

Belta celebrates 10th birthday

Next issue

In our January issue, **Special Report** finds out about the latest trends in the junior sector, while **Market Report** investigates business trends in Spain. **Direction** looks at the issue of contracts between agency and schools, while **Feedback** asks students in Australia what they think of their study abroad experience. **City Focus** visits London in the UK and **Destination** tours the inland states of the USA. **Status** provides another comparative global analysis.

The Brazilian agency association, Belta, has celebrated its 10th birthday with an anniversary evening held at the New Zealand consulate. Since its inception, the association has grown from seven members to represent 52 agencies across the country. Representatives from consulates and overseas education bodies attended the event to congratulate Belta on its achievements to date.

'It was an honour to receive Belta's guests, because much of our growth in Brazil is due to [Belta's] presence and structure throughout the country,' commented Simon Adamson, New Zealand's Consul General, who hosted the event. Alfredo Spinola, President of Belta, said the event enabled Belta to 'see all it had accomplished, and how much [it] can accomplish from now on'.

Some of Belta's achievements over the past 10 years include the establishment of the Belta



Marcelo Mauler, Norma Polimeni, Alfredo Spinola, Maria Inez Grasso

website, the development of the Belta Guide, distributed to students throughout the country, and the launch of language and education fair, ExpoBelta. Maria Inez Grasso at Belta explained, 'In 2003, in its fourth year, ExpoBelta is expected to attract 30,000 people to a pool of five cities: Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Curitiba and Salvador.' The event started out in 2000 as a subsidiary event to a large tourism fair.

Grasso added that this year, 'the big news is the guide's online version', which can be accessed from Belta's website or at www.guiabelta.org.br. Students can contact Belta members directly now to find out about courses they are interested in. According to Grasso, in the first two months of operation, more than 2,000 messages were sent to Belta members.

'One should also not forget about the social projects that will

Agent questionnaire



Name of Agent: Valentina Sarazinska
 Position: Director
 Age: 58
 Name of Company: Language Centre Kora
 Location: Daugavpils, Latvia
 Other branches: none
 No. of full-time staff: three
 Average no. of student per year: 100-150

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.

1. When and how did you become a language travel agent?
 Nine years ago. At that time, I was working as a teacher of English and French. My senior students asked me to arrange a trip to the UK for a vacation course. It was not an easy job at that time, but I managed to organise everything. It was incredible! So in the summer of 1993, I brought my first group of students to Embassy CES Hastings.

2. Please tell us about your client profile.
 First of all, they are our students who attend our classes here: juniors request vacation courses, seniors request exam preparation, high school, college or university programmes. I am happy the number of adults (aged 20-to-40) is increasing. They typically request standard courses.

3. How many institutions do you represent and in how many countries?
 It's difficult to give the precise number. On the one hand, we have signed agreements with 11 institutions from Europe, Canada and Australia. On the other hand, we sometimes place one or two students in many other centres. It's a great pleasure to meet new partners who willingly assist you. Very often, one client gives a start to a long and mutually beneficial cooperation.

4. What percentage of Latvians, in your opinion, actually study abroad?
 In my opinion, about 13 per cent take long-term programmes abroad and about 30 per cent take short-term courses and there are many others who just dream about this, but money matters...

5. How do you promote your study abroad services?
 Via local mass media, special events in our centre, regional education fairs and numerous meetings with potential clients.

6. How do you find new business partners?
 By participating in agent fairs - thanks to the CEC Agent Fair in Halifax, Canada, I [can advise] my clients about great educational opportunities in that wonderful country. The Ialc Workshop in Riga presented us 10 partners. We also meet partners via the Internet and personal meetings.

7. In general, are students knowledgeable about the range of study options on offer?
 They are getting more so, especially university and high school students. But there are many who know little or nothing. It's a usual practice [that] a counsellor in my office spends hours with a student first, [spends] another day with the client and his parents and after that many hours to get the necessary papers ready. What a pleasure to get a thank-you letter later from Sydney, Fort Lauderdale or Munich.

8. How is the agency market in Latvia developing?
 There are some big agencies that have been working successfully for years in the capital and western regions. We are the largest centre in the southeast. I do not think that there could be a great increase in the agency market in this country.

be promoted by Belta,' added Grasso. 'The association has already offered to grant five scholarships abroad to qualified students from government-owned schools who obtain the best marks in national exams. This is just one example of how Belta has been accomplishing its mission of helping the development of international education in Brazil.'

