

Belta plans for future

Next issue

In our March issue, **Special Report** examines the latest trends in the summer programmes market, while **Market Report** finds out how Australian schools fared last year. **Direction** looks at the question of agency expo strategies, and asks agents about the potential for expansion in the industry. **Feedback** finds out what students studying in France think about their study abroad experience and **Agency Survey** assesses Italian agents' responses about trends in 2001.

Indicating its confidence in the market, following a sharp downturn in student bookings in the weeks after September 11, the Brazilian agency association, Belta, has forecast that bookings will pick up again in 2002, and is pressing ahead with plans for ExpoBelta, which it is organising independently for the first time this year.

Alfredo Spinola de Mello Neto, President of the association, said that Belta members experienced a decrease in bookings of up to 70 per cent following the attacks in the USA. However, figures rallied last November, at just 25 per cent below the rate of the previous year.

Nevertheless, agencies were hit hard by the public's reluctance to travel, and some businesses had to make redundancies, he said, while others opted for a legal resource under which employers were able to reduce staff salaries



Belta is planning to launch an online guide to study abroad

and the number of hours worked by up to 25 per cent.

But, as Maria Inez Grasso, Finance Director of Belta, pointed out, "The need for language skills and international experience remains. In spite of the [situation], the students cannot wait indefinitely to prepare themselves for the global environment."

The ExpoBelta fairs, which are expected to attract between 50 and 60 exhibitors and up to 20,000 visitors, are to take place in April in Belo Horizonte and Sao Paulo. Previously, these events were organised in collaboration with a major tourism exhibition, and an educational pavilion was dedicated to study

Agent questionnaire



Name of Agent: Fernando Zaragoza
 Position: Course Coordinator
 Name of Company: Instituto Anglo-Mexicano de Cultura
 Location: Mexico City, Mexico
 Other branches: Toluca and Puebla
 No. of staff: two
 Average no. of students per year: 200

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?
 We started promoting courses in England and Canada in the 1980s. Our mission is to promote the [union] of the Mexican and British cultures, something which we have been doing since 1943. For that reason, one of the natural choices for expanding our services from the traditional English language classes was to promote courses abroad.

2. Please tell us about your typical client profile.
 Our typical client is aged from 18 to 25 years old, there is a 50/50 split between England and Canada, and most students require general English language courses.

3. Are there any new trends among students?
 No. We have had a remarkable [shift towards] one school in England that has given us excellent results, and receives 60 per cent of our students, but these are normal [English language] courses.

4. How many institutions do you represent and in how many countries?
 We represent two in England and two in Canada.

5. How do you market your agency to potential clients, and how have your marketing methods changed over time?
 We are shifting from mass marketing (newspapers, magazines, etc.) to more direct methods (school visits, corporate clients, etc). We want to focus our efforts on the students attending our own regular courses, as well as with other schools where other services are supplied, such as academic consultancy, certification, programme designs, etc. Taking advantage of this, we consider that there is a big market to exploit at lower costs.

6. What has been the most successful business decision you have made? Including a cheaper school in our range.

7. What do you think the future holds for your agency?
 That's a very good question! We are investigating the chances of promoting our courses through a travel agency chain that would reach parts of the Mexican Republic that we currently don't reach.

8. How has the Internet impacted on the way that you do business?
 The Internet has made our client response [rate] easier and faster. It has definitely reduced the time in which information is supplied to clients. In this way, we have better chances to find services that customers are looking for, and to satisfy their requirements for information and assistance.

abroad. Celso Garcia, Belta's Fair Organiser, commented, "The independent [venture] will assist Belta's [members] and their international partners mainly with regard to the cost of the stands and the quality of exhibitors and attendees [at the fairs]."

De Mello Neto said that ExpoBelta would play a vital role in boosting student demand for study abroad this year. Another plan is to launch an online guide to complement Belta's printed student guide to study abroad. "Our printed guide is already a traditional vehicle for international advertisers," said De Mello Neto. "We are sure that the online version will achieve the same success. Nowadays, it is very important to have websites using state-of-the-art search engines with [lots of] information. Belta has gained recognition from the public, and its website is an important source of information." □

Tieca reports successful student fair

TIECA, the Thai agency association, held its seventh International Education Fair in Bangkok last year and it was a "great success", according to the association's Spokesperson, Geoffrey Blyth.

