



COLOMBIA

Back on the Map of World Tourism



World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

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Committed to Tourism, Travel and the Millennium Development Goals

INDEX

	Page
1. FOREWORD	2
2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
3. INTRODUCTION	6
I. Country Brand	6
II. Tourism and Country Image	8
4. IMAGE AND REALITY	9
I. Authenticity and Consistency	9
II. Colombia, Reality and Image	9
5. IMAGE AND COMMUNICATION	12
I. Country Image and Crisis Situations	12
II. Successful Cases: Spain, Nepal, Montenegro	13
III. "Colombia is Passion" - Country campaign	14
6. TOURISM AND COUNTRY IMAGE IN COLOMBIA	15
I. Colombian tourism: Reality and Promise	16
II. "Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay"- Tourism campaign	17
7. CONCLUSION	19

1. FOREWORD

In 2007 the Government of Colombia hosted [UNWTO's General Assembly](#) with more than a hundred ministers of tourism and a thousand participants from around the world gathering in Cartagena de Indias.

Almost universally we were impressed with three issues:

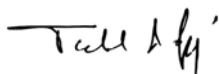
1. The incredible tourism product.
2. The real difference between our perceptions before arriving and the positive realities of the tourism experience.
3. The way in which the people inside the industry and the citizens generally reflected the spirit of the Colombian national and tourism brands – "Colombia is Passion" and "The only risk is wanting to stay".

As we believe in UNWTO that brand will be an increasingly important competitive factor we asked the Colombian Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism Luis Guillermo Plata if we could undertake some more in depth analysis of the Colombian case.

Our goal was twofold:

- To objectively dissect the Colombian Brand and the evolution of its tourism product, promotion, perception and performance.
- To use the results as a basis for continuing support for Members, in the context of UNWTO "competitiveness" activity, in particular with the World Economic Forum.

This report represents an overview of that analysis. It has been prepared by longstanding UNWTO collaborator **Germán Porrás Olalla**, former Secretary of Tourism of Spain and one of the architects of its great success in this field.

Handwritten signature of Taleb Rifai in black ink.

Taleb Rifai, UNWTO Deputy Secretary-General

Handwritten signature of Geoffrey Lipman in black ink.

Geoffrey Lipman, UNWTO Assistant Secretary-General

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colombia is a country that has managed to come back from the edge of the abyss. With its very survival threatened - in a way that is without parallel in the world - by the combined effects of drug-trafficking, guerrillas and terrorism for many years. The vital energy of its society and the vision of its leaders have made it possible for Colombia to overcome this fundamental threat. Anyone who has had the opportunity to get to know, even superficially, its social dynamism, the professionalism of its productive sectors, the qualities of its people and the vigour of its institutions, can understand the profound reasons behind this survival.

At the same time as this recovery process, Colombia was capable of designing a communication strategy to make the new national reality known and to create a new country image that overcomes the stereotypes and prejudices that had been formed over the course of the years of conflict and that were disseminated globally by the mass media.

For those who know Colombia only from a distance, the effort of communication designed and implemented by the Colombian institutions as a collective task of the entire society, is functioning as an indispensable and effective instrument to get to know the true reality of Colombia.

The objectives of Colombia's communication strategy are not to redefine the profile of the country, or its identity or its ideology, which are fully defined. Rather to highlight all of these identifying elements and framing them in the current reality of Colombia in order to transmit a true image, free of stereotypes and prejudices derived from a traumatic historical stage, which it has already left behind in large part, and which is in the process of becoming completely overcome within the short term.

The Colombian institutions have been able to develop and implement a brand strategy that meets the highest technical demands of present-day communication. Conceptually, they have defined what the brand is and what is established as the objective. Likewise, their brand has been able to incorporate a "feeling", a vision of Colombia that incites in the communication target the desire to share in and enjoy

the experience being proposed. The mission of the brand, its positioning, the values it embodies, its commitment to the people and its invitation for the people to participate in the collective effort are clearly defined in the campaign.

Both the country brand, "Colombia es pasión" (Colombia is Passion), as well as its tourism derivation "Colombia, el riesgo es que te quieras quedar" (Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay), possess the conceptual elements that a brand entails: a clear, simple, credible and attractive image, defining its attributes; it develops an umbrella concept; it uses a catchy slogan, as well as a powerful visual symbol.

Colombia,
the only risk
is wanting
to stay.

Operationally, the development of the campaign follows a flexible code, which allows the incorporation of all the actors involved through a shared brand-management system. Moreover, it makes it possible to associate the country brand with personalities, national and foreign, who best embody the values that the country wants to project.

In the same way, the execution of this strategy utilizes procedures (familiarization trips for journalists, novels, filming of movies, etc.) that go beyond the use of advertising and sponsorships, the two traditional instruments, and which are as effective as the latter two but are considerably less costly.



The contribution of tourism to the success of this national branding program is a model example of the important role played by tourism not only in social and economic development, but also in forging the image of a country.

In the tourism domain, the results that reflect the reality of Colombian tourism are already manifest, having doubled the number of tourists between 2003 (624.990) and 2008 (1.222.102). International tourism has become the number three export sector, behind oil and coal (2.263 billion US\$ in 2007 -including passengers transport - with growth of 13% compared to the previous year). Colombia has moved up in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index prepared by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization, and one of the strategic lines of its tourism policy, "Turismo Compite" (Tourism Competes), which is under the general competitiveness policy of the Colombian Government, is to make significant progress in this indicator.

