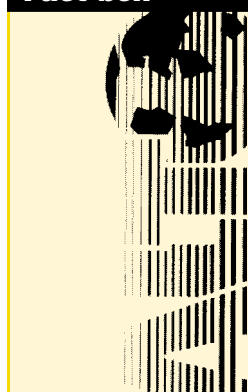


Alto's global vision

The new Chairperson of the Association of Language Travel Organisations (Alto), MICHAEL GERBER, tells *Language Travel Magazine* of Alto's aims for the future and answers our questions about the association's significant achievements to date.

Fact box



Full name: Association of Language Travel Organisations

Year established: 1998

Number of members: 200

Type of members: language travel agents, language schools, language course organisers, language associations

Association's main role: to enhance trading opportunities for buyers and sellers of language travel products; to establish guidelines and standards for business conduct between members

Membership criteria: membership of Fiyto and written adherence to the Alto Charter

Government recognition: no

Code of practice: yes

Complaints procedure: no

Agent workshops/fam trips: annual seminars, trading opportunities, General Meeting at WYSTC

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Q What does the new Alto board intend to work on, in its members' interests, over the coming term of three years?

A [The Alto board] intends to enhance [its] membership, in particular, buyers of language travel products – to add value to membership and to help to set standards for the language travel industry [as the association has done since Alto's inauguration]. Last but not least, to carry out the mandates given by the membership to the Executive Board.

Q What do you hope to achieve as Chairperson of Alto?

A I want Alto to become the central point of reference for the language travel industry; offering support, information and guidance in matters concerning the senders and receivers of language course students. With a membership of 200 organisations, representing buyers and sellers of language travel products from 39 countries and from all five continents, Alto [is already] the leading global association in the language travel industry.

Q How has Alto evolved as an association since it was established?

A Having started in 1998 with 120 founder members, Alto today represents a membership of 200 buyers and sellers of language products worldwide. Alto members have agreed to conduct their business according to the "Alto members' guarantees of quality", for the benefit of their clients – the language course students. As well as setting quality standard guidelines for Alto members across the industry, the association [has set up]

a multilingual website for both the language travel trade and for [potential] language travel students, which attracts more than 1,000 visitors per month.

Q What are the key challenges facing the language travel industry, in your opinion, in the coming months and years, and how will Alto work to help members overcome these?

A For the time being, the events of the 11 September 2001 in the USA have had and will continue to have a negative effect on the language travel industry. [In addition to this challenge], the Internet is changing the way agents and schools work. Alto will continue to assume its role to work on the provision of more, better and fair business for its members.

Q Why do you believe Status, the data collection project organised in collaboration with *Language Travel Magazine*, to be important?

A Unlike for other industries, the language travel trade is lacking comprehensive, up-to-date and reliable data to help agents and schools define their strategies and to plan their marketing and sales activities professionally. The Status survey data collection project will help considerably in achieving this goal.

Q How does Alto work with its associate membership of other language school and agency associations?

A Through WYSTC (the annual World Youth and Student Travel Conference organised by Fiyto), Alto offers a platform for these associations to meet and to discuss matters of

common interest to their own membership – in an environment where at the same time many of the relevant global buyers and sellers of language travel products meet. Looking at the objectives and activities of these many associations, it seems that in the future, Alto can play a central role in order to avoid duplication of efforts, so that language organisations can [make better use] of their time and their financial contributions spent [furthering the efforts] of their own membership.

Q How does Alto negotiate the viewpoints of both buyers and sellers of language travel products and come up with guidelines on issues, such as Internet-based sales, that are agreeable to all?

A Alto's Executive Board and membership represents both senders and receivers of language students on a global basis. [Therefore], issues are raised from both sides of the membership, and after discussing the different viewpoints with and among the Executive Board, guidelines are [agreed upon] for the benefit of the industry.

Q Do you have a message for any of our readers who may be interested in Alto's activities?

A The language travel industry is becoming more and more professional in the way its business is being conducted. The greater the number of bona fide and professional buyers and sellers of language travel products that join Alto, the more representative the association's voice becomes, not only [on behalf of] its members but for the industry as a whole.