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Independent schools need to brand personal touch: IALC

Posted on Apr 30, 2015 by Amy Baker

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New [research](#) commissioned by independent language school association, [IALC](#), reveals that education agents value the benefits of working with independent providers and boutique chain schools. Such providers heavily outflanked chain schools for “easy access to senior management” and “high customer satisfaction”.



Executive Director Jan Capper spoke on plans to better define IALC schools, discussing the term 'boutique' to represent the membership

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About Amy Baker

Amy Baker is a Director of The PIE News and has worked in the international education industry for quite a long time.

“Your brochures look the same as [a chain school], but you are something better, a warmer feeling for the student”

And in a powerful powwow held on the fringes of the most recent IALC Workshop, panellist Jose Carlos Hauer Santos, CEO of agency giant STB in Brazil, issued a call-to-arms to IALC members to play to their strengths of providing a personal student experience.

He observed that while agencies understood the value of working with independent schools, there remained scant resonance of IALC among consumers themselves.

With 70 offices sending tens of thousands of students overseas, Hauer Santos's opinion is valuable, and chimed well with a new five-year marketing strategy that the IALC board outlined to the membership during its AGM.

He called for greater differentiation in the marketplace: “Your brochures look the same as [a chain school], but you are something better, a warmer feeling for the student,” Hauer Santos told the IALC schools in the audience.

The association will seek to better define and brand its global membership of language schools offering language tuition and cultural immersion in a native country.

“Positioning IALC as a boutique brand would be a first in study travel and would allow us to define boutique in our own terms,” IALC's Executive Director, Jan Capper, told *The PIE News*. “We would need to integrate into our inspection some elements to ensure that all members are 'boutique' as eventually defined.”

When asked what proportion of his language school bookings were accounted for by independent language schools, Hauer Santos indicated



The panel included the CEO of STB, Oxford International Education

Group, English Language Company, ICEF Monitor and Bridge

explained that he liked working with independent schools, not least because it gave him an edge on his competition which might not be able to offer the same school and product.

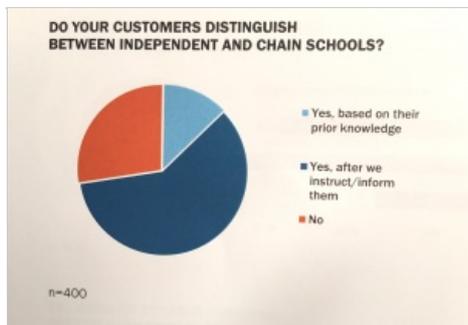
that this figure was 40%, up from 25% a few years ago.

He

Over 60% of those surveyed preferred independent schools for having greater ability to adjust the offer and a friendlier approach

The danger, he explained, of selling a school chain is that a student might be able to book the same product elsewhere and with a discount.

However, Hauer Santos conceded that chains were far simpler to deal with, offering standardised products in multiple locations and with one point of contact. Training his counsellors was more manageable, and so more experienced counsellors might be the ones more likely to be trained on further study options with independent brands.



“We like to be able to advise a school where I know the owner will look after them personally,” he suggested, likening boutique language schools to restaurants, “where Momma is in the kitchen”.

The latest IALC research, undertaken by [Student Marketing](#), found that of the 472 responding education agencies, close to 80% of them valued independent schools for easier access to senior management, while over 60% of those surveyed preferred independent schools for having greater ability to adjust the offer made to the student and a friendlier approach.

Chains were better appreciated for having higher quality premises and facilities.

By programme type, independent schools were held in much higher regard for delivering one-to-one teaching and executive training, while the agent response group felt chains delivered slightly better on university preparation/foundation courses.

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