

IDBtv: Positioning the Inter-American Development Bank as the premier source of information on development issues in LAC

IDBtv creates television programming on economic and social development issues in the region and distributes it through partnerships with television outlets in Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States. Content produced by IDBtv is aired on more than 125 television channels. Through a partnership with CNN and TV stations in the region, IDBtv productions bring news about IDB programs and policy priorities to millions of households in 200 countries. Through this programming, IDBtv has helped to position the Bank with decision makers, opinion leaders, and the general public, as one of the greatest sources of information on development issues in the region.

1. Background

In early 2005, the IDB's External Relations Office (EXR) determined that the resources it was investing in video were producing scant results. Because of its content, at that time this programming reached a very small audience, since the Bank's video team mainly covered loan signings and other official events, which were of limited interest to people outside the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

It was evident that there was a need to better match the target audience with the information content, which led to reconceptualize and redirect the Bank's television programming. The decision to get IDB name recognition among a wider audience was made. To that end EXR's video team launched a comprehensive marketing survey of some 100



IDBtv team during video production

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television channels, contacting TV news editors, producers and executives by email and in telephone interviews. The purpose of the survey was to determine whether there was a demand in the region for serious, in-depth reporting on economic and social development; what media could carry such programming; and what would be the most cost effective formats for producing such programming with ample reach.

Survey responses indicated that the general public does indeed have an interest in the social, economic, and cultural subjects that comprise the work of the IDB. They said that there is a need for good public tv programming on development subjects in Latin America and the Caribbean. Respondents also confirmed EXR's own perception that the TV programs then being produced were too focused on the Bank procedural, formal and institutional aspects to be of interest to a significant audience. The conclusion was that the IDB had a potential opportunity to help meet the demand for information on regional development, but it would have to change its strategy.

Television in Latin America is the primary source of information and news for 85 percent of its people. In contrast, only a small fraction of Latin Americans read newspapers or regularly goes online.¹ EXR also regarded TV as a powerful medium. It promotes public dialogue on issues, influences public opinion, and drives change.

2. IDBtv plots a new course

Taking into account the survey results, in 2005, EXR created IDBtv with three interrelated goals: inform public opinion on development issues; tell the human story of economic and social

development and the work of the IDB; and disseminate IDB achievements on issues of global concern.

The IDBtv team developed an integrated communications strategy for video production and dissemination that would focus on issues that are important to the Bank and illustrate its mission. Instead of the previous emphasis on events taking place at headquarters, IDBtv would increase programming on economic and social development issues in its borrowing member countries, interviewing staff experts, executing agency personnel, and beneficiaries to speak about the results and achievements of Bank projects.

IDBtv productions focus on development trends in the region, while also promoting Bank programs and initiatives. Topics reflect priority areas of the Bank related to culture and socio-economic development, science and technology, and the environment. Whenever possible, programs focus on people and how they overcame problems thanks to IDB financial and/or technical assistance. They tell stories through the eyes of project beneficiaries.

Today, IDBtv produces several kinds of video programming that serve specific audiences. IDBtv programming packages include a combination of the following productions:

- Documentaries – 15 to 60 minute productions
- News Reports – 2 to 3 minute stories
- Video News Releases (VNRs)– Satellite broadcasts of IDB news and events
- Public Service Announcements – 30 second to 1 minute clips

The core product is a package consisting of four news reports on average, distributed every month to client TV stations. IDBtv's programming content is based on Bank projects

¹ <http://www.zonalatina.com/>

in key priority areas. Various Bank departments and upper management provide ideas for reports, and EXR selects the most compelling stories of interest for the TV media.

The audience is the general public, although an effort is made to place the packages on channels and programs that target their priority audiences, decision makers and opinion leaders.

IDBtv also produces and distributes unedited video material on breaking news and major IDB announcements that often include interviews with IDB specialists.

In addition to news and features, IDBtv creates content for public awareness campaigns that target specific audiences for the purpose of advocating policies or changing behavior. In the latter case, the team conducts focus groups of representatives of target audiences to test the effectiveness of messages.

Public awareness programming has supported campaigns on subjects including street children, domestic violence, human trafficking, and disaster prevention. Subjects of recent reports include the following: clean energy and energy efficiency; disaster prevention and mitigation; microfinance; conditional cash transfer programs; remittances; water and sanitation; and quality of life in the region.

IDBtv has been recognized by professional television journalists for its storytelling format² and journalistic approach to development issues. In 2007, IDBtv won CNN's World Report Award in the Best Business Category for its report "Brazil: Road of Death," which describes an initiative to reduce traffic accidents on a particularly dangerous highway in that country.

² Storytelling can be defined as the art of using words and actions to reveal the elements and images of a story while encouraging the listener's imagination.

3. Lessons Learned

As a development institution, the IDB must communicate effectively the impact of its interventions in the Region. By working with governments as well as with the private sector and the civil society, the Bank seeks to achieve sustainable economic growth, increase competitiveness, modernize public institutions, and foster free trade and regional integration. The effective flow of information among those partners and between them and project beneficiaries is often a major factor in an operation's ultimate success. IDBtv experience offers important lessons about effective communications strategies that can be applied to many areas throughout the Bank.

- j) Since IDBtv produces programming for two different objectives (one to inform, the other to effect behavioral change) the messages and audiences for each are very different and thus each message needs to be tailored. Similarly, Bank staff must carefully define the objective of each communications initiative.***

Steps required to tailor and refine the message on a continuous basis include the following:

- Define the audience. Is it Bank staff? Upper management? Member country governments? Executing agencies? Beneficiaries? The general public?
- Make the message relevant. Who are the people that comprise the target groups? What are their interests and points of view? If the message calls for behavioral change, is it taking into account the characteristics of the intended recipients? If the information relates to an IDB activity, is the target audience interested in the IDB as an

institution? Or is it more interested in what the institution does?