To this end, Colombia's tourism policy is working on specific lines of action:

- The Regulatory Framework: national priority for the tourism sector, tourism standards and regulations, environmental sustainability, security, and health and hygiene; Business Climate and Infrastructure: specific legislation for the creation of a tourism promotion fund and tax stimulus for hotel investments, investments in air, maritime, road and rail transport infrastructure; tourism infrastructure and new information and communication technologies, and competitiveness in tourism prices; and
- Human and Natural Resources: occupational training, the aforementioned natural resources as well as cultural resources (1128 monuments

and sites have been declared as assets of cultural interest and 4 have been included on the World Heritage list: the Port, Fortresses and Group of Monuments of Cartagena de Indias; San Agustín Archaeological Park; National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro, and Historic Centre of Santa Cruz de Mompox and 2 more on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Masterpieces, the Carnival of Barranquilla and the Cultural Space of the Palenque of San Basilio) as well as fostering the perception of tourism as an instrument for development on the part of Colombian society.

Among the concrete actions taken, especially notable are those relative to:

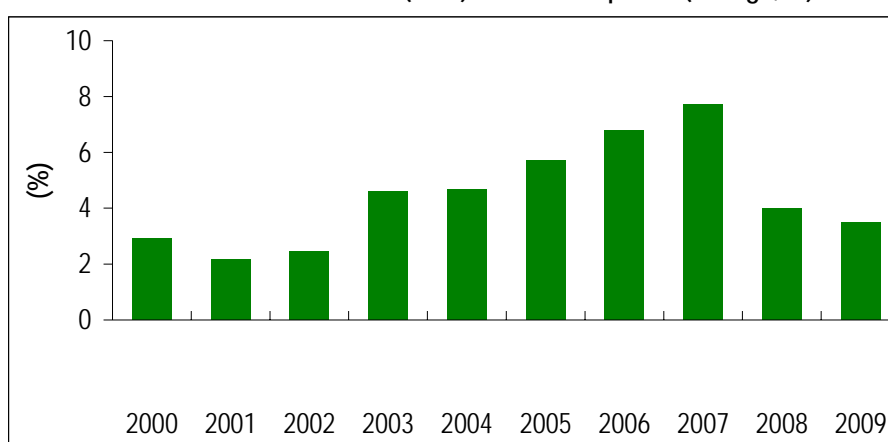
- the safety and security area, with the consolidation of 2234 "Vive Colombia Safe Routes" for tourism, increased level of security that has led to the positive modification of "travel advisories" issued in the main generating markets in order to adapt them to the reality; favouring accessibility through an open-skies policy for all operations to the most important airports and charter traffic to the most touristic sites;
- the progressive elimination of visa requirement for certain countries and the non-requirement of a passport for nationals of Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Chile and Brazil;
- impetus given to tourism infrastructure projects (convention centres, cable cars) with the availability of 510 Posadas Turísticas (Tourism Inns) already existing and another 428 approved, tax incentives for hotel projects (15,484 rooms available by 2011) and the consolidation of the Tourism Information Points (Puntos de Información Turística, PIT) network with 21 centres in 2008, and another 15 in the planning or execution stage;
- collaboration between the public and private sectors;
- reinforcement of the financing of tourism policy; and
- reinforcement of international promotion with increasingly active presence in the main generating

markets: Mexico, United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Italy and Poland.

The goal is to turn Colombia into the number-five tourism country of Latin America by 2010, and to attain the figure of four million international tourists and double the contribution of tourism to the national GDP, by achieving receipts of 4 billion US dollars by 2010.

- direct and resolute confrontation of problem to achieve the greatest communication effectiveness;
- putting issues into context and into perspective geographically and in terms of importance;
- transforming the initial negative perceptions into definitive positive perceptions through effective management of the crisis situation and highlighting the measures adopted in order to mitigate its effects and to prevent repetition;

Growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices (change, %)



Source: IMF

It was a smart decision to tackle head-on the perception of Colombia as a risky destination using a clear and direct message, without shying away from mentioning risk, and using that very same perception in a positive sense, turning its originally negative connotation upside-down. This approach follows the basic rules that must inspire all communication actions in risk situations:

- full transparency of the information in order to ensure the future credibility of the source;
- swiftness in response in terms of both assistance and communication;

- taking advantage of the attention attracted to disseminate positive information about the tourism destination, emphasizing the attractions and the improvements in its offerings;
- the "leitmotiv" of the campaign slogan "Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay", which is framed within the message of the general country image campaign "Colombia is Passion", is converting negative perception into positive opportunity.

In this regard, Colombia, with its strategy for the creation of a new country image, with an interrelated tourism brand, constitutes a good model for other countries that have to face analogous situations.

3. INTRODUCTION

I. COUNTRY BRAND

Creating a new country brand has helped several nations in their efforts to overcome image problems resulting from a past of political instability, civil conflict, widespread violence or recurrent natural disasters. Any of these can result in biased perceptions of reality, based on stereotypes and prejudices and which can be reinforced by media coverage of events.

Creating a country brand is an integral and substantial part of the effort needed to develop a national economy: increasing exports, attracting investments, establishing new businesses and companies, boosting the arrivals of tourists, and the recruitment of skilled immigrants.

The process poses special challenges for countries going through periods of transition, whether in terms of economic or political development, if switching from an authoritarian to a democratic government or coming out of conflict and moving towards stability or regaining peace. There are numerous examples throughout Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and IberoAmerica.

In such circumstances, a country brand is not merely another option for a national economy in search of new and better opportunities in the global marketplace. The strategic, planned and sustained application of communication and promotion measures at international level are a fundamental element in leaving behind a past marked by conflict.

