

The Canadian Image

A subject which has been getting significant press in Canada lately is the issue of branding Canada abroad. The Canadian Trade Office in Taipei (CTOT) realized some time ago that perceptions of Canada in Taiwan were having a negative effect on Canadian trade performance. Two years ago, the CTOT and several private sector Canadian partners commissioned a study to measure perceptions of Canada in the local community. Most of our suspicions were confirmed. While Canada has a positive image in Taiwan, it is based on Canada as a good place to vacation, or retire. It is not perceived as a good place to do business.



by Scott Fraser
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Every morning, we get together and recite, "Canada is a dynamic, high technology, competitive and multicultural society."

This was the impetus to our own re-branding efforts. Except, we don't call it re-branding, but rather image enhancement. Our goal is not to throw out Canada's positive image, but to build on it — by convincing the Taiwanese to also think business when they think Canada.

To start, we had to decide on which Canadian characteristics to promote in Taiwan. The CTOT came up with four adjectives, and this has become our office mantra. Every morning, we get together and recite, "Canada is a dynamic, high technology, competitive and multicultural society." We use this mantra to guide all our activities in the CTOT, including our cultural and education programs.

The next step was to ensure Canada is delivering a consistent message in Taiwan, and not just from within the CTOT. The CTOT chairs the Advance Canada in Taiwan (ACT) Committee, which groups together organizations in Taiwan mandated to promote Canada, including Canadian private sector companies.

Working together as the ACT, we have completely revamped our Web site. It is now recognized as the definitive site to go to in Taiwan for information about Canada. Aimed squarely at a Taiwanese audience, it consistently receives more than 100,000 hits per month. We have also mounted three very successful, radio-based image campaigns aimed at young urban decision-makers.

The media is a major tool we use to promote the Canadian image. Whenever we have a "mantra-compliant" visitor from Canada, we mount media campaigns to capitalize on their presence. We organize press conferences or interviews with members of the print or internet-based media. A week does not go by when we do not have several articles in the local Chinese language press on Canada.

Whether measured by the number of trade inquiries, the number of hits on our Web site or most important, the increase in exports (up 15 percent through the first six months according to Taiwanese statistics), our efforts are worth it. We will repeat our survey of images of Canada and see if this buzz about Canada is real.