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Foreign students have also lucked out at the Expo. Germany's Sebastian Kuhne went from being a host at the Germany Pavilion to a press assistant, before a German-funded tent manufacturer offered him a job in its marketing and sales department.

"Participating in the Expo and staying in Shanghai has been my dream since I started learning Chinese. The Expo has definitely been a major turning point of my life. It has given me a chance to build up my skill base and continue working in this city," said the 24-year-old.

Kuhne originally served as one of 192 tour guides at the pavilion, culled from a list of 3,500 applicants. He said giving directions and answering enquires in Chinese was like cramming for his final exams.

"I had to memorize about 1,000 pages of materials to get ready for the opening of the Expo during a six-week training period from March. It was extremely tough, because we could only imagine what the pavilion would be like at that time," he said.

Kuhne studied at Shanghai's Tongji University, majoring in business administration. He took an internship at a German toy company in Ningbo, Zhejiang province,

for his third year.

Others have not secured their future, but are still optimistic.

Marianna Drago said that working as a press officer for the Italy Pavilion has helped build up her resume, but has not landed her any follow-on jobs just yet.

"I have learnt how to work in the field of communications. And I've built up my professional profile, so the experience will definitely help me with my next job, but there are still challenges ahead," said the 29-year-old.

Drago worked in Beijing during the 2008 Olympic Games, assisting an Italian film crew, but said the Expo had afforded her much more of a hands-on experience.

She started studying Chinese at university 10 years ago, and has worked as a hostess and interpreter in other major Chinese cities like Dalian, in Liaoning province, and Shenzhen, in Guangdong.

"I have mixed feelings right now. I'm half sad and half happy," she said. "Working at the Expo was stressful, because it's been non-stop since the start, so it will be good to take a short break, but I'm sad to leave the pavilion, and also sad that it will be over."

For Jennifer Huang, the Austria Pavilion's media officer, working at the Expo symbolized a fresh start after her career hit a roadblock.

"I was a bit lost when I applied for the position, as I didn't know what to do after working as a Chinese teacher for foreigners, and as a leasing executive," said the 30-year-old.

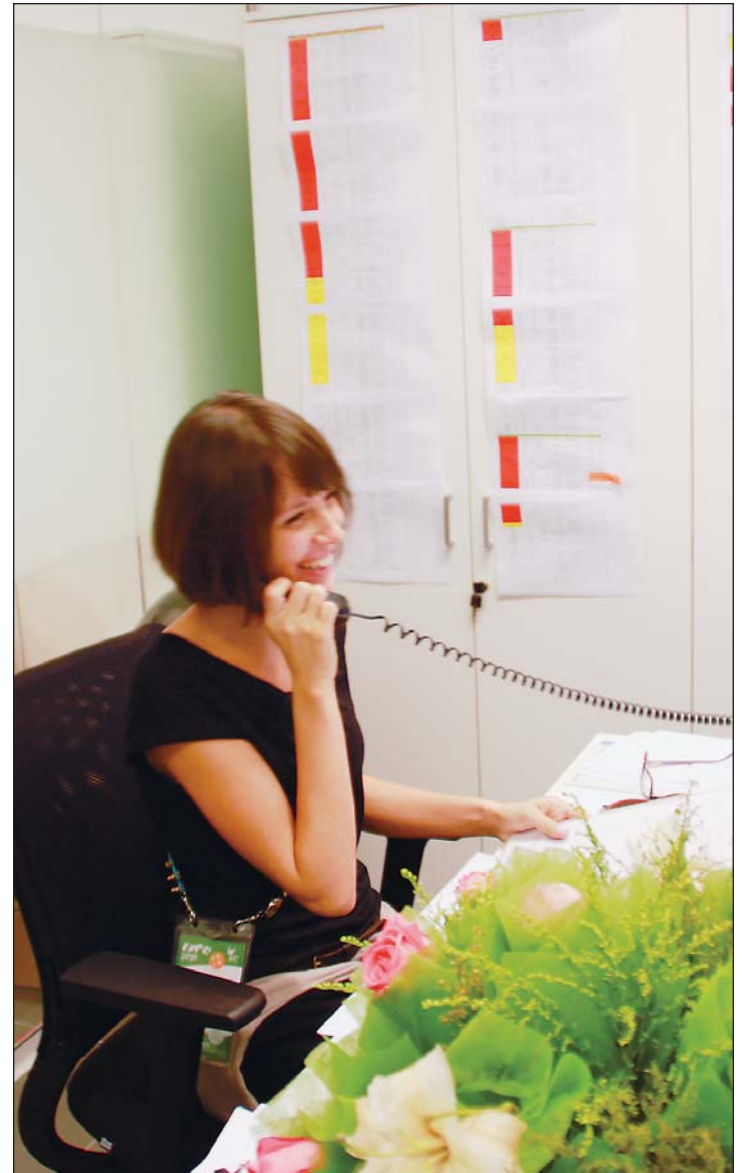
Huang is one of the founders of Modern Mandarin, a Chinese language company for foreign schools or associations. After seeing another entrepreneurial venture hit rock bottom with the global economic crisis, she decided to take the plunge and apply for a paid position at the Expo.

"I was one of the first six employees hired by the Austria Pavilion at the beginning of the year to get started on preparatory work, so I had to manage everything from paperwork to media contacts, logistics and even the food supply," she said.

"As a local girl from Shanghai, I've been very proud to have contributed to this historic event. I also seem to have found myself again, and it's been great to bring my strong communication skills into play at my job," she added.

She said 12 months in the media and public relations field has convinced her that this is the career for her.

"I spent so many years searching for what I wanted to do, and I eventually found it at the Expo," she said.



The future remains uncertain for Italy Pavilion staff Marianna Drago.

Right: Volunteers attend a job fair in September.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Below: Sebastian Kuhne, a press assistant with the Germany Pavilion, has already landed another job in Shanghai after the Expo.

YOVOHAGRAFIE / GERMANY PAVILION



Shanghai local Jennifer Huang discovered her true vocation in life while working at the Austria Pavilion.