

# Alto welcomes new board members

## Next issue

In the January 2002 issue, **Special Report** examines the keenly debated issue of student visa issuance, while **Feedback** finds out what students studying in Germany think of their language travel experience. **Direction** asks agents what they consider to be potential threats to their business and **Course Guide** provides a listing of language programmes at independent schools in the UK. **Market Report** looks at how South African language schools fared in 2001.

The Association of Language Travel Organisations (Alto) elected a new Chairperson and four board members at its AGM held in Cancun, Mexico, during the World Youth and Student Travel Conference (WYSTC) in September. Peter Iwanovsky, departing Chairman, said the new or re-elected board members represented “a well-balanced mix of professionals from the buyers’ and sellers’ side [of the industry]”.

The new Alto Chairperson is Eurocentres’ Michael Gerber, while board members are from the schools, CIA Antibes in France and Linguaviva in Italy, and the agencies, STB in Brazil and STA Travel in the UK.

Because Alto is working on a number of projects, Iwanovsky explained that members did not mandate the board with further tasks. The board will propose aims for the next three years to the membership by the end of the



Delegates praised the excellent venue at WYSTC in Cancun, Mexico

year. “[These aims] will include added benefit for members and [steps towards] standardising quality and administration.”

One of the projects discussed by members during the AGM was a collaborative project with *Language Travel Magazine* to gather comparable data for the language travel industry. Iwanovsky said that new proposals to operate the

Status survey scheme via a legally-qualified third-party – had been well accepted by members.

Other subjects that were raised included paying commission on accommodation to agents and consultants. The new Alto board will set guidelines about this area of interest but Iwanovsky pointed out, “in the end it will be



Name of

Agent: Marco Righetti

Position: Co-owner with my wife Ursula

Age: 62

Name of

Company: Education Consultants sas

Location: Puegnago del Garda (Lake Garda), Italy

Other

branches: none

No. of full-time staff: two

Average no. of students per year: 450/500

Would you like to participate in our Agent questionnaire? If so, please send us your responses to these questions, accompanied by your photograph. Please contact us if you have any further questions.

## Agent questionnaire

### 1. When and how did you become a language travel agent?

In 1971 I became manager of an Italian tour operator in Milan dealing with language travel abroad. In 1986, when the company was sold, I left and started my own company, together with my wife.

### 2. What has been the most challenging enquiry you have received from a student?

Honestly, none of our students’ enquiries [has been] a real challenge. Because of the variety of the schools’ programmes [we represent], we have been able to meet nearly everyone’s request.

### 3. Please tell us about your client profile.

Our youngest student was eight years old, while our eldest students have been as [old] as 72. The strongest age group is from 20 to 35 years old. Our students are predominantly university students, employees and managers. Apart from requests for general language courses, more and more adults

require business and professional courses. During the past years the USA has been the most desired destination, [however] this year, we had many more enquiries for Europe, especially Ireland. Australia is also becoming interesting. Until two years ago, most of the students who attended general language courses booked intensive courses for three or four weeks. Since then, we have experienced more [requests for] “holiday courses” – semi-intensive courses for two or three weeks.

### 4. What do you think will be your future growth areas in the language travel market?

[In terms of destinations], Australia and, if the exchange rate with the pound sterling remains at today’s level [which is putting students off the UK], Ireland. As to courses, specialised, professional and certificate programmes.

### 5. How many institutions do you represent and in how many countries?

Education represents 50 schools and universities – including the nine

Universities of California – with study centres in the five continents. We started with a few organisations we knew already from my former [agency]. We added schools which offer specialised courses and small “family run” schools.

### 6. How do you market your services and how have you adapted your marketing technique in the past five years?

The best advertising is by word-of-mouth recommendation from our [previous] students. We are advertising, with good success, in a specific magazine and [we also] have our own web pages.

### 7. How has the Internet impacted on the way you do business?

The Internet is very [powerful] and usage has grown very quickly. We have had our own homepage for five years. We update the pages every year and we are considering putting our [agency] brochure on the pages in 2002. We have also considered the possibility of linking our site with other schools’ pages.

a business agreement between agents and schools if commission is paid, how much it should be and what added value the end-user [should] expect”.

Alto's AGM took place during the annual conference of the Federation of International Youth Travel Organisations (Fiyto), of which Alto is a sub-group. After criticisms about the event last year (see *Language Travel Magazine*, December 2000, page 7), this year it was deemed a success, with one venue for all delegates.

Christina Varesvhi, General Manager of IVI Idiomas Vivos in Venezuela, said, “I think this year [it] was quite important to attend, especially after the tragedy of September 11. It was important to get input from colleagues all over the world [about this].” Of 900 delegates, close to 700 attended WYSTC, and a special session about the consequences of September 11 was convened. □

## Another online venture in Turkey

ANOTHER agency has embraced the Internet and chosen to market its products in collaboration with a well-known national website. Alternatif Education Counselling Service in Turkey launched an Internet project earlier this year with a company called DMG, which is a powerful media player in the country.

