communication activities where the learners are provided with a chance to practice their language skills. Especially in foreign language classrooms, peer to peer communication in the target language is very limited, often mechanical and lacks authenticity, which makes it difficult for learners to sustain interest in the communication.

Zon offers a solution to this problem by providing opportunities to engage in communicative activities with both Non-Player Characters (NPC's) and other players from all over the world. The Chat function is the best example of such an opportunity. With the help of this function, the teachers could bring their classrooms into one confined room and start a chat on a topic selected by any of the students. Moreover, the students, while exploring Zon and learning the language and the culture, may interact with other students from all over the world and practice their newly learned language.

Language, Motivation and Gameplay

Zon provides the learners with a unique game-play where learners start by arriving at Beijing airport as a tourist and make their ways up to citizenship as they gain language and culture experience. This may help provide learners with extra motivation beyond language learning. This motivation the game provides could easily be accessed through various real-life roles the learners can practice. For example, the learners can take the role of a lost-and-found attendant, and test their vocabulary knowledge of colors, numbers, and objects. Of course, the success at the job is honored with Zon money, which might also serve as another layer of motivation for the learners.



Figure 4. Working as a Rickshaw puller

This flexibility of taking roles in the game and exploring the environment full of language and culture elements is surely beyond a classroom can provide. Instead of following a linear storyline provided by a textbook, in Zon the players could go through language points at their own paces and desires. It is known that the learners are equipped with different levels of cognitive and psychological needs, and therefore, learning should be highly individualized and customizable in order to motivate all students, meet their diverse learning goals and styles, and accommodate their individual psychological and cognitive needs. This individualized and customizable environment provides the learners with a unique environment that mingles the elements of authenticity with advantages of technology. In other words, the learners are given the opportunity to freely explore an authentic language environment they could most probably get by living in the target culture.

Moreover, learners might have different purposes in learning the language, which might end up determining the language skills –reading, writing, listening, speaking – they might want to foster. In a way, this means that not all learners might need/want to foster their reading skills at the same level. It may be, thus, unwise to force all students to be at the same level of competence in all aspects of the language — reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Zon gives this chance to the learners, and the learners might choose listening to dialogues over chatting, or reading newspapers over watching Zon TV. In this way, Zon makes uses of the different sources of multimedia to appeal to different language skills and learner types, which would otherwise be difficult task to achieve in a foreign language classroom.

Overall, Zon helps the learners develop their Chinese while giving them opportunities for authentic communication and providing them with real-life situations. Being web-based, the game can be used by the learners at any time and from anywhere they want. This flexibility might give the language teachers the flexibility to use Zon as complementary to their existing curriculum, and direct their students to the game for further practice and learning opportunities.

Part II. The Game

Our website, <http://enterzon.com> is the portal for everything Zon, which makes it the ideal place to start your journey in Zon. Through the EnterZon portal you can get the latest news and updates, upgrade info and statistics from the Zon Community.

From EnterZon, sign up for the Zon environment by clicking on “**Register to Play**”. Enter your information and design your avatar and once that is complete you will be prompted to verify your email address. Once verified you'll be ready to play.

Register For Zon

User Information
Real Name:
E-mail Address:
You must provide a valid e-mail address to play Zon.
Date of Birth: Month: Day: Year:
Gender: Female Male Not Specified
Country:

Account Information
Account Name: ✓
You will use this name to log in.
Password:
Password (again):

The form continues below our Terms of Service.

Terms of Service

IMPORTANT! PLEASE READ CAREFULLY.
BY USING THE GAME (DEFINED BELOW), YOU AGREE TO BE BOUND BY THE TERMS OF THIS AGREEMENT. IF YOU DO NOT AGREE TO THE TERMS OF THIS AGREEMENT, YOU ARE NOT

Figure 5. Setting up an account

Once you log in to the Zon Environment server, your avatar will show up in the Beijing International Airport. From then on, your avatar will rejoin the world on whatever screen you were on when you logged out previously.

The Storyline

Students will start playing at the tourist level at beginning. As they progress through Zon, students can choose to become a resident, and eventually a citizen of the virtual Chinese world. Before progressing to resident and citizen, however, they must engage in tasks learning about Chinese language, traditions, celebrations and daily life.

For a detailed explanation of game scenes visit: <http://enterzon.com/node/13>

Creating Characters

The very first thing for students to do is to fill out their information on Zon passport. After submitting the passport, they will receive an email from Zon and activate their account. Users can choose their own character's gender and appearance. Here is the picture of changing the appearance of avatars.