A new country image or national brand is particularly useful for reinforcing the social legitimacy of the efforts made to overcome the past and the consolidation of a new scenario of stability and progress. It constitutes a solid foundation for channelling policies aimed at enhancing a country's attractiveness to investors, customers for products and services, and tourists who want to visit the country.

A country's image is its most valuable intangible asset. This is not a new concept; it has been

traditionally referred to as 'reputation' or a 'good name'. But image-building has undergone considerable development in recent years, in line with its growing importance in a world of instant communication where local news can become an event with global repercussions in a matter of minutes.

The terms "national brand" or "country brand" have been coined to refer to the perception of a country in other countries, by governments, investors, potential consumers or travellers. A national brand helps others understand what a country is, making it more intelligible for diverse audiences. It provides a field of reference for framing news reports and creating narratives, and affects all sectors of the national economy. There is widespread consensus that for a country brand to function it needs to correspond to the intrinsic reality of the country and involve emotional elements that make it receptive to target audiences.

Interest in the country brand concept has been so great that studies, once theoretical or academic in nature, have given way to practical initiatives. There have been various attempts to create indices for evaluating national brands, each of which is based on different criteria. Two such indices are mentioned below, although others are under development or soon to be launched.

One of them, the East West Global Index, is based on articles published about a country in the most prestigious international media. Another, perhaps the best known, is the Nation Brand Index (NBI), which is

based on the opinion of a sample taken from 35 countries, consulted through quarterly surveys. The NBI takes into account a series of indicators: economic, social, political and cultural. A brief description of this index helps understand the complexities involved in the creation and projection of a country's image.

Among the economic indicators, the most important are those relative to attracting investment, especially direct investment, and which relate to the perception of the economic, social, legal, and institutional status of a country. Also, the volume and nature of its exports, which respond to the foreign image of the products and services offered and the country's capacity to attract the interest of potential consumers.

Among the social indicators, the most significant is the image projected by the country's people, their level of education and competence, their openness to the outside world and their receptive attitude. This sector also includes their capacity to attract skilled immigrants, students or prospective residents.

In the political area, key factors are perception of the country: its levels of competence, institutional stability, legal certainty & fairness. Also its position and actions on basic issues of international politics: democracy, justice, solidarity, environment & role in solving international tensions and conflicts.

The cultural area encompasses not only the perception of the country's cultural legacy, but also the creative capacity of its society in areas such as art, literature, design, fashion, etc.

Last but not least in importance - now seen as an essential element - is the tourism index, the capacity to attract visitors who want to enjoy a country's natural and manmade attractions.

Each country competes with others for the attention, respect & trust of governments, communications media, investors, consumers, immigrants and tourists. A good country brand, in short, constitutes a fundamental competitive advantage in a world that is becoming increasingly competitive not only because of the constantly growing number of competitors, but

also the efforts each of them is making to gain ground in the international arena.

The creation and consolidation of the image of a country is a slow and complex process. Due to the multiple elements - political, social, cultural, economic and institutional - that form part of and affect the process, efforts must be sustained and have a clear and determined vision.



At the same time, a country image is a fragile asset that can be affected by numerous factors. These range from natural disasters to institutional instability, and include social problems, economic decline, and internal and international conflicts, all of which test the management capacity of society and institutions when it comes to addressing the challenges they face.

Success in dealing with these problems can help in regaining the original positive image or help to establish a new, more persuasive and attractive one. This is the case with several countries striving to overcome difficult situations. Some, like Vietnam and Nepal, are switching to a more democratic form of government. Others, like countries that formerly made up Yugoslavia, are getting over the trauma of separation & conflict. And then there are those like Colombia that have had to recover from serious domestic problems, like terrorism & drug-trafficking.

Of all these cases, Colombia has proved to be one of the most successful in surmounting past difficulties. It now stands as a model capable of inspiring others to use similar formulas to conquer their fundamental challenges.

II. TOURISM AND COUNTRY IMAGE

The relationship between tourism and the image of a country is reciprocal. A positive country image is essential for tourism development, and the change of image in Colombia has been a fundamental factor in the country's recent tourism successes. At the same time, tourism plays an instrumental role in creating and consolidating a country's image.

The fact this analysis of the Colombian case is being approached from the perspective of tourism is due to two reasons that go beyond the sector itself.

- Tourism is a fundamental factor in the formation of a country's image, as shown by the previously mentioned indexes. Firstly, tourism promotion is based on communicating to potential travellers the elements that differentiate a country as a tourism destination. Secondly, tourism provides visitors with the opportunity to get to know a country personally, and to transmit their knowledge and perceptions to relatives, friends, colleagues and other potential visitors. This is especially true with the ever-increasing penetration of the Internet. One of the principal roles played by tourism is to offer visitors the chance to modify their perceptions and opinions as a result of their direct interaction with other peoples and cultures. Tourism also serves as an effective instrument in inducing social change by breaking down stereotypes and prejudices between the residents of a country and its visitors.
- Colombia has fully understood the role of tourism both as an instrument of economic and social development and as a factor of national cohesion. Tourism policy is a priority state policy, and tourism promotion is a basic factor in the creation and consolidation of the country's overall image.

This is the reason why an analysis of Colombia's success in creating a new national image from such a difficult starting point - the conflict generated by terrorism, guerrillas and drug-trafficking - has received support and technical assistance from the World Tourism Organization.



Medellín, Botero City

The Organization believes that Colombia's case can serve as a role model for other countries in similar circumstances. A crucial element of the Colombian approach is that while it recognizes the decisive role of tourism in the country's image, this is only part of a collective effort.

The all-encompassing process includes all sectors of Colombian national life - those attracting foreign investments, promoting exports, territorial balance, socio-economic development, environmental preservation, institutional stability - in a way that makes each sector an integral part of the overall process of constructing a new country image.

