

Venezuela in deep crisis

Next issue

In our June issue, **Special Report** examines off-peak student trends in the language travel market, while **Market Report** finds out about market trends in New Zealand last year. **Direction** looks at study tours in the summer market and **Feedback** finds out what students studying in the UK think about their study abroad experience. **City Focus** visits Cork in Ireland while **Destination** looks at what's on offer for international students learning Italian in Italy.

Language travel agents in Venezuela are feeling the pinch as political troubles, the devaluation of the Bolivar and national strikes buffet the country's economy, leaving the population with substantially less income than 18 months ago.

Since February, the government has introduced tight controls on foreign currency exchange, making it almost impossible for Venezuelans to buy dollars. This, in turn, has severely affected the outbound student market.

"If you have Bolivars you cannot buy dollars until the government gives banks special permission to sell and buy," reports Mariacarmen Devera of ESC. "At this time, it is almost impossible to find [a bank with this permission]." Jose Mujica, of Cursos Worldwide Languages JM, laments, "Nobody willing to buy a [language] course is sure they can get the currency or when



PHOTOGRAPH: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Venezuelans protesting against the policies of President Chavez

the government will open the market for [transactions]."

There is still demand for overseas language courses, but for very different reasons. "People are still interested in acquiring a second language, especially English," says Mujica. "Not for the same reasons as before, but as a way of survival in a different country or environment."

Oscar Mendoza of RCU agency agrees. "Many of our cli-

ents are 'old' clients and from the middle class," he says. "They have enough money to support [themselves in] these bad days, and other clients are looking for the opportunity to emigrate."

Since the Bolivar was first devalued by 120 per cent in comparison with the dollar in February 2002, agencies estimate that business has dropped by 50 per cent on average. Devera says she is still sending clients abroad,

Industry issues - agents speak out

January February March April May June July August September October November December

Q What marketing materials do your partner schools provide you with and how could the resources available be improved?



"The marketing materials provided vary a great deal from school to school. Some schools provide agents with very comprehensive marketing materials, including brochures with translation (or brochures in our native languages), agent's manuals, photo binders (to provide illustrations to potential students when counselling), CD Roms, videos of the school, posters, maps etc. To me, an agent's manual, photo-binder and brochure are the most important marketing tools for promotion. I do not use CD Roms or videos as often as I should because it is more time consuming to run the CD Rom or video to potential students. In addition to the above, I think news releases are also a good way to keep agents updated about new developments happening in a school."

Pamela Wang, Marco Polo Immigration & Education Consulting Co, Taiwan



"The schools usually provide us with brochures and some posters. An agent manual that is well thought out is always helpful. One school in Italy sent us a photo album with pictures of the school, classes, staff, excursions, social activities, etc - this was a nice thing to show prospective students and more personal than regular brochures. Since we participate in fairs and seminars, I would like to see more functional promotional materials for such occasions [such as] a small giveaway or an interactive CD Rom that is easy to hand out. For office use, the customer would benefit from videos, CD Roms, maps and photos. Our target group is mainly adults aged 30-plus and it is always nice [to have] materials that are appealing for this group. Surely, this also depends on what type of marketing materials the school can afford; a small school might not have the budget."

Anne Ostrand, Ostrand Utbildningskonsult, Sweden



"The usual suspects emerge: brochures, prospectuses, posters, CD Roms, videos, photos, postcards, follow up letters and websites. The type and style of marketing materials depends on the education provider. To be effective, marketing materials need to work in conjunction with strong internal administration networks and efficient and ongoing support for distribution outlets such as agents. Too often, education providers spend resources developing marketing materials but do not put in place structures to back them up. Language schools tend to be better positioned to alter and adjust their materials, whilst universities in the UK, Australia and New Zealand tend to have marketing materials that lack innovation and enthusiasm. The better language schools in the UK and NZ have fresh, easy-to-navigate websites that are well maintained, whilst universities tend to underuse their website and clog them with irrelevant user in-

formation. They often fail to display simple things such as course tuition fees and are unable to effectively and efficiently field enquiries from interested parties, thus undermining their own marketing initiatives."

Tom Kane, UKEAS, Korea and China



"The quality and quantity of the material we receive depends on the school, institute or university and also the country. In general, the brochures we receive from the language schools in Australia and New Zealand are excellent and we are constantly updated with new materials and the latest information. Overall, the American language schools and universities we deal with do very little in the way of marketing in South America in contrast with the ones in Australia, New Zealand and the UK."

Gonzalo Decillis, Monez Ruiz, Argentina

although numbers are down 70 per cent on last year. She says most of her clients want to study in Canada, "and the Canadian Embassy is rejecting all visas, students and visitors, so at this time, we have to send [clients] to England or another destination".

Mujica has also experienced problems with visa issuance. "Several countries have restricted their visa issuance," he says, "due to the tendency of a lot of people to extend their course length. Visa denials have increased, and this has reduced sales."