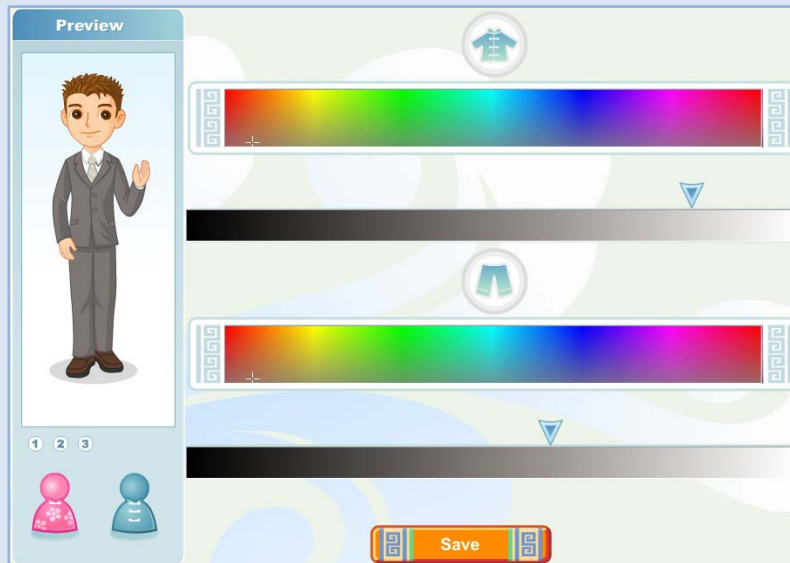


Figure 6. Creating a character

Later in the game, if players decide to change their avatars, they can easily do so by clicking their avatar image at the right bottom corner of the screen.

The User Interface

Zon User Interface

Current Game Scene

Money

Energy Meter

Panel

System message area

My Class/Club

Inventory

Away From Keyboard

Tasks

Sound Control

Exit Game

Avatar Customization Button



Navigation

Clicking mouse to a target makes the avatar go to the targeted area on the screen. The players activate the *wheel* and interact with NPC's and other players by clicking on them. The Player Interface has three components you will use frequently during game play. They are:

- The Wheel
- Money and Energy Meters
- Inventory

The Wheel

When the arrow cursor changes to a hand, clicking on an object brings out the wheel. The wheel will display all options (options will be discussed in the following sections) available for that person, object, or building. This also means that the availability of options on the wheel will change **depending on the object**. To activate an option, clicking on it is enough.



Figure 6. Wheel functionality

Money and Energy Meters

Your Money meter shows how many Zon Dollars (ZDs) you have in your current Inventory. This does not display any money that you have stored in the Bank of China or as Travelers' Checks. Any money you have saved in the Bank of China is readily available via ATM or Teller transactions.

Your Energy meter displays your current overall Energy Level, a game statistic that goes from 0 to 100. Sleeping, resting, eating, drinking, and completing tasks will increase your Energy Level. Your Energy Level will decrease very slowly when you are logged into Zon, but game tasks can also require lots of energy to complete, so you will want to keep your Energy Level high.



Figure 7. Energy and Money meters

Inventory

Your inventory is where you store items you own, like your Zon Passport, food and drinks, and anything else you need to carry. Any item you want to trade with other users, or you received from other users are also stored in your inventory. You can access it anytime by clicking the inventory button.



Figure 8. User inventory

Part III. Learning and Teaching

The language and culture elements provided in the game have meticulously been chosen in accordance with Hanban Chinese Curriculum². The difficulty of content is designed keeping the Hanban “stages” in mind. Moreover, the themes, and selection of the vocabulary items is also based upon the same curriculum.

Language and Culture Teaching

About

About provides the cultural background knowledge of the subject of Observe. As the virtual tourists who come to China for the first time, students may have questions about the buildings or people around the Zon community. By viewing *About*, they may have a better understanding of the Zon community, as well as Chinese culture and society in reality. In language classrooms, teachers may require students to study Chinese culture by reading *About* on their own, and then have group discussions about some of the

² The Chinese Language Council International is composed of members from 12 state ministries and commissions. Governed by the Council is the Office of Chinese Language Council International, known as “Hanban” for short. International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education has been developed under the auspices of Hanban to meet the needs of many countries of standardizing Chinese language education.

topics students have come across.