4. IMAGE AND REALITY

I. AUTHENTICITY AND CONSISTENCY

First and foremost, the image of a country will only work if it authentically reflects the nation, the society and the relationship between the two.

National identity consists of a set of cultural features and the particular codes of the social groups that inhabit the territory, defining its personality, giving it individuality, and making it unique for both residents and visitors. In an effort to rationalize, systemize and make effective use of its new image.

Colombia defined its "identity profile" through a series of features. Some were physical (colours, landscapes, climate, architecture, sites, language, music, sounds, smells, etc.), psychological (the character of the population, their relationship with history, traditions and legends, historical and contemporary figures); symbolic and iconic; and some involved relationships between all these elements.

A country brand should be the result of the collective imagery of the country, the system of conscious and unconscious mental evocations of a society that gives meaning to its *weltanschauung* and to its relationship with its territory. A country brand, therefore, consists of an identity (history, national character, personality); an image (a system of signs and its code), its communication, its vocation and functions, and the benefits it provides for the society it represents. This characteristic of the country brand is especially important in tourism, since today's tourists

increasingly feel the need to discover and understand the cultures of the countries they visit. Personal experience and enrichment increasingly constitute one of the fundamental motivations for travel.



Cafe Quindio National Park

On the other hand, and in agreement with what has been said earlier regarding authenticity, there has to be consistency between image and reality. The usual approach when diagnosing the existence of an image problem for a country is that the remedy lies simply in communication.

However, this approach is insufficient. To obtain effective and lasting results, communication must be preceded or at least accompanied by corrective measures that help to give communication credibility.

II. COLOMBIA, REALITY AND IMAGE

Colombia has observed this golden rule. Its communication strategy is a reflection of the new reality in the country & the results obtained from its arduous, bold and sustained effort to change the old image.

Colombia has undergone a profound transformation over the past few years. A number of parameters

relating to social, economic, educational, security and infrastructure aspects clearly reflect this process.

The country has established a new educational and occupational training model based on quality and major public investment in the education sector has increased by 35% between 2002 and 2008. Elementary & secondary education cover is now 100%, and a third of pupils went on to higher education in 2008. In a spirit of facilitating relations between peoples, the government has increased progressively the number of countries whose nationals do not require an entry visa to 87.



In the health sector, Colombia is poised to achieve universal health coverage for the entire population in 2009. It will have achieved in 17 years what took developed countries 30 years. In 1990 the coverage rate was just 23% and in 2002 80%. Life expectancy at birth rose from 68.3 years in 1990 to 72.8 in 2005.

As a foundation for economic and social development, Colombia is investing heavily in public infrastructure projects: water distribution and treatment, road transport (17,736 kilometres of roadways, of which 8,172 are highways), rail transport, port systems (690 million tonnes) and its network of 47 airports, eight of which are international. Work has already begun on a new airport for Bogotá. In telecommunications, 35.6 million people users had a mobile phone and 12.2 million subscribed to Internet in 2008.

Especially notable are the advances in safety and security, a crucial factor for institutional stability & the economic & social development of Colombia. Between 2002 and 2007, homicides declined by 40%, kidnappings by 87% & serious attacks by 76%. This drastic reduction in crime highlights the enormous progress in combating drug-trafficking and guerrillas.

Both activities previously constituted serious threats to Colombia's democratic system, but have lost social support following the capture of their leaders, the cutting off of supplies, desertions and their loss of territory. The best illustration of the loss of control by the guerrillas is the fact that all democratically elected mayors can now carry out their functions normally and live in the municipalities they govern.

The application of the programmes "Vive Colombia. Viaja por ella" (Live Colombia. Travel all around it.) and "Rutas seguras" (Safe Routes), has permitted freer movement for Colombians and a substantial surge in tourism. This policy has served to boost domestic tourism, as well as proving a fundamental factor for social cohesion and a reaffirmation of the self-confidence of Colombian society.



Victoria Regia in the Amazon

As a country with the second greatest biodiversity in the world, Colombia has approached protection of the environment very seriously. Policy is based on recognising that the country is potentially vulnerable to climate change, with threats to human settlement, health, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, tourism, nature systems, and biodiversity and water resources.

In order to meet this challenge, the Colombian Government has adopted a National Climate Change Policy (CONPES). This includes the National Biodiversity Policy and the Ecotourism Development Policy, which defines actions in 28 areas out of the 54 that make up the National Park System.

These parks cover 10% of Colombia's territory. UNESCO has included Los Katíos National Park and the Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary in its World

Heritage list. Within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol, Colombia has developed 104 projects linked to the Clean Development Mechanism, 29 of which are backed by the national government.

Another area where Colombia has seen spectacular progress is in creating a legal framework for business that encourages new enterprises and foreign investment. Reductions have been made in the costs, time and administrative procedures required to start a new business. The government is fully aware that foreign investment is needed to promote economic and social development.

To facilitate this, a legal framework has been set up using innovative instruments such as Legal Stability Pacts that in 2008 protected 2.56 billion US dollars in investments. The government has also designed a more favourable tax regime, with the creation of 27 new free-trade zones that have attracted 1.41 billion US dollars in new investments. For the tourism sector, the framework has been particularly favourable. In 2003 a thirty year tax exemption was approved that can last even longer, up to 2047, for new investments in refurbishing, expanding or building new hotels, while ecotourism projects were given a 20 year moratorium. Reciprocal agreements have been signed with several countries, among them Spain, that prevent double taxation on investments.