Despite Belta's best efforts to promote study abroad however, there are factors dampening the market. Alfredo Spinola told *Language Travel Magazine* that the instability of the economy meant it was hard to forecast growth in year-end figures. 'Parents cannot plan for [the cost of] living expenses abroad for their children,' he said, pointing out that the value of the real dropped to 3.6 against the dollar in late August. 'Our hopes for January and February [the peak season] are linked to the global economy.' □

Refunds - a reader's response

FOLLOWING our article about refund policies in the September issue, Anders Akerlund, of Avista Sprakreseformedlarna agency in Sweden, offers his own view.

'Our policy is simple: if a student wants a refund, we pay back what the school [agrees] to refund, whatever the motives are to interrupt the course. The reasons for this are the following: Firstly, I believe almost no student cancels without a valid reason in their opinion. Secondly, it is often difficult to determine if the reasons are valid or not and it's time-consuming to find out. Thirdly, I believe that in the long run, it's goodwill for both our agency and the school to apply a generous attitude towards refunds.'

Now, schools have very different approaches to refunds.

Some are very generous about it, others never refund. Some only refund due to illness, others according to the circumstances. Some schools offer a credit for the outstanding period. Many schools are in between, and discussions have to take place 'case by case'.

As we mainly have long-term students, it has become increasingly important for us to negotiate standard agreements for refunds. The more dynamic schools, in this respect, apply a cancellation policy of one-to-four weeks notice for both the tuition and accommodation. If students leave the course immediately they lose the corresponding amount. If they stay during the notice period, they do not lose anything. I find this a very good standard that I would like to see extended to as many schools as possible.

Some schools tend to fear that such a policy would make students stop their courses too easily. Our experience shows that this is not the case. A dynamic school should accept that some students extend their stay while others shorten it.

For schools that have installed a system allowing students to start every Monday or every month, their system is a cost-efficient method to permit new students to be integrated and others to leave at regular intervals. To apply a strict non-refund policy under such a scheme is not logical, as a cancellation does not correspond to continued costs for the school. The situation is different for a school operating a specifically designed 12-week course.

To be realistic, it is of course impossible to make a standard clause for all schools in all circumstances. In my opinion however, the guideline to follow is that cancellations are a normal part of our business and that nobody should earn money on them. The need is growing for a general standard on refunds, rather than individual agreements or ongoing negotiations with schools on a case-by-case basis.' □

On the move



Joining Queen's University School of English in Canada as Director, Dr Andy Curtis earned his

MA in applied linguistics and English language training, and his PhD in language education at the University of York in England. Most recently, Dr Curtis was a faculty member at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA. This is not Dr Curtis' first association with Queen's University: he has also held the post of visiting scholar in the Faculty of Education.



Alexandra Fletcher has moved to the Sales & Marketing team at Churchill House School of

English in the UK, where she is in charge of developing the Japanese, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, Korean and Thai markets. Ms Fletcher commented, 'It's a wonderful school, with a high reputation [and] excellent on-site facilities. I'm enjoying being part of the sales team!' She was previously involved in international recruitment at St Lawrence College in the UK.



Tatsuhiko Hoshino, formerly Executive Officer of Marketing & Sales for the Japanese

agency chain, ICS, is now working as Marketing Director for the Princeton Review of Japan, based in Tokyo. Mr Hoshino said, 'TPRJ is the premier test preparation and college/graduate school advising service provider in Japan.'



Regent Language Training in the UK has promoted Johnny Peters to the position of



Sales and Marketing Director. Mr Peters has worked for

Regent since 1999 as Sales Manager and Director. His new role will encompass the sales and marketing function within the company, overseeing Regent's marketing strategy and developing promotional materials that will incorporate the newly developed sub-branding system. Regent also recently appointed Hortensia Mendy (below) as a Sales Consultant, who will represent the organisation in Latin America. Ms Mendy has a wealth of industry knowledge and will be using her experience to establish links with agents in South America.



Face to face

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?

Dr Clark Egnor, Director, English as a Second Language Institute.

Where do you work?

Marshall University, West Virginia, USA.

Why and how did you start in the industry?

I got my first experience with international education while teaching English in Japan during the late 80s. I have directed the English as a Second Language Institute (ESLI) at Marshall University since 1994.

Why should agents choose to represent your school?

Marshall University is a top-quality, best value university with 13 colleges and schools offering over 100 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programmes. We offer conditional admission to students who lack the necessary English requirement and we will waive the Toefl [requirement] for those who complete the advanced level of our Learning English for Academic Purposes (Leap) programme.

How does your school promote itself to agents?

As a member of Nafsa: Association of International Educators, we have made contact with some agents who are also members of Nafsa. We are interested in participating in agent fairs in the future.

Please tell us about your most popular courses, and about new courses that have been recently introduced.

We recently implemented a language lab that is conducted totally on the Internet. Our students can now practise reading, grammar, listening and writing on any one of the hundreds of networked computers on our campus or from the comfort of their dorm room or apartment.