There were 74 exhibitors and more than 4,000 visitors at the two-day fair. John Wade, representing Hothouse Media at the event, reported, "[The fair] was in the wonderful venue of the old Raffles Hotel in Bangkok. The grand ballroom had been set up to accommodate [exhibitors], with some 25 booths being occupied by Australian educators."

Across all the Thai students visiting the fair, English language courses and MBA programmes were reported to be most in demand. Blyth added that countries

of interest were the USA, followed by Australia and the UK.

"[September 11] had no effect on the number of visitors," said Blyth. "However, we have to wait and see about enrolment. I think Australia is definitely on the up while the USA and UK are down." Observers from other agency associations, including Kosa, Vieca and Tosa, attended the fair. "All the exhibitors enjoyed the great food and hospitality," said Blyth.

He attributed the fair's success to "the experience of the management team and Tieca's full-time office." The event was managed by incorporating the Internet into promotions too, and 1,200 students enrolled for the event using the Tieca student website. □

Ialc schools visit Baltic states

NINE school directors from the International Association of Language Centres (Ialc), representing 11 different teaching destinations in five countries, went to Finland and the Baltic states in November last year to introduce their schools to agents there. The Ialc Baltic Roadshow saw a series of mini-workshops organised in Helsinki, Finland; Tallinn, Estonia; Riga, Latvia; and Vilnius, Lithuania.

"It was an extremely positive move by Ialc to organise the roadshow," said participant Alexander Jones, representing Yes Education Centre in the UK. "My trip gave me an insight into the region, allowing a far greater localised market knowledge of these countries and their ambitions for the future."

Agent Irina Dubrovskaya, of Ergo Study Abroad Services in Latvia, was among the agents attending. "[The roadshow] was very convenient [for us]," she said, "and schools had really interesting offers, so hopefully, it will be beneficial for us."

Odile Migieu, of Cork Language Centre International in Ireland, commented that these countries will play a bigger part in European economic life as the European community enlarges. "As with all new markets, it is vital to gain a foothold at an early stage," she said. "I see the investment as an investment over the medium term."

Dubrovskaya agreed that Ialc schools were likely to benefit from their marketing initiative. "Their efforts to come and visit us demonstrate real interest in our market," she said. "Such an attitude makes us trust and respect [these schools], and when choosing a partner, we will of course give priority to them." She added that meeting the schools allowed agents "to feel the life of the country and to understand it better".

Jan Capper, Secretary at Ialc, explained that the association's policy is to visit agents in emerging and re-emerging markets. Another roadshow is planned to China in the spring. □

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?

I'm Eugenio Cordova, Director of two Spanish institutions in Ecuador.

Where do you work?

Instituto Superior de Español in Quito and Otavalo, plus the Islas Galapagos Spanish Language Center on the Galapagos Islands.

Why and how did you start in the industry?

After finishing university, I worked as a Spanish teacher. Because of the lack of schools – and encouraged by some of my students – I opened the Instituto Superior de Español in 1988.

Which languages do you speak?

Spanish, English and German.

Which are your strongest student provider markets?

Europe and North America (by agents).

Why should agents choose to represent your school?

We [offer] invaluable experience. We know what the students expect from a language school!

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

To improve and update our programme, [incorporating] new methods and materials into the teaching process.

How does your school promote itself to agents?

We advertise in magazines and on the Internet.

What percentage of your annual student intake comes through agents?

About 50 per cent.

What do you enjoy most about working in the industry?

The international atmosphere and working with people [who are] eager to learn our language and culture.

How do you believe the industry will evolve?

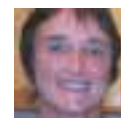
Students are more and more interested in studying abroad. I think that like in all other serious businesses, we have a bright future ahead.

On the move



Richard Gorst is the new Business Manager for English Courses at St Clare's Oxford in the UK.

Prior to this new appointment, Mr Gorst was General Manager of ECO Ltd, a company he established in 1994 on behalf of a German educational group. His new role is to coordinate and manage English language courses provided by St Clare's from a business perspective.



Harriet Parker has been appointed to the new post of Academic Principal at English in

Chester in the UK. Ms Parker started her career with the UK's Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in Thailand and then worked in the private sector in the UK. For the last 20 years, she has held a variety of posts in the public sector, most recently Coordinator of the English Language Unit at Wirral Metropolitan College.