About can be accessed by activating the wheel and clicking on *About*. Here is a sample picture of *About* of a telephone. In this *About*, calling to and from China is explained, giving the learners a better understanding of the culture beyond just language teaching.



Figure 9. Sample *About* screen

Observe

Observe is an access to pre-recorded conversations, listening and reading. It can be accessed by clicking on an in game object and activating the wheel. Students will listen to the whole dialogue, and check the meaning of each word or every sentence. Here is the sample picture of an *Observe* layout.



Figure 10. *Observe* in the wheel

It contains the picture of the dialogue, the sound file of the dialogue, record button, language points, conversation, word and sentence examine, and word and sentence expand.

Observe is the major source where users learn about Chinese language skills in Zon. Students can learn about the sentence structure, pronunciation, Chinese characters and pinyin spelling. They can also record their pronunciation, and then compare it with Zon standard pronunciation. The grammar points of the conversation are listed in *Observe*, as well. Students can click “words” and then “expand” to view the grammar explanations; click “sentence” and “expand” to view the sentence structure explanations. The ones marked with red cloud mean grammar exercises are available. Teachers may use this as grammar practice or weekly quiz.

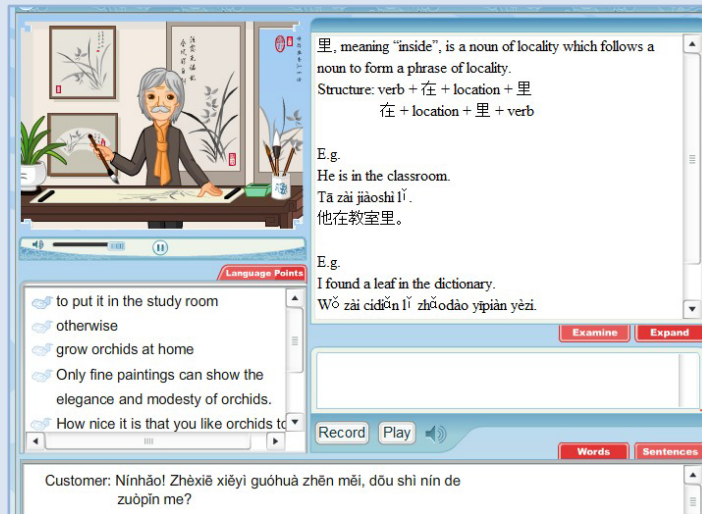


Figure 11. Sample observe screen

Here is a sample picture of the exercises. In this exercise, students will learn to recognize Chinese bills and practice the numbers in Chinese. There is a brief grammar review at the first page of every exercise. Students may read the review before they start the exercise.

Explore

Explore offers students a cluster of words related to the *Observe*. Students can either learn or review these words as a group. They can access *Explore* by activating wheel and selecting "explore" from the options. Teachers can use *Explore* to review new words for students.

This is option is not available for every object. Here is a sample picture of the *Explore* of Jianbing stand. Users can view the words related to Jianbing stand.



Figure 12. Explore functionality

Extended Learning Activities

Besides offering basic language and culture learning modules and interactive game play, Zon also provides a variety of entertaining learning resources, which encourage users to explore further and participate in and contribute to the whole Zon community. The key further exploration sources are: *Learn (videos)*, *Zon TV*, *Zon newspaper* and *Zon game arcade*.

Learn

Learn contains instructive videos related to the subject of the dialogue in *Observe*. This function can be activated by clicking “Learn” from the wheel.

By watching *Learn* videos, Zon users have the chance to take a look at the real life in China and Chinese people’s living. Zon users may also review the words that appear in the *Observe* dialogue. Here is a sample picture of *Learn* videos about ordering in a restaurant. In language teaching settings, teachers can let students watch the videos from *Learn* and require them to recite the main idea of the conversations. This could be a way to improve students’ listening comprehension and spoken skills.



Figure 13. Learn functionality

Zon TV

After users check in Zon hotel and enter their hotel room, they may watch *Zon TV* by activating it and change channels with the TV remote control. *Zon TV* is another source for Zon users to explore, which include cultural channels and linguistic learning channels. Each channel contains a series of episodes. Here is a sample picture of one of the episodes. Students may review and practice pronunciation by watching channel 2 “phonetic instruction”.