The success of these measures is reflected by a total foreign direct investment of 8.65 billion US dollars in

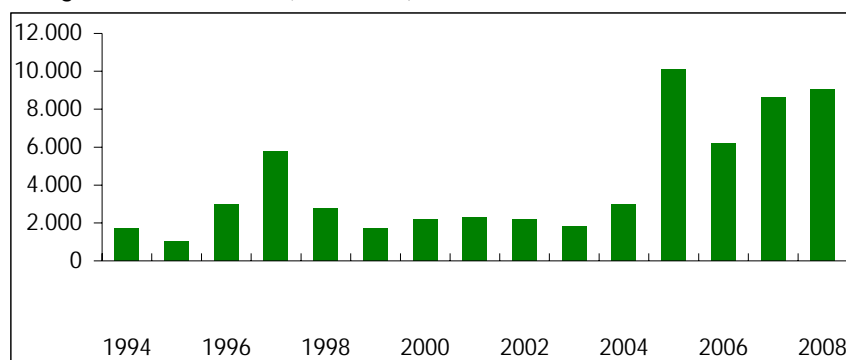
2007, representing 5% of national GDP. This new regulatory scheme has boosted Colombia from 66th place in 2007 to 53rd in 2008 in the "Doing Business Index" of 181 countries. In 2007 the country won the eponymous prize awarded by the World Bank & has a good chance of winning the award again for 2008.

To illustrate Colombia's economic growth: GDP grew by 332% between 2002 and 2007, exports increased by 150%, unemployment dropped by 29%, and foreign investment grew by 323%. Road mobility increased by 41%; hotel occupancy rose by 32% and the confidence index of the Colombian population increased by 75%. All this effort forms part of a long-term project called "Vision 2032", under which Colombia is due to become one of the three most competitive countries in Latin America that year.

The forecast is to have a medium-high level of income per capita (up from the current 3,000 US dollars to 18,000 US dollars in 2032), thanks to an export driven economy offering high value-added and innovative goods and services. All of this will be supported by a business climate aimed at encouraging local and foreign investment, promoting regional convergence, improving employment opportunities and raising living standards while substantially reducing poverty.

The results obtained to date suggest this vision is not mere aspiration, but a reference framework to guide effective action aimed at obtaining real and tangible results.

Foreign Direct Investment (US\$ billion)



Source: Bank of Colombia

5. IMAGE AND COMMUNICATION

I. COUNTRY IMAGE AND CRISIS SITUATIONS

Terrorism, civil conflicts, wars, natural disasters and political instability constitute the principal content of the mass media.

Reinforcing the negative effects aroused by the media, many outlets base their products on stereotypes that coincide with prejudices and perceptions already rooted in their audiences.

While isolated incidents have a limited negative impact, prolonged and recurrent cases of terrorism, war, or political instability and the resulting media coverage can cause lasting damage to the image of a country. Negative effects are accentuated by information technology that makes it possible for the media to present instantaneous graphic images of events taking place in almost any part of the world. Colombia, like other countries that have suffered deep and prolonged crises, started off from a paradoxical position. They are well-known by the worldwide public.

Although this might be considered purely negative, it also has positive elements in forging a new image. The fact is that the country is already on the map of world opinion.

Communication is not needed to make the country known, but to correct a distorted image through an information campaign that is deliberate, planned and sustained, putting forward the positive elements that lead to a change of image. This objective will be attainable if communication is based on the facts. If there is consistency between the reality and the message that is transmitted, the new image will end up prevailing. The time it takes to achieve success will depend on how well focused the message is and the strategy of the communication programme.



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COLOMBIA
DESDE ADENTRO?
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DE COLOMBIA COMO DESTINO TURÍSTICO
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JUEVES 10 DE MAYO | 5 P.M.
VIERNES 11 DE MAYO | 1 P.M.

SALA 1 ATRIO, ENTRE LOS PABELLONES 1Y3 B.T.C

CARTAGENA DE INDIAS:
SEDE DE LA XVIII ASAMBLEA GENERAL DE LA | ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL DE TURISMO | NOVIEMBRE 2007

Promoting Colombian Tourism

II. SUCCESSFUL CASES: SPAIN, NEPAL, MONTENEGRO

These three cases show the effectiveness of communicating the country brand.

Spain was able to move from being an authoritarian political regime and a poorly developed economy to a successful democracy thanks to a transition process that has come to be seen as a model for other countries. The process channelled social energy towards the development of an economy based on the modernization of infrastructure and the diversification of the production system.

Spanish society already had close contact with neighbouring societies as the result of a rapid development of tourism that attracted millions of other Europeans to the country. With the new possibilities offered by economic progress, the country advanced quickly and adopted the behavioural norms of its neighbours. Each transformation - political, social and economic - reinforced another, contributing to the modernization of Spain and its integration in the movement towards European Union. Based on this transformation, Spain forged a new image to transmit to international public opinion.

It presented itself as a modern country, with infrastructure on a par with more developed countries, and with producers, financial, technological and commercial enterprises that were capable of competing at international level. In the service sectors, it was able to reach number-two spot in the world tourism rankings by diversifying its product, enhancing quality and spreading tourism flows around the country.

Reflecting the intense interaction between tourism and country image, the collective satisfaction felt by Spanish society with the country's progress was epitomised by the slogan of a tourism advertising campaign: "Bravo, España". But the best example of the contribution of tourism and tourism communication to the consolidation of the country brand was a Miró-designed logo. It not only identified Spanish tourism for over 25 years, but also helped identify Spain as a country. Other countries that have gone through a conflict-ridden past are carrying out

similar exercises. An interesting case is **Nepal**, which suffered the hijacking of an Indian aircraft at Kathmandu airport and the subsequent suspension of flights between India and Nepal in 2000. Then came political instability from the assassination of the King and Queen in 2001 and a Maoist guerrilla campaign. Seeing its image deteriorating, presented in the media as an unsafe tourism destination, the country faced the collapse of tourism, a vital sector in the national economy.

