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### **What do Honda Motor Co., Giorgio Armani and the German Consulate in Los Angeles have in common?**

They all have sent employees to the Beverly Hills Lingual Institute to learn languages important to their respective jobs.

While English may be the world's lingua franca, a rising tide of busy professionals are making time to study foreign languages in order to excel in their careers. Tapping into that demand and catering to working adults, the Beverly Hills school has chiseled out an expanding share of a market comprised of dozens of competing private language schools that dot the Southern Californian landscape.

"Los Angeles is an incredibly international town, and is only growing more so," said owner Karin Fallon, a former high school language teacher with a doctorate in education administration. "We're seeing really enthusiastic students interested in learning languages, either to help them conduct business or travel abroad, or even simply for personal fulfillment."

The Lingual Institute's reputation for quality instructors and affordable prices has steadily swelled its enrollment - not a simple feat in a crowded industry still dominated by Berlitz language schools. The Beverly Hills institute has gone from 25 students when it first opened in 1996 to 300 today, with revenue rising in direct proportion. It pulled in \$150,000 in 1997, and is projecting revenues of \$500,000 this year.

That rate of growth is not fast enough for Fallon, who previously ran the Philadelphia Lingual Institute in the mid-1980s. There, she did a complete makeover, hiring all new teachers, centralizing its location and changing its marketing strategies. As a result, the school grew from 125 to 460 students in 18 months.

Under Fallon's watch, Money magazine named the Philadelphia institute a "top deal," and Wharton Business School named it the best language institute in town.

After her husband got his MBA from Wharton, the couple decided it was her turn to decide where they would settle. She picked Los Angeles, where she

"This was my dream," she said. "I realized I didn't have to be concerned about the many other private language schools out there, since no one else has the quality of teachers we have, or our affordability."

Fallon - who no longer teaches classes herself, choosing instead to focus on running the business - places strong emphasis on the caliber of her school's teachers. She only hires instructors who have taught at the college level, and pays more than the industry standard to keep them happy. The Beverly Hills Lingual Institute has attracted instructors from USC and UCLA, ranging from the doctoral-student level to full professors. The institute also employs professors who are on hiatus or retired from university life, but who want to keep their hand in teaching.

Coupled with a traditional philosophy of teaching a balance of grammar, reading, writing and speaking skills and only using college-level textbooks, the institute has earned an outstanding reputation among academics. Both USC and UCLA recommend her language school, as do a variety of local consulates.

"The (Beverly Hills Lingual Institute) is a nice environment to work in, where students are very eager to learn and the environment is very well run," said institute instructor Kurtulus Oztopcu, who has been a professor of Turkish at both UC Berkeley and UCLA.

Affordability and variety are the institute's other strongest selling points. A two-month term of weekly, 90-minute classes costs \$200 for the more heavily subscribed classes of Spanish, French and Italian, and \$250 for the almost 30 other languages offered - ranging from Tagalog and Vietnamese to Croatian and Persian.

Fallon has noticed some consistent trends emerging. Many record-industry executives are being drawn to study Spanish because new markets in Latin America are opening up for them. French, and to a lesser extent Italian, are very popular with people working in the movie industry because of all the movie deals coming out of Europe. Businessmen involved in import and export activity tend to study Asian languages.

"The Lingual Institute fills the perfect niche for me since it offers more serious language study than a place such as Berlitz can, while offering a more manageable work load and schedule than a UCLA Extension class can," said Bob Schlesinger, a Chinese-language student and president of West L.A. import/export company RPI Inter-State. "(Fallon) has a great ability to provide what a student needs and wants."

Classes never have more than eight students, guaranteeing the level of personal attention needed to effectively learn a language. Fallon has rarely cancelled a class due to under-attendance, preferring to take a loss rather than compromise the school's reputation.

Fallon plans to add another full-time employee soon, to help her out as the school continues to expand. She hopes to see the business grow to 500 students per term, and wants to expand into a bigger space in the Beverly Hills building that it currently occupies at 9601 Wilshire Blvd.

"The bottom line is that I'm having fun," Fallon said, shrugging off the fact that she works 80-hour weeks as a matter of course. "All the students here are so passionate about what they're studying. As an educator, how can I not thrive on that?"

### **Beverly Hills Lingual Institute**

Year Founded: 1996

Core Business: Teaching languages and culture to adults

Employees in 1996: 1 full-time, 11 part-time

Employees in 1999: 1 full-time, 35 part-time

Revenue in 1998: \$250,000

Revenue in 1999 (projected): \$500,000

Goal: To become the leading language school in L.A. County

Driving Force: Growing internationalization of business in L.A.