Figure 14. Zon TV

Zon Newspaper

Zon users will get a free copy of *Zon Times* when they first enter Zon. For the latest issue, users need to find the newspaper stand in Zon community and purchase it. Users can click “read” of the newspaper in their inventory and view the instant weather information of Beijing, China; find the latest sales or notices of Zon community; learn more about China from the cultural column and the authentic dairies from Chinese young journalists. Zon users can also post their own information on *Zon Times* to seek study buddy or trade goods. In language classrooms, teachers may require students to read the *Zon Times* and recite some news. Teachers may also use the articles on *Zon Times* as expanding reading practice.



Figure 15. Zon Times

Game Arcade

Game arcade provides both language-based and non-language-based mini games. Zon users may find the game arcade when they first enter the airport. The language-based mini games contain Chinese text and pronunciation, and users can practice Chinese numbers, colors, directions, etc. Non-language based games contain traditional Chinese custom and users can experience the traditional Chinese games. Here is a sample picture of one educational mini game about Chinese numbers.



Figure 16. Playing minigames

Interaction in Zon

Zon offers tools that enable social interactions among its users and NPC's to give the users a chance to experience modern Chinese life. Zon users have the ability to not only communicate with NPC's, but with other game users by means of voice chat or text input. By using these interactive learning tools, students will be able to experience Chinese culture through living in the variety of virtual worlds that reflect the progression of familiarizing with and settling down in a country. The main interactive learning tools are: *Engage*, *Examiner* and *voice and text chatting system* (with Avatar-based community members and other Zon users).

Interaction with NPC's

Avatar-based community members are the third type of interactive learning tools for Zon users. Besides Zon users, there are other community members like bank clerks, post officers, hotel receptionists, passengers waiting at the airport, etc. These community members are all avatar-based, with whom Zon users can launch a short conversation. As tourists, Zon users may ask for detailed information of the community from these community members. As users progress in exploring in the game and upgrade to be a resident, they can hunt for a job and become friends or colleagues of these community members.

Like *Examiners*, Zon online Chinese instructors will play the role of the community members at times, and launch a voice chat with Zon users. Here is a sample picture of *the community members* of Zon hotel. The people sitting in the couch and the working staff around the hotel lobby are all avatar-based community members.

Examiners

Examiners, who wear black Bachelor gowns in every scene, serve as the Chinese cultural instructor. By engaging the Examiners, user will encounter a series of questions about Chinese culture. At times, Zon online Chinese instructors will take the role of examiners. They will ask questions through voice chat and grade the test for users. This is an enjoyable yet challenging interactive learning method for Zon users. In language teaching, teachers may require students' grades from the examiners. Here is a sample picture of examiner.



Figure 17. Examiner

Engage

Engage is where users carry out their purchase, currency exchange, ordering food, and other activities, and can be activated by clicking the Engage option from the wheel.

Users are supposed to choose the correct sentence structure or pronunciation; otherwise, the activities will not be able to continue. When users choose a wrong sentence structure, there will be hints telling users to check the grammar points. For example, in the newspaper vendor scene, users can have interact with the vendor and buy a newspaper.



Figure 18. Engage functionality with newspaper vendor

Once the users successfully buy their newspapers, the Zon Times is placed into the users' inventory. In language classrooms, teachers may use Engage as "role play" games and ask students to fulfill certain

tasks. Teachers can open students' inventory list to check if students have followed the directions.

Apprentice

Apprentice in Zon is designed as a task, and users are required to fulfill the task according to what they have learned in *Observe*. They can access to *Apprentice* by clicking on an object and selecting *Apprentice* option from the wheel. This option is not available for every object.



Figure 19. Apprentice option

For example, the *Apprentice* function in the rickshaw puller scene, the users are supposed to help the customers find the places they want to go from the map. There will be some clues or hints available for students. Teachers can require students to pay attention to the written text and listen to the audio files of the clues.



Figure 20. Sample Apprentice Scene


Tasks

Tasks are one of the main ways of engaging the learners in meaningful language learning activities. The users receive a task (tasks can be created by the teachers or other community members as well?) at their hotel rooms. The learners have the option of either accepting or rejecting the task by clicking on

the question mark and viewing the task.



Figure 21. Task indicator in the hotel room

Tasks provide the learners with structured objectives built around specific goals, requiring the learners to explore the map and engage in certain activities. The task can be reviewed later in the user control panel by clicking on the  icon.

Tasks give the teachers the control to combine certain elements of the game (settings, themes, language elements) and make sure the learners go through every aspect of the game.

Interaction with Other Zon Users

Zon is a massive multi-player role-playing game. It combines computer-driven interactions and human-driven interactions, and offers an enjoyable and flexible platform, and users can meet and chat with others. The advantage of multi-player role-play game lays in its social nature, which attracts and motivates the target population and develop communicative function of language.