Despite the inherent difficulties for all small countries in gaining access to global media, the Nepalese tourism authorities launched a series of initiatives (media relations, joint campaigns with tourism operators, concentration on nearby markets). They successfully got over the message that Nepal continued to be a safe destination for tourists. That message tallied with reality, as none of the incidents affected tourists.

Montenegro is another prominent case. Giving maximum priority to tourism as an essential element of the national economy, the country has strived to recover its former tradition as a tourism destination prior to the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the subsequent ethnic conflicts. It created a new image to brush aside a conflict-ridden history of the Balkans that dated back to the First World War. The objective was to promote tranquillity, presenting Montenegro as the first nation to declare itself an "ecological country".

It was an image that addressed various complementary objectives. It helped to recover the tourism tradition and served as an element of collaboration with neighbouring countries. By encouraging shared parks and natural spaces, the cooperation helped overcome past periods of conflict. A new, intrinsically peaceful image of conservation countered established stereotypes and highlighted tourism as an instrument to overcome conflict and aid regional integration, in line with a broader push for European unification.

III. “COLOMBIA IS PASSION” – COUNTRY CAMPAIGN.

Colombia has designed a communication strategy that addresses these same parameters, but with an approach that has an essential advantage.

This differentiating factor is that the Colombian strategy features a global, integrated approach, which encompasses all sectors that are directly involved in and have the closest connections with the rest of the world: exports, investments, tourism, diplomatic relations etc.

On one hand this helps pool efforts that would otherwise be dispersed. On the other, greater efficiency is achieved by transmitting a single message. Both public institutions and the private sector participate in this collective effort.



Aside from the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Tourism, which was its inspirer and promoter, among the public entities involved are Bancoldex, Fiducoldex, the National Guarantee Fund (FNG), the Superintendence of Industry and Trade, Artesanías de Colombia S.A, and in particular Agencia Proexport Colombia, the agency responsible for trade, investment and tourism abroad. Representatives of the public and private sectors form part of an Advisory Council that manages the national brand.

By 2008, 220 private companies were involved in the initiative, 1,000 Colombian products were linked to the country brand, and leading national and global personalities were giving it their support.

The Colombian private sector has had a valuable precedent to follow, the Juan Valdez campaign run by the national growers' association to promote the country's coffee exports. Involving Colombian society as a whole in pushing the country branding has proved fundamental in that it creates an image abroad of a national togetherness that is firmly rooted in the population.

The comprehensive communication strategy to recreate the country image of Colombia is based on the message “Colombia es pasión” (Colombia is Passion) and on a heart-shaped logo that won the prize for Best Logo and Design in 2006 from the American Design Awards.

It meets the requirements of communication experts who believe a corporate trademark has to correspond to the ‘DNA’ of a corporation, business or country. The concept is what differentiates Colombia from other countries. This message wants to tell, demonstrate and show to the world, whether they are tourists, investors or potential buyers, the enormous quantity of things that Colombians have, who they are, and that they do things with passion.

The Colombian institutions have been able to develop and implement a brand strategy that meets the highest technical demands of present day communications. Conceptually, they have defined what the brand is and its objective.

They have been able to create a “feeling”, a vision of Colombia that incites in the target market a desire to



share in and enjoy the experience. The mission of the brand, its positioning, the values it embodies, its commitment to the people of Colombia and its invitation to participate in the collective effort are clearly defined in the campaign. Both the country brand, “Colombia es pasión” (Colombia is Passion), as well as its

tourism derivation “Colombia, el riesgo es que te quieras quedar” (Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay), have the conceptual elements that a brand needs according to Kotler and Gertner: -

A clear, simple, credible and attractive image, that defines its attributes; the development of an umbrella concept; a catchy slogan, and a powerful visual symbol.

Colombia,
the only risk
is wanting
to stay.

The development of the campaign follows a flexible code, which allows the incorporation of all the stakeholders involved through a shared brand-management system.

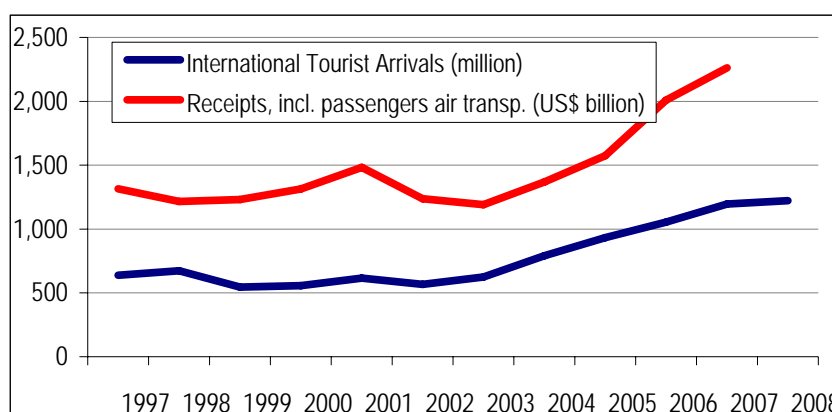
It also allows for the brand to be associated with personalities, national and foreign, who best embody the values that the country wants to project. As for the spin off tourism slogan, the aim is to change the idea of "I don't want to go to Colombia" for "I don't want to leave Colombia". By facing up to the implicit question "But isn't it risky going to Colombia?" rather than avoiding it, the wording helps overcome any fear that might arise from being invited to visit the country.

