



ICT and the Building of a National T&T Brand

By Atiba Philips

A brand is more than a logo, a slogan or a jingle. It must be grounded in truth, conveyed with passion and coordinated across all of the various means used to deliver and reinforce its message. A strong national brand, therefore, is one that gives a country credit for its achievements and recognition for what it can contribute to the world. For us, such a brand will encapsulate what it means to be Trinbagonian, what makes us unique, and how valuable those unique attributes make us within the global context.

A national brand, however, must first start with us. We as a people must know what is special and interesting about our twin-island state (that fact in itself being a key element) and then be able to convey that in writing, visually and experientially, using every media channel available (including on-line!)

Our brand is what people buy into. It's what makes them want to spend their vacation, invest their money, base their business or buy things made in Trinidad and Tobago. In short, a positive and recognisable brand benefits the country economically. This is one of the main reasons why as persons living in T&T must seek to take this business of national brand building much more seriously. Many professionals are unwilling to go to certain countries in the Middle East and for different reasons, countries in Africa due to their perception of the difficulty to live comfortably in those regions for an extended period of time.

We as a country have to develop the habit of branding what is ours. Awareness of the benefits of protecting the perception of our beloved country in the eyes of the world is low, and the economic energy spent on the

legacy of oil and gas development still runs high. This is illustrated by the fact that other sectors that traditionally benefit from national branding have historically played a small role in the Trinidad and Tobago economy, for example tourism, which comprises less than 4% of GDP.

Some Pertinent Statistics: Every year the World Economic Forum (WEF) puts out an international survey of the world's most competitive countries, particularly as it relates to ICT. For many of the information categories where national governments cannot provide hard data, these rankings are informed by what are called 'perception indices' – generally

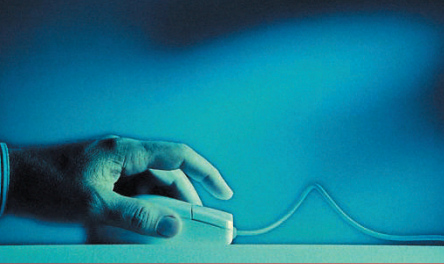
gathered from within the business community. Trinidad ranked 58 in 2001 and 81 in 2009 in the Networked Readiness Rankings. This decline is due, in part, to the fact that many Trinidadians are unaware of some of the advances that our country has made. A marquee area is that of ICT.

Did you know that broadband (high-speed internet access) prices are now the cheapest in the Caribbean, where three years ago we were the third most expensive territory in the region from which to access the internet? Did you know that there is also positive economic development in other areas that are under reported?

Table 1 World Economic Forum Latin America and the Caribbean Network Readiness Rankings 2008

Environment Component Index		Readiness Component Index		Usage Component Index	
Country	Rank	Country	Rank	Country	Rank
Barbados	27	Chile	36	Chile	35
Puerto Rico	31	Barbados	40	Jamaica	36
Chile	35	Puerto Rico	43	Brazil	41
Jamaica	53	Costa Rica	48	Puerto Rico	42
Panama	57	Brazil	55	Mexico	49
Costa Rica	61	Jamaica	59	Barbados	50
Mexico	62	Mexico	63	Dominican Republic	56
Uruguay	69	Colombia	64	El Salvador	58
El Salvador	78	El Salvador	68	Uruguay	61
Colombia	80	Panama	71	Colombia	64
Trinidad and Tobago	81	Uruguay	73	Guatemala	65
Dominican Republic	83	Argentina	74	Argentina	67
Brazil	86	Dominican Republic	79	Costa Rica	69
Honduras	88	Guatemala	81	Venezuela	73
Guatemala	90	Trinidad and Tobago	82	Panama	76
Argentina	92	Venezuela	84	Peru	82
Peru	98	Peru	85	Trinidad and Tobago	83
Guyana	107	Honduras	90	Honduras	94
Bolivia	113	Guyana	93	Ecuador	107
Paraguay	114	Ecuador	97	Bolivia	108
Nicaragua	116	Suriname	101	Nicaragua	113
Venezuela	117	Bolivia	105	Guyana	114
Ecuador	121	Nicaragua	112	Paraguay	121
Suriname	125	Paraguay	115	Suriname	124

Source: World Economic Forum



Notwithstanding our lack of awareness, Trinidad and Tobago has much to boast, particularly among Caribbean Islands. We have:

- the pitch lake – the largest one of three in the world
- the Gasparée Caves
- the largest species of centipede in the world
- the greatest variety of ‘local’ food and cultural diversity in the region
- the greatest variety of flora and fauna in the region
- the oldest and largest protected natural habitats in the Region (in Tobago)
- the greatest show on earth – Trinidad and Tobago Carnival
- and a number of other accomplishments in the areas of business, academia and scholarship, international beauty pageants, sport and innovation.

Why is Brand T&T important?

Branding serves to counter unbalanced media messaging that sets expectations about “Third World countries”, “Caribbean islands” or other labels assigned to us by North America and the United Kingdom; it can offset the influence that these messages have, especially on our youth vis-a-vis cultural values, perceptions

and practices. Moreover, local efforts at nation branding, particularly when executed on-line, can be used by the Diaspora in their efforts to market Trinidad and Tobago in their networks and professional situations overseas. Branding promotes knowledge that serves to instill a sense of national pride causing those of us living in-country to want to focus our energies on maintaining and developing positive elements rather than magnifying the negatives. And branding promotes the continuance of traditions by increasing awareness and the availability of indigenous facts.

