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IALC Brisbane workshop debates future of online booking

Posted on Apr 22, 2014 by Katie Duncan

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The International Association of Language Centres (IALC) annual workshop was held in Australia for the first time this month and allowed 106 language centres from 21 countries to meet with 90 education agencies. This year, as well as a unique Australian experience, all delegates enjoyed an incisive seminar programme.



The keynote seminar panel: (L-R) MD of iae GLOBAL Network, Mark Lucas, GLS Managing Director, Barbara Jaeschke, Information Planet Founder, Mauricio Pucci, ICEF Vice President, Rod Hearps and Bridge President, Jean-Marc Alberola

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About Katie Duncan

Katie Duncan spent a year working in Madrid as an educational consultant before moving to London to complete a Masters in International Marketing. Her speciality is the international education sector.

Of the schools and agents present at the seminar on commodisation, 70% of them agreed that the industry is now somewhat commoditised

Organisers at the UK-based IALC HQ said they were pleased with the diversity of attendees from 46 countries. “We had our best ever agent attendance from Asia and the Middle East – exactly the result we wanted from our first workshop in Oceania,” said Jan Capper, Executive Director.

The extended seminar programme drew a record number of delegates and the major draw was a session on future booking trends and global distribution systems.

The introduction of a beta-stage online booking system left opinions divided, sparking an interesting debate over the commoditisation of the industry among the crowd of independent language school owners.

Founder & CEO of Australia-based agency [Information Planet](#), Mauricio Pucci, introduced a global distribution system that he will be trialling in Australia later this year – a booking system that could be used widely by education agencies and their clients and enable booking across a wide range of schools, if they choose to adopt the platform.

Speaking at the event, Pucci said the software aims to reduce the burden of high agent commissions on schools while allowing agents to sell more products.

“The cost of commission is going so high, because it’s so costly to train staff, to pay-per-click and everything else,” he said. “If we can diminish the costs of the agents, empowering them with a simple communication system of information, they will ask for less commission, so it’s a win-win situation for everybody.”

“I think it’s fair to say that he’s created a global distribution system for our industry”

An informal vote during the sessions revealed that 70% of schools and agents agree that the industry is now “somewhat commoditised” however reactions to the software were mixed.

Jean-Marc Alberola, President of [Bridge](#) in the US, said: “What Mauricio’s put together is really an incredible piece of software. I think it’s fair to say that he’s created a global distribution system for our industry.”

However, Marketing Director of [Malaca Instituto](#), Bob Burger, asked whether commoditisation is a positive move for any school in IALC when competing against big chain schools, to which Mark Lucas, Founder of [iae GLOBAL](#) responded: “No, probably not.”

Principal of [Phoenix Language Academy](#) in Perth, Robynne Walsh, commented: “I get the feeling that this is coming down with the lowest common denominator, and that’s not what we normally do in IALC. We usually shoot for the stars, it’s all about quality and high class schools.”



Agents also weighed in on the debate. Founder of Germany-based [GLS](#) (which operates an agency and school) Barbara Jaeschke, said: “As a school you have to offer your clients the possibility to book online. I’m a strong believer that the agents won’t die; a good agent is always worth the money.”

IALC also announced the appointment of its new President Celestine Rowland, owner of [Galway Cultural Institute](#) [\[1\]](#). “It is a great honour and privilege for me that the membership of the association has voted me as their President,” she told *The PIE News*. “I see my role as leading the organisation and implementing all our plans with the wonderful executive board and the very hard working secretariat.”

Attendees had a chance to get up close to Australian wildlife at the event

This year's workshop was hosted by [Langports English Language College](#) in Brisbane and gave delegates a real taste of Australian culture with an Australian dinner and Aboriginal performance on the first night.

Langports also hosted a party in the school, allowing schools and agents to hold crocodiles, snakes and lizards and meet some friendly koalas as well as observe some traditional Aboriginal activities such as basket weaving, didgeridoo playing and wine tasting.

The final night of the workshop concluded with a gala dinner that raised money for charity Yalari through an auction of original Aboriginal artwork.

[CES Schools](#) and [Melton College](#) won the majority of votes, to host 2016's workshop in Leeds and York. Next year's event will be held in Rouen by [French in Normandy](#) on 23-26 April.

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April 22, 2014 

The future of online booking was debated at @ialc_languages workshop in Brisbane last week
<http://t.co/mG4Nrs7qZb> #ialcworkshop2014 #intled

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ANDREW SMITH

April 25, 2014 

Many schools do allow agents to use their online booking system as directs do, but raises two questions, with possible solutions.

Issue many if not all agents have is using best practice in SEO etc. attracting relevant 'inbound' traffic, but this may lead to candidates using agent websites as free online directories, and agent is acknowledged by neither the school nor candidate?

1. How does the school whether independently, or in cooperation with agents (SEO websites that act as both landing page and online directory), attract relevant traffic?

2. How does the school acknowledge the role of agents and their websites in monitoring, analysing and attracting relevant traffic?

Provided school marketing managers and agents know how to leverage SEO etc., how to acknowledge agents is quite simple. How? An affiliate system, this could include not just traffic coming through agent website via enquiry/application button, but tracks prospectives through enquiry, eligibility, application, etc.

In other words, rewarding agents with a reduced commission where candidates have clearly come through their website to apply direct. However, while many schools' or institutions' marketing managers speak of 'agent management', events etc. i.e. 'outbound' marketing, it suggests 'inbound' marketing innovations maybe restricted?

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@GHMINDENVER

May 1, 2014

Are language schools a commodity? | IALC Brisbane workshop debates future of online booking <http://t.co/Siba6Uza4n> @ThePIENews

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