

Interbrand

Branding A Country

Principles of branding apply in equal measure to countries as they do to corporations. But *methods* are different. Countries will compete daily with neighbors or block regions for tourism, inward investment and export sales. There's only so much business that can go around. Those countries that start with an unknown or poor reputation will be limited or marginalized. They cannot easily boost their commercial success. Consequently, they will often languish at the bottom of the ladder of influence. No voice or even worse, they are the butt of jokes at every regional summit.

Similarly, when the reputation is clear and positive such as with Germany (and that's despite two world wars), products made in that country carry an extra aura. The brand equity they possess opens doors and wins contracts. Take the European car business - while mass car buyers all over Europe show a preference for indigenous brands (Citroen/ Renault in France, Seat in Spain etc.) the number two choice invariably is a car made in Germany, and it doesn't necessarily mean a BMW or Mercedes.

Creating a branding program for a country demands an integration policy that most countries do not possess- the ability to act and speak in a coordinated and repetitive way about themes that are the most motivating and differentiating a country can make. Which countries bother really to understand and act on this? The identification of key issues is an emotionally charged debate as who can really decide whether tradition or radicalism is the more motivating?

Ireland and Scotland are widely acknowledged as having created country brands that punch far above their natural weight. Part of the reason for this is that they are in the so-called 'tiger club', small, cocky fighters who use the illusion of an enduring enemy to create a strong brand identity for themselves as the underdog. In the case of Scotland for instance they even used an advertising line called 'Scotland the Brand' (replacing Scotland the brave), also, the Scottish Culture Board has sent Hollywood a training course in Scottish dialect to make sure that authentic accents are the only ones we hear on the big screen (the end of 'Scottie' from Star Trek perhaps).

Ireland enjoyed an enormous surge in popularity on the back of numerous Eurovision Song Contest wins and famed shows such as River Dance. And of course, Guinness is the quintessentially Irish Brand that at once feeds the reputation of Ireland as Ireland, the country brand, feeds it.

The benefits of a consistent and professional country branding can be observed in every region- they include the ability to win more investment business because the country image says the right things about taxation, labor skills, safety, the environment, political stability plus the chance to apply a 'made in' label because it will positively aid the sale of a product in an overseas market.

So how do you go about branding a country?

- You have to have the cooperation and involvement of representatives of government, business, the arts, education and importantly the media. The media will go crazy to be involved because branding a country is a good opportunity to settle old scores and hit the political debating table hard. Don't launch a country branding project if you don't want to spend a lot of time answering questions- you'll get plenty.
- You need to find out how your country is perceived internally and by people abroad who you want to influence. Use qualitative and quantitative methods. If it's for a product such as wine then some dimensions in a country brand may be less important than others - for instance people joke about national characteristics and the British often say they find it hard doing business with the French but

when it comes to wine consumption, the British do consume vast quantities of Champagne and are most knowledgeable about French wine.

- Consult with opinion leaders to look at national strengths and weaknesses and compare them with the research you do.
- Create a strategy which should include some kind of professional model for the brand and the way that the brand idea will be communicated, bearing in mind that different audiences will need different takes (tourism is usually quite different to investment although they obviously connect).
- Work out a program to make the strategy tangible through improvement programs, campaigns etc. Make sure you can point to tangible examples of brand enhancement otherwise the media will have you in the spotlight for wasting time and money. People want their country to have the best physical impression at ports of entry, city centers, etc. Look at how Rudolf Giuliani transformed the external visitor impression of New York from scary city to one of the safest places in the world.
- Create a system to link together the different organizations and departments that can be part of your brand but remember that if it all looks too governmental then people will avoid working with it. This is a big challenge. The government needs to drive support for the initiative but shouldn't try to take all the accolades, otherwise, unless it's a dictatorship, all you'll end up with is a number of re-branded ministries and government bodies.
- Most of all, its actions that really count. You can't impose branding on a country but you can find out the aspects that appeal to the widest group of people and which are different and special. Take time, be consistent, build an integrated picture and always back it with quality. You will have success.

As a final example, look at Spain, a great piece of repositioning from a country on the edge of modern European dynamics to one right at the heart. A brand based on passion and a wonderful identity that connects itself through multiple links and layers so it has become the most recognized country mark in Europe

Our belief is that brands truly have the power to change the world, they have the power to change the way we view the world and how we choose to see one country in contrast to another. The business of country branding is deeply serious, starting with the fine example of the Romans, it's always been with us. Those who employ professional skills with a determination to measure, evaluate and communicate can achieve outstanding economic results. With over twenty-five years of brand consulting behind us, Interbrand would go as far as to say that a well-engineered program has the potential to transform fortune and create a lasting value for the country. It cannot, as a consequence, be the property of one administration and it must as a consequence have the ability to outstrip political issues to focus on significant and compelling aspects of differentiation.

Charles Brymer is the Chairman & Chief Executive of the Interbrand Group, which includes 26 offices in 20 countries.