Imogen Craney is the new Head of Studies at Global College in Sydney, Australia. Formerly with

multimedia company, Planet English, Ms Craney has been in the industry for over 10 years. "It's very exciting to be working for a young school such as this," she said. "My focus is on keeping the language classes innovative and dynamic, bringing culture and technology into the classroom, linking up with universities, and maintaining high standards of delivery."



Jacqueline Joyce, Manager of MEI-Relsa in Ireland, is moving on. Ms Joyce said, "After

nearly six happy – and hopefully productive – years, I am moving to Hastings in the UK due to family commitments." She will be working freelance on a variety of projects. "My best regards to everyone I've met in the course of this work," she said. "It has been a wonderful experience."



Simon Gray has been appointed Director of Studies at Bell Oxford in the UK. Having previously

worked at ILA Oxford and EF in Hastings, he has substantial experience. His role will be to manage the students, teachers and classes on a daily basis, and he also has responsibility for developing Bell products and the profile of the school locally, nationally and internationally.

ICS Japan charts September 11 aftermath

THE MARKET study team at Japanese agency chain, ICS, has charted the impact of the terrorist attacks in the USA on the local clientele. A spokesperson at the agency revealed to *Language Travel Magazine* that short-term programmes in the USA had been affected much more than long-term programmes of over three months in length and undergraduate programmes in the country.

In September, a cancellation rate of 25 per cent was recorded for US short-term programmes, compared with a rate of just eight per cent for long-term programmes and two per cent for undergraduate programmes. In October, these rates actually increased, although the ICS team pointed out that the 40 per cent drop in US-bound short-term programmes during October was actually across a smaller number of students. A higher 13 per cent cancellation rate was also recorded for long-term bookings to the USA and a five per cent drop-out rate was recorded for undergraduate programmes.

In September, bookings to all other language teaching destinations dropped by an average of eight per cent, followed by 12 per cent in October. A spokesperson for the ICS team commented that the level of enquiries during this period had not dropped, however, adding that many Japanese students choose to embark on their intended studies six months in advance of their enquiries. □

Talk to us

How does your agency deal with the issue of refunds from a school, if your client changes their mind about their study plans or cannot obtain a relevant visa?

Do you make sure that schools have strict guidelines about this, or have you experienced problems?

Language Travel Magazine would like to hear from you. Please fax us your comments on: +44 207 440 4033 or email us on: mail@hothousemedia.com

Association corner

Magdalena Jugovic, Spokesperson for the Yugoslav Association of Travel Agents (**Yuta**), informs us about the current market trends in Yugoslavia and the achievements of the association.



YUTA

Since Yuta last updated *Language Travel Magazine* about its activities, we have started the realisation of all our plans, including establishing a quality trademark and opening a dialogue with various local embassies. The licensing of travel agents is going well and all our members acquired licences during 2001. We have also started the process of establishing a quality trademark for Yuta members in the general public.

So far, two press conferences have been held, but this is of course far from enough, so we hope to decide on a complete [marketing] campaign that will be carried out this year. As for establishing a dialogue with embassies, we have only just initiated this by sending out the letters to the embassies introducing the Yuta group, what our aims are and how we hope to go about our plans. We are now at the stage where we shall try to set up appointments with the consulates and try to get our ideas accepted.

The majority of [our] students are still young people opting for summer vacation courses. But there is also an evident trend of more adults asking for intensive general English courses during the year. With Yugoslavia opening up economically after almost 10 years of UN sanctions, it is evident that business people need to brush up and improve their English, which they haven't used on a regular basis for quite a long time. Also the number of general and business English courses is on the rise. We think we will have more of these in the future which is a good thing, and more challenging to the agent trying to find a course to suit the client exactly.

So far we haven't seen any effects [of September 11] as far as the language travel market is concerned. This is mainly because the USA hasn't been a major language travel destination [here]. But we see that the interest in exchange school year programmes in the USA – which are very popular in Yugoslavia – has fallen, although it is still too early to tell what the final numbers will be. English in the UK has remained on the same level, although students opt for smaller cities (Hastings, Bristol, etc.) rather than London, which used to be the number-one destination. Italian language courses are also showing a rising trend.

A reason to dissuade students from travelling to the USA on a language course is visa problems. My agency, for instance, had a group of four students who were refused visas, although they had all previously attended language courses in the USA and were either full-time high school or university students. If things don't change in the attitude of the USA embassy, it [will soon be] a waste of both time and money for potential students and for us as agents [to apply to the USA].