The strategy utilizes various procedures (familiarization trips for journalists, settings for novels and the filming of movies, etc.) that go beyond the two traditional instruments, advertising and sponsorships, are as effective as these and yet cost considerably less.

6. TOURISM AND COUNTRY IMAGE IN COLOMBIA

Within this overall framework of forging a new image, tourism and tourism policy play a very prominent role as noted. But it should be kept in mind that tourism promotion is based on disseminating the image of the country, and that tourism provides millions of visitors with the opportunity of a personal and direct experience with the reality of Colombia. This knowledge is the most effective instrument for destroying stereotypes and prejudices.

International Tourism in Colombia, 1997-2008



Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ©

I. COLOMBIAN TOURISM: REALITY AND PROMISE

It has been pointed out earlier that the entire communication campaign has to tie in with reality. In the tourism sector, the results already show what is happening with Colombian tourism: that the number of tourist arrivals doubled between 2003 (624.909) and 2008(1.222.102), growing at an annual rate of 18%, one of the highest in the world.

Tourism has become the number three export sector, behind oil and coal (2.26 billion US dollars in 2007, with growth of 12.7% over the previous year). Colombia has moved up the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index prepared by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with the World Tourism Organization. One of the strategic aims of tourism policy, "Turismo Compite" (Tourism Competes), which comes under the general competitiveness policy of the Colombian Government, is to make significant progress in this index. To help achieve this, Colombia's tourism policy involves three main action points:

- 1) A Regulatory Framework (national priority for the tourism sector, tourism standards and regulations, environmental sustainability, security, and health and hygiene).
- 2) Business Climate and Infrastructure (specific legislation for the creation of a tourism promotion fund and tax stimuli for investments in hotels; in air, sea, road and rail transport infrastructure; tourism infrastructure and new information and communication technologies, and competitiveness in tourism prices); and
- 3) Human and Natural Resources (occupational training, with 1,128 monuments and sites having been declared 'assets of cultural interest' and four included on the UNESCO World Heritage list: the port, fortresses and other monuments of Cartagena de Indias; the San Agustín Archaeological Park; the National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro, and the Historic Centre of Santa Cruz de Mompox. Two others are on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Carnival of Barranquilla and the Cultural Space of Palenque de San Basilio. Another objective is fostering the image of tourism as an instrument for developing Colombian society).



Cartagena de Indias

Among the main actions that have been taken are:

- creating a safety and security area, with 2,234 "Vive Colombia Safe Routes" for tourism, an increased level of security that has led to favourable reappraisals of travel advisories issued by governments in the main generating markets; and improved accessibility through an open-skies policy for all the main airports and charter traffic to the main tourist destinations;
- the progressive elimination of visa requirements, including the waiving of passports for nationals from Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Chile and Brazil;
- the impetus given to tourism infrastructure projects (convention centres, cable cars etc.); the setting up 510 Posadas Turísticas (Tourism Inns) with another 428 approved; tax incentives for hotel projects (15,484 rooms to be available by 2011);
- the consolidation of a Tourism Information Points (Puntos de Información Turística, PIT) network with

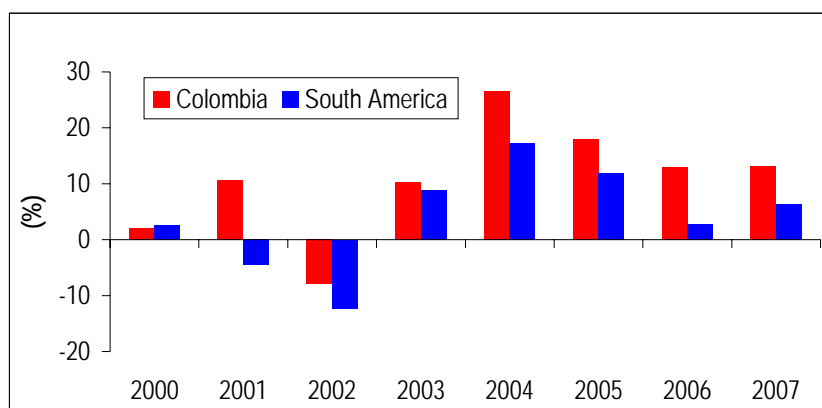
21 centres in 2008, and another 15 in the planning or execution stage;

- collaboration between public and private sectors;
- reinforcement of the financing of tourism policy and of international promotion with an increasingly active presence in the main generating markets: Mexico,

United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Italy and Poland.

The goal is to turn Colombia into the number-five tourism destination of Latin America by 2010, reaching the figure of four million international visitors and doubling the contribution of tourism to GDP with receipts of 4 billion US dollars.

Colombian Tourism outgrows South America's International Tourist Arrivals (change, %)



Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ©

II. “COLOMBIA, THE ONLY RISK IS WANTING TO STAY” TOURISM CAMPAIGN

A complementary factor, but also a fundamental part of Colombian tourism policy which fits into the general effort to create a new country image, is the tourism promotion campaign based on the message “Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay”. This, in turn, forms part of the overall country image campaign “Colombia is Passion”.

There is no tension between the two campaigns, and they are consistent with each other in their emotional content. The tourism campaign involves common elements, which provide unity and consistency with the campaign.