- It is not enough that the message is important, or even relevant. It must also be interesting. Whenever possible, it should take the form of a narrative with a beginning, middle, and an end (Storytelling).
- Test messages before they go “live”. Feedback begins even before a message is released to the target audience. Even informal vetting to colleagues and friends can reveal if the message has the clarity and forcefulness required.
- Monitor, assess, and evaluate the effectiveness of the communications strategy over its entire lifetime, and be prepared to make changes. The IDBtv team solicits feedback from its TV station partners on a continuous basis as a source of insights into countries and tastes and interests of their people. Direct contact with the recipients of information is fundamental to good communications.

ii) To achieve its goal of professional production, distribution, and monitoring of its programming IDBtv promotes partnerships with several Bank units as well as with commercial TV stations.

The IDBtv core team is presently made up of one staff member (executive producer and general coordinator) and three consultants responsible for marketing, filming and editing respectively. The expanded team includes a dozen freelance producers, editors, graphic designers, narrators, music composers, etc. The core group works closely with colleagues throughout the Bank, including sector and country department staff, upper



IDBtv team during video production

management, executive directors, Country Office representatives and staff, Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) and Inter-American Investment Corporation (IIC) staff.

The heart of IDBtv’s dissemination strategy is its partnerships with more than 125 television stations and networks in 20 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that reach more than 60 million households. Among them are RCN Colombia, Caracol, Televisa, Telefé, and Ecuavisa. In addition, through its special partnership with CNN International’s World View, IDBtv productions reach 450 million households in more than 200 countries around the globe. CNN en Español, broadcast to 17 million households in Latin America, Spain and the US, uses IDBtv programs in El Mundo Informa and Panorama Mundial, its prime time show.

The Bank’s Country Offices are particularly valuable IDBtv partners. Approximately 40 percent of programming content is developed in direct response to Country Office requests. In addition, a large part of the routine contacts with

local media is made by Country Office staff members, in line with their goal to increase communications outreach activities.

iii) *Using the latest technology enables IDBtv to produce professional quality and innovative programs on a fast-paced production schedule. The technology also enables IDBtv to maintain a high level of production with a very small staff.*

Television is a fast-moving, competitive field, and IDBtv team members must keep their technical capabilities on a par with commercial counterparts in areas such as high-resolution digital video format, live webcasts, and satellite video feeds. IDBtv utilizes latest hardware and software technology.

The IDBtv team has also innovated in the area of distribution by taking advantage of new ways in which people access news and information. For example, it broadcasts Bank stories via mobile phones using CNN Mobile and Caribvision facilities to achieve worldwide coverage. In addition, IDBtv programming is now available through new social media outlets: YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.

iv) *Television is a notoriously expensive undertaking. As a result, IDBtv has developed a variety of funding sources for its activities that greatly leverage contributions from EXR's administrative budget and generates free publicity for the Bank equivalent to more than US\$8 million dollars annually. These sources include budgets of other Bank departments, donor trust funds, and other organizations.*

At present, some 80 percent of IDBtv programming is funded by non-EXR Bank departments as well as by Country Offices. Additional resources are mobilized

through partnerships with non-government organizations, the Ricky Martin Foundation, and media networks including MTV Latin America and DIREC TV cable network.

As a cost-saving move, IDBtv outsources most of its production work in the region. Local crews in the countries produce the content, with headquarters staff doing editorial and post-production work at headquarters to ensure quality control. The savings are significant: a three-minute IDBtv report typically costs about \$8,000, compared to some \$40,000 if it were produced completely by an outside production firm.

4. Conclusions

The lessons learned from the process of information sharing adopted by IDBtv are relevant for everybody throughout the Institution. Some ideas to make meaningful and more professional communications include:

- When you have limited staff and budget, promoting partnerships both inside and outside the Bank is essential. In addition to making a more efficient use of resources and saving money, working with partners (both internally and externally) has the benefit of including more people in the communications outreach effort. As a result, IDBtv's circle of stakeholders expanded, thus creating more opportunities for disseminating information, forming opinion, and creating best practices.
- It is of the highest importance for IDBtv team to track the reach and penetration of its programming through information provided by partner networks and advertising agencies. Based on this data, the IDBtv team produces media monitoring reports on usage of programming at a general level. The television partners

also provide feedback on the IDBtv programming content. Additional feedback is provided by IDB Country Offices, which hire communication firms or consultants to get data on the channels, show, time, and frequency that IDBtv materials are used.

- To a great extent, an organization's effectiveness depends on its ability to communicate both among its own staff and with outside audiences. Creating meaningful dialogue on overarching development issues or building consensus on and ownership of projects and reform initiatives are key elements for the IDB. As an international development organization operating in many fields and countries, and across many cultures and languages, the IDB faces a particularly difficult challenge in this regard. The experience of IDBtv indicates that applying the basic principles of successful communications will help the Bank become more effective in its mission.

Acronyms used

CNN Cable News Network

EXR External Relations Office

IDB Inter-American Development Bank

IIC Inter-American Investment Corporation

MIF Multilateral Investment Fund

MTV Latin America Music Television
Latin America

RCN Colombia Radio Cadena Nacional Colombia
(Colombia National Radio Network)

References

"IDBtv". Twelfth Annual Outstanding Team Awards, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington DC, 2008.

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