Izzet Aslantatar, Marketing Manager at Alternatif, explained that DMG owns much of the media in Turkey, including the Turkish branch of CNN. “[It] has the biggest Internet portal in Turkey,” he said. “We have produced a website that is embedded in its website, and we provide all the study abroad materials.”

The agency has in fact launched two separate websites. Dilokulu.com is a portal that deals with language schools while

uluslararasıegitim.com provides information about mainstream education opportunities overseas.

“We decided to [establish] two sites, one for language and the other for education,” said Aslantatar, “but they will still support each other.” The implementation of the project is no small task. Alternatif aims to translate institutions' websites into the Turkish language and hopes that eventually all students in Turkey will have access to the sites in their native language.

“We believe, especially for language schools [because of Turkish students' lack of linguistic competence], that the websites produced by the schools are not enough, for students whose native language is not English,” said Aslantatar. Students visiting the sites will be able to apply directly to an institution, or via the Alternatif agency site.

Alternatif has been canvassing institutions to generate interest for the project and find schools to work with the site. At the time of going to press, 20 institutions were working on both sites. Aslantatar pointed out that North American schools in particular had been receptive to the idea. “Canadian and American schools see it as a very good way of reaching [international] students,” he said, “and if [the project] is supported by an agency and a reliable company like [DMG], they [foresee] no problem in getting students.”

Aslantatar is hoping to attract 1,000 student bookings via the website in the first year of operation. Campaigns to increase awareness of the site via scholarships are also planned, and airlines may also be invited to sponsor these packages. “We are very confident that [soon] all Turkish students will know about [the sites],” said Aslantatar. As part of the set-up, DMG shares the commission payment from bookings made via Dilokulu.com, while the education portal is a sole project of Alternatif. □

Each month, we profile the people from language schools who deal directly with agents, in order to give you the chance to get to know some of the people you work with.



### Who are you?

Alexandre Poelmans  
Manager, Agents Network at  
Ceran Lingua International

### Where do you work?

At our world headquarters in  
Spa, Belgium.

### Why and how did you start in the industry?

I started with the international Ceran Lingua Group because of my previous experience in working with agents' networks and because of my interest and willingness to [use] this experience with Ceran Lingua.

### Why should agents choose to represent your school?

Our unique scientifically-based learning methodology has been recognised for more than 25 years by a large variety of business companies and official institutions around the world. With our various European, Japanese and now US centres, the presence of Ceran Lingua in the international markets is increasing greatly.

### What do you believe are the challenges facing your school in the future?

The challenge I will face in the near future will be to set up an agents' network [and] to have a close relationship with [agents]. The target is, together with agents, to analyse each market, to know its exact potential, and to set up the best strategy and objectives in order [for both parties] to be successful.

### How does your school promote itself to agents?

An agent interested in representing Ceran Lingua could [visit] one of our centres and/or spend a week [with staff] in a Ceran centre. We are [also in the process of] editing a special Ceran catalogue for agents.

### How do you believe the industry will evolve in the future?

Language training will continue to be a must for business people working in... transnational companies. English is the number-one language all over the world; there is no reason in the short term for any [significant] change in this field.

### 8. How do your clients form an opinion about which country they want to study in?

America remains the most popular country [in which to learn English]. Those students who do not want to travel so far away from home choose a European country and [among them] London is the most requested destination. Ireland is [popular] because of its [favourable] exchange rate, and Australia [continues to] gain more and more interest as it is quite inexpensive compared with other countries.

### 9. How do you select which schools to represent?

We have been representing schools we know for more than 20 years, [adding] new schools and universities that offer specialised courses. Our students ask for small “family run” schools, which are able to guarantee a very good service. The first contact is usually made at the Alphe or Arels Workshop. All the schools, except the Australian and South African schools, have been visited throughout the years to verify that they meet the standard we

promise to our students. If we receive complaints about a school, which is rare, we inform the school, and if there are other complaints from different students we [stop working with] that school. Cooperation between the schools [we represent] and our agency is very important.

### 10. What is the biggest challenge facing language travel consultants today, in your opinion?

I think that all of us [in the industry] have to face reduced numbers of students. Until now, we have not been affected too much by the uncertain economic situation in Europe, or by the strong dollar and pound. [These problems] might become worse due to the [global impact of] events in the USA and their consequences. We will have to deal with [people's] fear of travelling due to possible terrorist acts. We have to try to assure people that travelling is not a constant risk. The media could help in this by not writing everyday about possible terrorist acts in certain nations.

## New initiatives from agencies

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION Foundation (IEF), a 12-year-old agency in Taiwan, is planning to collaborate with agencies in China. Albert Lee, Executive Director of IEF, explained that the move was prompted by the fact that “the market is not big enough to sustain growth [in Taiwan]”.

