



Challenging Times Call for Considered Country Communications

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Country PR and branding is a growing business and its influence profound. Get it right and countries can see a startling upturn in business, tourism and inward investment.

In many respects, country branding is a macrocosm of what corporate brands do every day. The fundamentals remain the same – forging a reputation that is better, stronger and deeper such that it shapes external (neighbours, investors, visitors) and internal (citizens) opinion. And, of course, having a clear course of action to protect its brand when things do not go according to plan.

A quick read of the latest edition of FutureBrand's Country Brand Index shows more and more governments are paying as much attention to the brand reputation of their country as they are to national infrastructure systems. In an environment of limited global financing, country brands matter.

Singapore remains an example of how careful country brand management can result in a highly competitive national reputation. It's worth remembering that Singapore became an independent nation only 45 years ago. But its visionary outlook set a course from which it has since elevated its position to become the regional hub for multinational companies in Asia Pacific – and a place where its unrivalled reputation for safety and security is on a par with its shopping experiences.

Singapore's success is grounded in the core principles of brand reputation. First and foremost, it has absolute clarity on what and who it is. It knows its DNA and it has a clear personality. Secondly, it has been built from this central brand position, projecting itself to very specific audience groups with equally specific messages that connect with those audiences. And thirdly, it has built a well-developed communications strategy against which every single government initiative is mapped.

Combined, these factors make 'Brand Singapore' a success. There is clarity in its positioning and it's easy to track crossover between the country and the corporates that are based within its region. Service quality, innovation and adherence to the rule of law are clear brand attributes with which corporations want to be associated.

Of course, countries and companies always need to go beyond their comfort zones to understand and adjust the gaps that inevitably exist between perception and reality. In 2010, that means staying well ahead of the communications curve in the way in which they garner insight from, and communicate with, their audiences. More often than not, that demands dialogue – not statements. But it's a stark reality that some countries (and companies) are better than others at implementing it in the real world. They are the ones that shine brighter than their competitors.

But of all the common factors between country and corporate brand management, it is advocacy creation and word of mouth that stands out as THE pivotal marketing and communications need. In a world that has become commoditised and equally *communitised*, people base their decisions on those sources they most trust. It's a fact that even the most "closed" countries and companies are seeing the need to create a level of dialogue between themselves and their audiences. Without it, their brand value will slowly perish, along with the intriguing prospect of heightened inward investment that the majority so cherish.

For more information on the 2010 Country Brand Index please visit www.futurebrand.com