Venezuela has previously been a strong student provider country for the USA in particular. In the latest *Open Doors* report, published by the Institute of International Education, Venezuelan students were reported to be the sixth largest source of students for English language enrolments, accounting for 3.2 per cent of the 78,521 students in the survey. □

Dear Language Travel Magazine

"HAVING read the March edition of *Language Travel Magazine*, I cannot help writing a few words to comment about the agents' points about [problems with] language schools (see March issue, Industry issues, page 10).

I think the most important thing for a client having booked a language course abroad is to know what to expect, so receiving ample information about the course, the school, the accommodation, what to do on the first day, etc, is the most important thing. Cultura Wien produces an agent's manual every year with pages to copy for clients and, after having received the booking, we send full information to the agent again.

However, often, after a student's arrival, [we find] that none of the information has been passed on to the client. We often

wonder with what minimal information students are sent abroad!

Another thing is that any questions or problems that can be solved in two minutes in the school are reported to parents, who of course immediately contact the agent, who contacts the school. We understand that students might be insecure expressing themselves in a foreign language, but our staff speak quite a lot of languages and are there to help, advise and solve any problems. We would appreciate it if agents could tell their clients to speak to our staff [about any problems]. The relationship between school and agent has to be based on mutual trust and cooperation, because the aim is a common one: to satisfy the client."

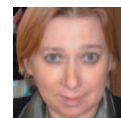
Renate Schmid, Cultura Wien, Austria □

On the move



Josie Dent has been appointed Academic Manager at Manchester Academy of English in the UK. Ms Dent has worked in the industry for over nine years and hopes that the

school will continue to grow and to explore new areas of English language teaching. Meanwhile, Frances Corley (below) has been appointed as the new Business Manager at the school, moving from her previous position as Marketing Coordinator.



MEI-Relsa in Ireland has appointed Geraldine Staunton as Education &

Training Officer. In her new role, she is looking forward to supporting language teachers from all over Ireland by arranging conferences and mini-workshops and encouraging teachers to get involved in projects such as the mentoring programme.



Justine Ball has changed jobs within Geos from Marketing Manager of the Brighton school to

Geos Europe Marketing Coordinator. She said, "My new role is to work on joint marketing initiatives for the seven Geos schools in Europe and to raise the profile of these schools."



Jesse Ro has become the new International Marketing Manager at the American

Language Communication Centre (ALCC) in New York, USA. She will be in charge of working with international agents on a daily basis and marketing ALCC overseas in conjunction with the Director of Marketing. Ms Ro said, "We are looking to create strong relationships with agents worldwide."



Peter Wilkins has become the Principal of Hawthorn Auckland after spending the last

10 years in international education marketing and management. He has worked at a national level in New Zealand with the Education New Zealand Trust and at an institutional level as International Manager at Eastern Institute of Technology. He looks forward to helping develop the Hawthorn brand as the pre-eminent brand in international education. □



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?

Robert Zuch, Director.

Where do you work?

Aspiring Language Institute, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Why and how did you start in the industry?

My wife, Judy, established the institute in early 1989. I got involved in what became our family business in early 1994 when our twin boys, Thomas and Alex, were born.

Why should agents choose to represent your school?

Our principles have never changed: we provide intensive, small-class tuition with individual attention to each student's needs. By keeping our capacity to a limit of maximum 70 students, we maintain a familiar, home-like atmosphere, while the resulting well-balanced mix of nationalities is a bonus to all.

How does your school market itself to agents?

Personal marketing. Almost all of our agents have worked with us for more than a decade, and visit us frequently. Attending the Berlin Workshops and the Arels Fairs in the 1990s helped to create a wide network of contacts. In addition, our professional body, FielsNZ – of which I am the current secretary – organises regular inbound and outbound agent workshops.

What percentage of your annual student intake comes through agents?

Over 95 per cent of enrolments are agency bookings from Switzerland, Japan, Poland, Taiwan, Czech Republic, Austria, Spain and Korea.

What plans does your school have for the future?

Establishing an alternative campus in the pristine wilderness of our country.

Alto launching dialogue session for members

THE ASSOCIATION of Language Travel Organisations (Alto) is organising an informal "dialogue session" for its members, which is scheduled to take place before the Alto cocktail party during the World Youth and Student Travel Conference (WYSTC) in Pattaya, Thailand in October.

This will allow participating members to voice their opinions and bring up for discussion matters of common interest, explained Alto Chairperson, Michael Gerber.

The association's annual general meeting will also be held during the conference, with an extended two-hour meeting scheduled, and an additional hour arranged for further discussion in order to give participants time to reflect on important issues arising from the meeting. Gerber said, "At the last meeting of the executive board, it was decided to give Alto members maximum opportunities for contact and discussion between language travel buyers and sellers." □