

ON THE NET

Agora Language Marketplace: Professional and Commercial Information and Services for Foreign Languages

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An important part of our job as language teachers consists of tracking down good resources that we can use in our classes. Professional journals, visits from publishers' reps, and exhibits at conferences are all important sources of such information, especially on the offerings of larger companies. The Internet, too, has become a valuable window on the products and services of many companies. This is especially true for small businesses or self-publishers of low volume materials, as well as schools providing study abroad programs. However, tracking down this information and determining whether the offerings really meet our needs can be a daunting task indeed, since many professional organizations and discussion lists such as [FLTEACH](#) prefer to avoid commercial advertising altogether.

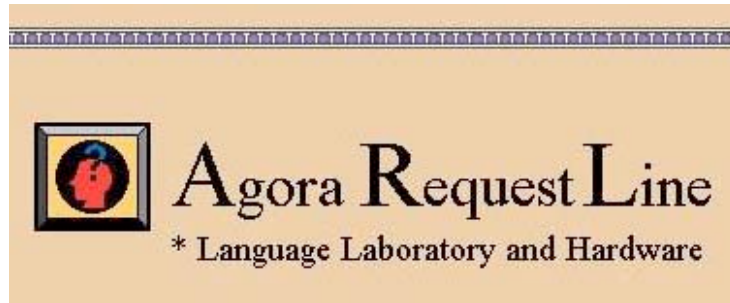
Seeing the Internet as a way to meet this need, Carolyn Fidelman endeavored to create a Web site that combined information about professional and commercial services in a well-organized, user-friendly manner. The result of her efforts is the [Agora Language Marketplace](#).



The [Agora Language Marketplace](#) seeks to provide a centralized location for information about products and services through advertising, a comprehensive publisher/distributor directory, study abroad program listings, product showcases, announcements, background articles, and reviews. Agora also offers useful services such as employment listings, a professional directory, a calendar of events of professional interest, and a newsletter about topics of current interest. In this column we will describe the main sections of the site ([Materials](#), [Study Abroad](#), [Language Lab](#), [Business](#), [Language Professional Services](#), and the [Agora Newsletter](#)), with an emphasis on [Agora's](#) services for users.

- **Materials**, also called **Publications and Products**, includes monthly featured products and categorized listings for various languages. An extensive **Alphabetical Directory of Publishers, Distributors and Bookstores** includes over 200 entries of contact information. A key feature of the Materials page is the **Agora Showcase** for the work of independent authors, which supports one of [Agora's](#) primary goals of helping self-publishing authors. Materials developed by teachers may not always have a large enough audience to become a profitable product for a publisher or distributor, even if their quality would otherwise make them ideal candidates for commercial enterprises. The Showcase provides a setting where these developers may publicize their work. [Agora's](#) editorial staff then reviews the items to assure their quality. As a result, [Agora](#) may be an excellent place to turn for assistance in learning to develop and market one's work.

- **Study Abroad** leads to a page of advertisements for language schools and companies that offer various study abroad programs all around the world. The page also includes a section entitled **Online Resources for the Traveler**.
- **Language Lab** connects to a page with three subtopics that address various aspects of language lab design and hardware. Included are several links to homepages of **Design and Hardware Suppliers**, some of which are interactive sites. A number of links to **Publishers of Language Lab Products** make it easy to find and contact these companies.
- **Business** has links to commercial providers of translation and other services that are of interest to the business world.



The **Agora Request Line** is an ancillary to the four main sites and gives users an opportunity to post online queries in each of the following categories:

- Publications (all media types)
- Study Abroad or Schools
- Business
- Language Lab or Hardware

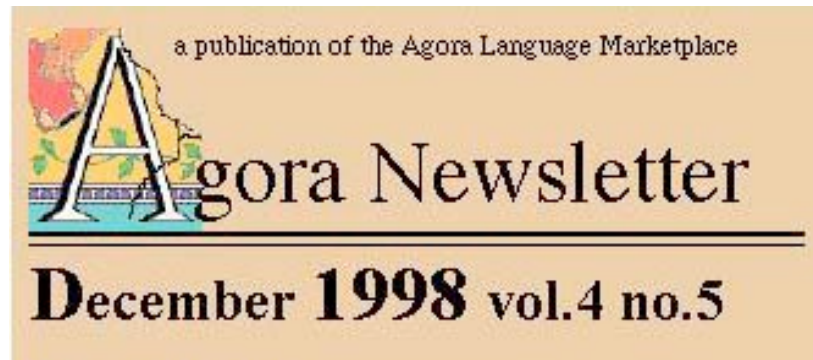
A user-friendly form allows free postings of up to 50 words requesting information on a topic; the post is then placed under the chosen category and on the corresponding page. Requests are posted, most recent first, for approximately one month. An alternative e-mail address is provided for users whose browsers do not support forms. This service has much potential for those who do not wish to enter the world of electronic discussion lists to obtain answers to their queries.