Unlike in China, where study abroad is growing in popularity, Lee said that the market for study abroad in Taiwan has contracted. “The holiday market has gone down by 40 per cent [this year] because the economy of Taiwan follows that of the USA,” he said.

IEF aims to work with agencies in at least three cities in China and share resources. “[Our] expertise and experience over the years can cut short the learning curve of agents in China and create more profit for IEF and our partners,” explained Lee. IEF will train Chinese agency staff and integrate the resources of all the companies it works with. “If it is acceptable, our partners in China will concentrate on marketing and servicing, while IEF will take care of [education providers], product design, foreign marketing strategy, selecting tour managers and so on,” said Lee, who was working on the project at the time of going to press.

Meanwhile, a travel agency chain with offices in 21 countries worldwide has announced its intention to venture into the language travel marketplace. Lee & Trauwitz is a new collaboration of two travel agency businesses that span Central America and the Caribbean, South America, Europe and the USA.

“Our function [as an agency] will be to sell and promote language schools, youth camps, international sports camps, youth ski programmes and youth travel,” explained Christine Trauwitz, Co-Founder of the company. She added, “We are building a strong infrastructure within schools [and universities] in the countries where our offices are located.” □

## Association corner

**Claudia Constanza Rozo López**, Secretary of the new Colombian agent association, **Anex**, talks to *Language Travel Magazine* about why the association was founded and what it has achieved during its first year of operation.



Anex was founded as an informal initiative of a group of agencies looking for the recognition of other agencies, with the aim of improving the quality of the service [we offer]. Work done [so far] has [included] the establishment of internal regulations and an agreed consensus about our aims and future projects. [Our members] now have a group and a place to [discuss] ideas about our activity... and ways of [improving] our service. Today, Anex is a point of reference for policies of conduct towards other agencies, marketing strategies and resolution with clients.

Anex has two ways to consolidate its existence. Firstly by the internal easy-going relationship between its members and the pride of belonging to a highly qualified group regulated by ethical codes of behaviour. We expect also to promote well-informed and creative kinds of service. Secondly, Anex will provide support in marketing strategies. The first public activity undertaken as an association was attending a “Salon del estudiante” student fair. We attended with a unified image and showed the diversity of [our membership] with promotional materials.

Colombian clients have a long tradition of interest in studying abroad, but the political and social crisis has increased enquires [about] security and the level of quality [provided by] foreign educational centres. English has become a need, not just an advantage, when Colombians search for jobs. Other languages [are considered] a particular intellectual interest [needed for] inter-cultural exchange and the establishment of new business networks. A search for best prices, over the quality of the course, has become a necessity as the economic situation in Colombia has declined. People at the moment are most interested in the UK and Australia.

[Anex] is planning an annual fair in Bogotá to promote its agencies' activities to a very specialised area of the market. The association will [also] open its doors to new members and group activities in different subjects. Next year, [it is hoped that] a better knowledge of other educational systems [will] be promoted [among] the membership. We [also] expect a consolidation of the best-qualified agencies in Colombia. There are definite distinctions between agencies in the country: the traditional ones trust their long experience, while for new agencies, marketing strategies play a more important role.

## On the move



Natalie Johnston has returned to work at St Mark's International College in Perth, Australia,

after working in London, UK, for two years. Ms Johnston was International Relations Manager at the college, part of the Geos International Group, prior to her departure but is now back on a part-time basis assisting with regional marketing in Oceania. She has also been teaching English at St Mark's, which she says has been a “diverse and challenging experience”.



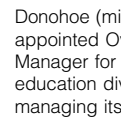
Three new staff have recently been appointed at UK agency, Cactus Language. Laura Woodhead (top) is a new Sales Consultant at the company. She has special



responsibility for coordinating foreign language training programmes in the UK. Joseph



Donohoe (middle) has been appointed Overseas Account Manager for the company's education division. He is managing its newly opened overseas office in Shanghai, China, and will be responsible for processing Chinese student applications. Diana Bundy (below) is the new Academic Director for Cactus Language Training. She will be responsible for coordinating the academic syllabus and organising trainers for the company's corporate language accounts.



Michael Gerber is the new Chairperson of the Association of Language Travel Organisations



(Alto). Mr Gerber, who is Chief Executive of Eurocentres, said he intended to enhance further Alto's reputation in the industry. “[With] 200 members worldwide, and [as] the biggest association within Fiyto, [Alto] has the potential to become the leading association of the language travel industry,” he said.

Muireann Neylon remains Director of Clare Language Centre in Ireland but she has moved the school from Corofin to the nearby town of Ennis. Ennis is a growing town with good facilities, but, as Ms Neylon explained, “it has retained its medieval character with small streets and lots of little boutiques, craft shops and café for visitors to explore”.