

World Economic Forum on Latin America
Cancún, Mexico 15-16 April 2008

Media & Entertainment Industry Partnership Regional Meeting

Tuesday 15 April
08.15- 09.45
Private Session

Latin America enjoys the reputation as a promising destination for investment despite widespread misunderstanding of the region and the persistence of stereotypes about it among foreign business leaders. The session analysed a range of potential causes for the confusion and offered some strategies designed to help improve Latin America's image.

Reasons behind Latin America's Image

- Concentration of ownership of the media in many countries: owners have their own agendas; small domestic advertising markets in many countries restrain the emergence of new and alternative media outlets.
- Some countries restrict the flow of information.
- Even in countries that enjoy freedom of the press, information rarely reaches an international audience – “If I live in the United States and I read about Latin America, I am one in a million,” said an executive of a multinational advertising agency. “Information stays where it is. The question is how to get it out.”
- Misunderstanding by the consumers of information: in the words of a representative of a foreign news agency, a survey presented at the session showed that “People think they don't know about politics and the economy and that they understand the culture and society. But the media mostly cover politics and the economy. People say they know less about what we cover most. I assume that they really know less about culture and society because we report about it less. But they just care less about those things. My question is whether they retain what they read.”
- Multinational companies tell their own executives that Latin American countries are unsafe, and these people behave accordingly when they travel to the region. “They are told it is dangerous and are put in a bubble,” said an executive from outside the region. “They are like soldiers in the Vietnam jungle. Somebody has to get a message to these guys.”
- Outdated self-image: “A lot of people in still wear the old Latin American style,” said an executive of a multinational advertising agency. When the region's image fails to change, “it is a self-fulfilling prophecy.”
- A single, popular foreign-produced film that reinforces stereotypes can drown out efforts to create a new image.

Strategies to Improve Image

- Create and promote country and regional brands: “More and more, the name of a country is a brand,” said the representative of a national investment promotion agency. “A brand has to reflect real things. Some of the things are given, like geography, but you can affect others. Mexicans have to be proud of what the brand says, and people outside the country have to identify with it.”
- Make the most of emerging technology: mobile technology is increasingly important, especially among younger people. Content designed for new media will become increasingly influential.
- Develop marketing programmes to disseminate positive stories, like the successful anti-poverty efforts in some countries, and positive factors, like the existence of knowledge-based clusters and the availability of creative talent in the region.
- Proponents of the new image can practice “citizen journalism” and use social networking websites and blogs to disseminate their message.

Summary



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- However, the role of traditional media in shaping a new image was contested. As one reporter pointed out, "The job of a journalist is not to sell the country or help build a brand. We just have to do our jobs well. It is true that owners have private agendas ... The market in many countries is very small, so there is not enough advertising to finance good journalism ... The challenge is to build good newsrooms. The problem is when we don't give context or tell the meaning of stories."
- Take responsibility: "Everyone is waiting for someone else to solve the problem," said the representative of a national investment promotion agency. "The private sector waits for the government to act. Then everybody thinks the media should do it. I believe it is everybody's problem."