There are brochures covering a wide variety of products (nature, beaches, scuba diving, cruises, culture and tradition, conventions, adventure, shopping, gastronomy, golf, learning Spanish as a foreign language, etc.); brochures of Colombia's regions featuring what they have to offer, posters, postcards, directories, advertisements for print, television and hoardings media, videos, pavilions at fairs, the Internet (www.turismocolombia.com in three languages, interactive and aimed at each target

audience – domestic tourists, international tourists, media and industry professionals; presence in search engines; newsletter from Proexport; E-learning projects and digital brochures), Tourism Information Points, public relations agencies in 15 generating markets, etc. The idea behind the campaign slogan is converting risk into opportunity. It is backed by testimonials from nine foreigners who live in Colombia, working as diving instructors, actors, hoteliers in San Gil, people who fell in love with Colombians, married and formed families in Bogotá, Cali or Medellín.

In the opinion of the author, it was a clever decision to tackle head-on the persistent, albeit false perception of Colombia as a risky destination. Colombia is

presenting a clear and direct message. Without shying away from mentioning risk, it is one that uses old perceptions in a positive way, turning the originally negative connotation upside-down. This approach keeps to basic rules that must be followed with all communication actions in risk situations.

These call for: information to be transparent to ensure the future credibility of the source; a swift response with assistance and communication; direct and resolute confrontation of the problem to achieve maximum effectiveness; taking advantage of public attention to disseminate positive information about the tourism destination, emphasizing attractions and improvements in what it has to offer; putting incidents into context, geographically and in terms of importance; transforming initially negative perceptions deriving from an incident into positive perceptions through effective crisis management and by highlighting measures taken to mitigate effects and prevent repetition in the future.

It should be pointed out that this capacity to respond can only be achieved by having in place an action plan, supported by a trained team ready and able to apply it and who collaborate with other partners involved with tourism policy, at home and abroad. These include international institutions, especially the World Tourism Organization, which has established specific mechanisms such as the portal www.sos.travel, and has extensive experience in helping Members face up to crises. Such situations are, unfortunately, becoming increasingly common and can affect any tourism destination.

The objective of Colombia's communication strategy is not to define the profile of the country, its identity or ideology. Its aim is to highlight all of these identifying elements and frame them within the current reality of Colombia. This helps the country to transmit a true image, freeing it of previous stereotypes and prejudices whose negative effects have been amplified by coverage in the mass media.

The communication strategy tries to use the same global media to transmit a true image of Colombia and to consolidate its country brand with the

international public. The success of the initiative is borne out by the results. A recent example in the tourism field is the specialized windsurfing publication "Boards", which devoted its lead story in the June 2008 issue to an article entitled "Viva Colombia".

A summary of the article reads: "Beset by the effects of drug-trafficking and the guerrilla insurgency, Colombia might not be considered as a top holiday destination choice. However, in recent times, the rigorous approach applied by President Álvaro Uribe has made it possible for the situation to improve, so much so that travel guide Lonely Planet picked Colombia as one of the top ten tourism destinations for 2006 and the PWA (Professional Windsurfer Association) has plans to hold a World Cup event in Colombia."

The article began by pointing out: "When we told people about our plans to visit Colombia we did not get very positive reactions". The authors of the article, after describing the magnificent conditions for windsurfing and the wonderful excursions they went on during a four week stay in Colombia, stated: "We saw a lot of things, we met really nice people and we enjoyed a great deal of time in the water. All the concerns of our families and friends proved to be unfounded."



Rosario Islands

"On our trip to Cabo de Vela we passed numerous traffic and military checkpoints, the coastal route between Cartagena and Barranquilla is one of the safest in the country, and walking around at night in the old town of Cartagena did not pose any problems. We will decidedly come back to this South American country blessed by the wind."

One of the most recent and prominent examples of this new perception of Colombia can be found in the travel section of the New York Times. In an article entitled "53 Places to Go in 2008", the paper puts Bogota in 21st spot with the recommendation:

"Bogota might be remembered for its death squads and gang violence, but this Colombian megalopolis - the fourth-largest city in South America - is cleaning up its act and drawing tourists with its "cultural diversity and colonial charms".



Bogota

7. CONCLUSION

Colombia is a country that has managed to come back from the edge of the abyss. With its very survival threatened for many years by the combined effects of drug-trafficking, guerrilla warfare and terrorism, its recovery is without parallel in the world.

The vital energy of Colombian society and the vision of its leaders have made it possible for the country to overcome this threat. Anyone who has had the opportunity to get to know, even superficially, the social dynamism of the country, the professionalism and qualities of its people and the vigour of its institutions, can understand the profound reasons behind its survival.

In this regard, Colombia, with its strategy for the creation of a new country image, constitutes a model for other countries that have had to face analogous situations. The contribution of tourism to the success of this collective effort likewise constitutes an example of the important role played by tourism not only in social and economic development, but also in forging the image of a country.

While carrying out this recovery process, Colombia has designed a communications strategy that makes people aware of the new reality. It has created an image that overcomes stereotypes and prejudices formed during the years of conflict and which was fanned by the predominantly negative coverage of the country in the world's media. This media failed to penetrate the reality of a Colombian society, veiled by tirelessly repeated images of the conflict generated by drug-trafficking and guerrillas.

For those who 'know' Colombia only from a distance, the communication strategy designed and implemented as a collective task of society as a whole is now an indispensable and effective instrument in getting to learn about the reality of the country.

Its strategy in creating a new country image constitutes a model for other countries that face similar situations. The contribution of tourism to the success of the collective campaign is a prime example of the important role played by tourism not only in social and economic development but also in forging the image of a country.



The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the only intergovernmental organization that serves as a global forum for tourism policy and issues. Its Members include 154 Member States, 7 territories as well as over 375 Affiliate Members from the public and private sectors. UNWTO's mission is to promote and develop tourism as a significant means of fostering international peace and understanding, economic development and international trade.

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