

Vin chain revealing that just 40 percent of its UK staff were British nationals. 'The trends we've noticed from applicants, especially from the UK, is that people don't see our industry as a career choice,' said People Director Mike Williams at the time.

Online appeal

An indication of the importance it places on offering services in clients' languages, H10 has made its website available in six languages, including German, Italian and Catalan. Caesar Hotel is part of the Barcelona-based Derby Hotels group, which also offers six languages, while the website for Caesar is available in English, Spanish and French. It is no coincidence that if you enter 'hotel londres habla español' in Google, these websites are among the top results.

They also feature highly on user review-based travel sites in those languages. Such websites have made it easier than ever for customers to share their opinions about products and services with others around the world, and they can have a big impact on companies in the tourist industry.

Avoiding public online complaints must be a priority – and language skills can help, says Magdalena. 'If somebody has to complain and they know no one speaks their language, they won't complain at the front desk. As they know there's no one they can communicate with, they don't try,' he says. 'But they might write a comment on the internet. You read comments and they are not always fair, because maybe the guest didn't know that if they ask for a solution we can do something. We prefer to deal with them face-to-face.'

Although my search for linguists working in British hospitality was frustrating, good-practice models do exist – in the capital, at least. We can only hope that, in a squeezed tourism industry, fierce competition and a ripple effect from the few hotels offering a good service will mean that more follow suit.



Making the words stick

*A new language learning tool based on an age-old idea is no flash in the pan, says **Jessica Moore***

Sometimes, the simplest ideas are the best – and FlashSticks are a case in point. These sticky labels are designed to help language learners extend their vocabulary, gain confidence and improve their pronunciation. Packs are available in Spanish, French, German and Italian, with simple, high-frequency words – such as days of the week, colours and parts of the body – emblazoned on Post-it notes.

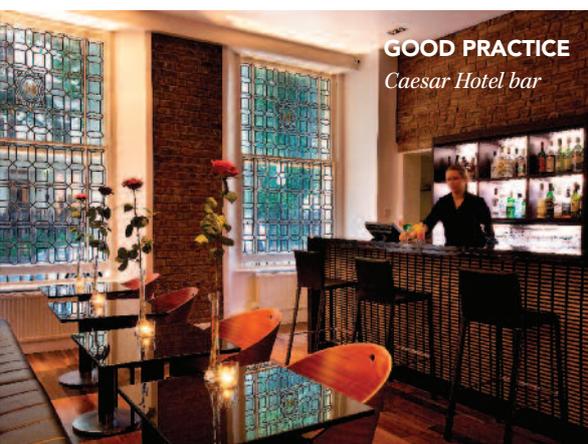
'It's about making words more present in people's everyday environment,' explains FlashSticks CEO, Veejay Lingiah. 'Some people label everything! The kettle, a cup, their socks... Others just put a selection of words up all around the bathroom mirror so they can learn while they're brushing their teeth.'

FlashSticks (www.flash-sticks.com) is a young company, the brainchild of Lingiah

and his school friend Richard Allen. It was Allen who first had the idea. While working in the technology sector, he found himself based in a business park in Spain. 'He naively thought that everyone would speak English in meetings. Of course, they didn't,' laughs Lingiah.

In an effort to learn vocabulary quickly, Allen did what countless others have done before him: he wrote Spanish words on Post-it notes and stuck them around his hotel room. 'It frustrated him that there was nothing he could buy that was similar.'

The pair sought to rectify that – but they needed help. 'Neither Richard nor I have a language background, so input from language teachers and feedback from our audience is critical,' Lingiah acknowledges. 'Language teachers at universities, primary school teachers, private tutors – they've all



GOOD PRACTICE
Caesar Hotel bar



should know. This is a fun way of learning a few more.'

She finds that FlashSticks help students build confidence. 'A lot of my British learners really benefit from being taken back to basics.' This rings true for Lingiah: 'A number of teachers and tutors have told us that many students drop out or struggle with learning a language because they lack confidence and don't feel they're making good progress. FlashSticks are a complementary tool that anyone can use alongside any other learning system. They aren't designed to be a complete language system – they're designed to help people boost their vocabulary and disrupt their learning in a positive way.' At £5.99, they're affordable too.



'We've noticed an increased engagement in French... FlashSticks enable children to be more independent'

got different experiences and priorities. They know the needs of their students and their needs as teachers.' FlashSticks was therefore developed in collaboration with language teachers and tutors, including language staff from Birmingham and Wolverhampton universities. Then 3M, the multinational owners of the Post-it brand, got on board, and FlashSticks launched in 2013.

Kerstin Hammes, founder of language tuition provider Fluent (fluentlanguage.co.uk), is a fan. She tutors mostly adults, both online and offline. 'I have always revised by sticking things up around the house, and I find that extremely helpful.' She had one reservation, however: 'I was initially sceptical about the readymade-ness of them.' But FlashSticks are colour-coded, highlighting word types (noun, verb etc) and gender. Each word is also accompanied by an image and its phonetic spelling.

'It's more than you would do for yourself, and you understand straightaway how to use the words,' says Hammes. 'If you write your own stickies, you tend to only write words you know, or words you think you

Using the app

However, it is the accompanying free app that is key to the product's success. 'If you hover a smartphone or a tablet over a FlashStick, it gives you an instant video of a native speaker pronouncing the word,' says Lingiah. 'That makes it simple for people to gain confidence with their pronunciation.'

Dr Neil Hopkin, Head of Peters Hill Primary School in Dudley, is among those seeing the benefits of the app in the classroom. 'We've noticed an increased engagement in French from our pupils since we started using FlashSticks. And because they enable children to be more independent in their learning, they enable teachers to generate a more personalised path for each child.'

From September, it will be mandatory for primary schools to teach a foreign language from age 7 (Key Stage 2), and FlashSticks have already had a lot of interest from schools facing that challenge. 'They've got teachers who perhaps don't speak a foreign language but are being asked to teach one,' says Lingiah. FlashSticks can help. 'Many schools now have tablets as well, so the

kids can repeat words from the videos,' he adds. 'That releases the teacher a little bit so they can observe and focus on children who are struggling.'

The company is growing rapidly and gaining recognition. It was a finalist for the 2014 Bett Awards learning and teaching tool of the year. 'Next year, the packs will be curriculum-aligned, so teachers can link them to learning topics,' says Lingiah. There will also be more advanced vocabulary packs available from March, accompanying sticker books, and the app content will be extended, offering a few sentences for each word. They also hope to develop lesson plans, both written and videoed, with the support of FlashSticks advisers.

Hopkin is particularly excited about the future of the brand. 'When I first saw FlashSticks, it was a firework moment in my mind, thinking of all the things we could do with them,' he enthuses. 'FlashSticks enable teachers to create a very print-rich environment, which is particularly important during children's early language acquisition. But FlashSticks also enable us to augment that environment with videos. It's one thing for a child to use their phonic knowledge to decode a word, quite another for that child to access further information about that word independently with a mobile device. That's enormously powerful.'

He would like to see greater and more sophisticated video content, including user-generated content from teachers and YouTube clips. However, says Lingiah, 'the basic idea remains quite simple. There's such complexity and subtlety in learning a language, we hope to offer an aid to boost vocabulary and confidence. If that helps immerse people in language in a way they can replicate at home, then that's great.'

CREATIVE APPROACH

Pupils use FlashSticks at Peters Hill School