- The **Agora Internet Site Reviews** presents an archive of reviews of FL related Web sites. With so many sites on the Internet, it is nice to have someone screening them for us. These reviews (also published in the *Agora Newsletter*) may examine a single Web site in detail such as the November '98 review "Freeware for Japanese Language Learning," or they may collect a number of good sites for a specific purpose such as the February '98 review "Web Resources for E-mail Exchange Programs" or the November '97 "Web Resources for E-mail Exchange Programs."
- Under **Employment** we find a listing of current job openings. Job openings may be listed here free of charge.
- **Situations Wanted** lists individuals looking for employment. These listings are paid and remain in place for six months.

- The **Agora Language Professional Directory** is a collection of links to the home pages of FL professionals intended to help us find out more about the colleagues whose names we often see online or in journals.
 - The **Calendar** has free text-only listings in the following areas:
 - Conferences
 - Calls for Participation
 - Professional Development (courses, workshops, and seminars)
 - Announcements (general announcements, funding information, requests for help, etc.)
- The **Academic Organizations** listing yields a page of listings of FL professional organizations, their contact persons, and links to their Web pages. A separate list of **State and Local Academic Organizations** offers similar information for these as well.
- **Other Internet Resources for the Language Professional** includes links to a small number of high quality Web sites, several online articles, and a number of FL MOOs.

Agora's **Language Professional Information Services** are certainly a valuable online source of oft-needed, up-to-date, and frequently changing information.



The **Agora Language Marketplace** publishes a monthly newsletter that is accessible from the Internet as well as receivable in electronic form via e-mail. Subscriptions are free and can be obtained by filling in the online subscription form or sending the message <subscribe agoranews> to the address agoranews@agoralang.com via your e-mail system.

The newsletter consists of several parts, the first of which is always a **Letter** from the Editor-in-Chief, Carolyn Fidelman, in which she highlights a few items for the month. Next comes the **Calendar**, underscoring conferences and other events of note for the upcoming month. We will examine primarily the December issue, with all chronological references in the topical headings dated accordingly.

The **Featured Service** portion of the newsletter offers a brief description of a product or service that might be of use to those interested in foreign languages. For example, the month of December 1998 focused on an intensive French language school located in Paris. In other issues, different FL products have been spotlighted. The concomitant link to the featured service or product home page is also provided.

Language News Stateside offers FL news "shorts" and notable events of interest to FL professionals in particular.

Agora's Web Pick for December... presents a short review of an acclaimed Web site that FL aficionados will think are the bee's knees. December's issue mentioned a site where ESL software reviews could be found. In contrast, the February 1998 issue featured a piece entitled "Web Resources for E-mail Exchange Programs."

FLTEACH On-line Subjects--November 98' (Selected) is a listing of some of the more salient discussion threads on [FLTEACH](#) for the previous month. Readers can then go to the [FLTEACH archives](#) to follow up on any information they find interesting.

Other Features on Agora for December generally includes links to advertised products and services that advertise on [Agora](#) and that are being highlighted by the editor for this particular month.

The **Featured Article** section of [Agora](#) offers a close look at noteworthy events involving FL matters world-wide. Reviewers frequently focus on issues of FL teaching and learning with technology. The articles are of varying length, address topics of interest to FL professionals, and detail what is happening currently with FLs around the world.

Another attractive aspect of the *Agora Newsletter* is the provision of [archives](#). Readers can search through previous issues for information on products, services, and other FL-related information that might be of interest to them. The archives are extensive, dating back to January 1995 and covering nearly every month since then.

In sum, the [Agora Language Marketplace](#) is a unique resource for Internet users with foreign language interests. The newsletter is a particularly popular feature as readers are apprised frequently of foreign language events and can thus remain current on issues in the field on a monthly basis. Easy access to many product reviews is helpful to users who may have difficulty finding this material in other venues. The calendar section can assist in professional planning and help to avoid missed opportunities to attend conferences and participate in workshops. For these and the variety of other features detailed above, a visit to [Agora](#) is a worthwhile trip.