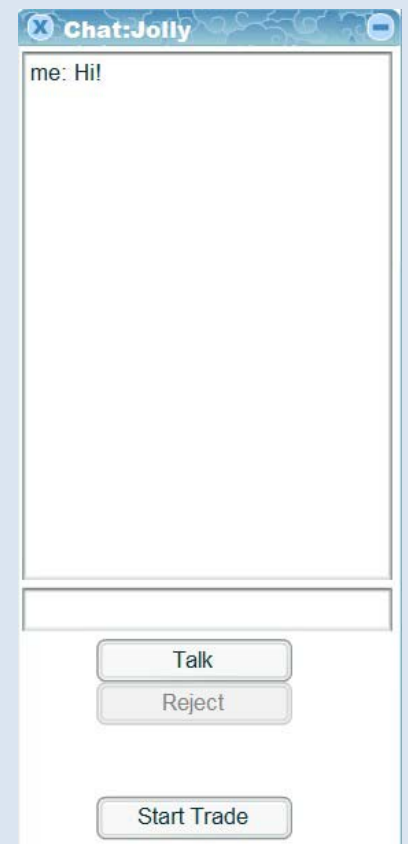
Chat (Audio and Text)

To start the voice chat with others, users need to either hit the “talk” button, or “accept” the voice chat request by other players.

As for the text-based chat, the learners need to click on the avatar of the other players and select the “chat” option from the wheel. Alternatively, the user can click on “my group” icon and click on a user’s name to activate the chat option. Here is a sample picture of two students chatting through text in Zon.



Figure 22. Chat Functionality



Besides voice chat and text chat, students can also trade the items on their inventory list. For example, student A bought a panda toy and decided to sell it to student B. Student B can decide if “accept” the trade or not. Once the trade is completed, the toy panda will be moved from user A’s inventory list to student B’s.

PART IV. Technical Specifications for Zon

Internet

A broadband connection is required to operate Zon.

Hardware

Minimum hardware configurations for Zon:

WINDOWS®	Macintosh	Linux®
Intel® Pentium® II 450MHz or faster processor (or equivalent)	PowerPC® G3 500MHz or faster processor Intel Core™ Duo 1.33GHz or faster processor	Modern processor (800MHz or faster)
128MB of RAM	128MB of RAM	512MB of RAM, 128MB of graphics memory

Operating systems and browsers

Zon is supported on the following minimum operating systems and browsers:

Windows		
Platform		Browser
Microsoft® Windows Vista®		Microsoft Internet Explorer 7, Firefox 2.0, AOL 9, Safari 3.x or later, Google Chrome
Microsoft Windows XP		Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 or later, Firefox 1.x, Firefox 2.x, Mozilla 1.x or later, Netscape 7.x or later, AOL 9, Opera 7.11 or later, Safari 3.x or later
Microsoft Windows Server® 2003		Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 or later, Firefox 1.x, Firefox 2.x
Microsoft Windows 2000		Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.x, Firefox 1.x, Firefox 2.x, Mozilla 1.x, Netscape 7.x or later, AOL 9, Opera 7.11 or later
Microsoft Windows Millennium Edition		Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5, Firefox 1.x, Mozilla 1.x, Netscape 7.x or later, AOL 9, Opera 7.11 or later
Microsoft Windows 98		Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0 or later, Firefox 1.x, Mozilla 1.x, Netscape 7.x or later, Opera 7.11 or later

Macintosh		
Platform	Browser	
Mac OS X v10.1 or later (PowerPC)	Firefox 1.x, Mozilla 1.x, Netscape 7.x or later, AOL for Mac OS X, Opera 6, Safari 1.x or later	
Mac OS X v10.4.x or later (Intel)	Firefox 1.5.0.3 or later, Opera 6, Safari 2.x or later	
Linux		
Platform	Browser	
Red Hat® Enterprise Linux (RHEL) 3 update 8, RHEL 4 update 4 (AS/ES/WS)	Firefox 1.5.0.7 or later, Mozilla 1.7.x or later, SeaMonkey 1.0.5 or later	
Novell SUSE™ 9.x or 10.1	Firefox 1.5.0.7 or later, Mozilla 1.7.x or later, SeaMonkey 1.0.5 or later	
Solaris™		
Platform	Browser	
Solaris 10	Firefox 1.5.x or later, Mozilla 1.7.x or later	