The Relationship between ICT and Brand T&T:

The category of ICT-driven media (which includes traditional TV, Cable TV, radio, mobile and the internet), makes up just a part of any overall branding/marketing strategy. Increasingly however, ease of accessibility, rich compelling content and convenience are making ICT-based media more and more important as a global means of accessing information and, consequently, as a determinant of opinions and investment. In some countries and regions (e.g. Europe) traditional newspapers are increasingly under financial strain, even to the point of

bankruptcy, because more and more people are getting their news from blogs (web logs), websites and video sites like YouTube and Google Video, on-line magazines (or webzines), and other on-line social networks. Over time, these sources have come to be perceived as more credible, up-to-date and less prone to bias than the established news media. Therefore what is happening on-line, and what people are saying about our national brand through these types of media does matter. We should at least be aware of what’s being said, and at best we should be taking a proactive role to influence how we are covered in the international media and social arenas.

We must provide positive and fact-based content and analysis of our own, and coordinate our messaging across the various media in a concerted manner. Having said that, we are in trouble when the “CIA Fact Book” is in the top five results when you search for information on Trinidad and Tobago through the major search engines like Google and Yahoo!. This means that the world is accepting as truth (and as “official” information on Trinidad and Tobago), information of which we are not the authors

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and have dubious ability to influence. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that Trinbagonians ourselves are gleaning our sense of our own definition from sources outside of our creation.

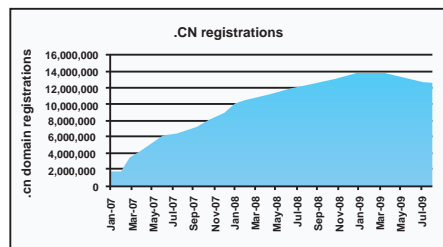
Connect to Asia: That T&T is unknown in markets like Asia can have a major impact on our future ability to assert ourselves as an attractive and prosperous society. Analysts predict that Asia will be an important market once the financial crisis is over and a new boom is imminent. Trinidad and Tobago needs to invest resources in becoming more visible in these markets, through communications in relevant languages and at relevant fora, and through scholarships and cultural exchanges, all of which can be promoted, mediated and facilitated on-line.

T&T's best chance to be internationally attractive is if we as a nation through words, deeds and clear messages convey that we offer the very things people value, such as a warm environment, a good business climate, welcoming people, energy security, a vibrant professional workforce, a responsible policy with regard to issues concerning human rights and interesting opportunities for individuals to develop personally and financially.

Some on-line Branding Opportunities & Considerations

Country Code Top Level Domains: A country code top-level-domain (ccTLD) is a relatively new resource available to nations and their local organisations to brand themselves as belonging to a region or country

on the Internet. Country code domains have steadily grown in popularity and some - .uk (England) and .de (Germany) and .sg (Singapore) boast millions of registrations. The .tt (Trinidad and Tobago) TLD is used by corporations like TSTT (e.g. bmobile.tt), but in general, this branding opportunity has been underused by the local private and public sector. This insufficient uptake is a result of several factors, including lack of awareness/marketing of the .tt brand, higher prices for .tt domains and a slightly longer process for accessing them. Notwithstanding this is a potent on-line resource available to TT firms that we must as a country take much greater advantage of to propagate the Trinidad and Tobago brand on-line.

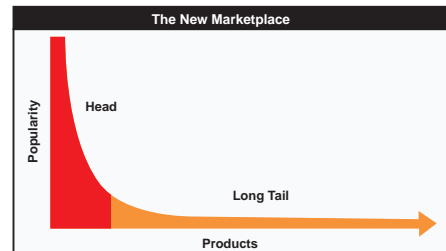


CN (China) registrations from January '07–July '09
<http://www.globalbydesign.com/blog/2009/08/18/chinese-domain-name/>

The Long Tail: Another phenomenon we must take into consideration is the concept of “the long tail”. This basically describes the aggregation of all of the non-traditional niche market opportunities that as a country we have not traditionally pursued, but can now access and cash in on at very low costs per “sale” through the ubiquitous channel of the internet. It can take just a few seconds, based on very limited content made available on-line to get someone who has no knowledge

of T&T to say yes to the Trinidad and Tobago offer.

Long Tail Curve



Generic Long Tail curve graph from Chris Anderson

In Trinidad and Tobago's case the “Head” of the curve consists of traditional industries where historical focus and return on investment has been highest (e.g. energy, finance and manufacturing). The “Long Tail” includes all of the other industries that we might develop, the combined result of which will aggregate to significant increases in revenue for T&T, for example: Eco-tourism, green/alternative energy, knowledge-based industries, sport and culture, agro-processing, visual and performing arts, and others.

Country branding, particularly on-line, must take on much more serious proportions for Trinidad and Tobago, even more so given new imperatives for economic diversification in the context of the global economic challenge. This is more than a tourism brand. It is a national brand. One that we can demonstrate as a people, in communities, in business and in Government, and see expressed in everything from our infrastructure to our laws and governance systems. Why? Because the total way of life in Trinidad and Tobago is replicated nowhere else in the world. There is only one T&T!



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