

# Public Relations in Mexico

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## Part 1: Background information

**Official Name:** Estados Unidos Mexicanos (United Mexican States)

**Capital City:** Mexico City

**Major Cities:** Mexico City, Guadalajara, Netzahualcuyoti, Monterrey



**Official Language:** Spanish. Others include various Mayan, Nahuatl, and indigenous languages.

**Type of Government:** Federal republic — 31 states plus one federal district (Mexico City)

**Location:** Middle America. Mexico shares its northern border with the United States, is bounded to the west and south by the Pacific Ocean, to the east by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, and to the southeast by Guatemala and Belize.

**Currency:** Mexican Peso

**Culture:** According to analysis by Geert Hofstede, whose research defines the five dimensions of culture, the Mexican way of life can be described through the use of the following terms: High Power Distance — a high degree of inequality within the country concerning power and wealth; Low Individualism — a more collectivist society that tends to reinforce close ties between individuals, especially in the case of the extended family; High Masculinity — a high degree of gender differentiation in which males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure; and High Uncertainty Avoidance — a low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity that consequently creates a rule-oriented society strictly governed by law.

## Part 2: Overview of the public relations industry

It was not until NAFTA was established in 1994 that the Mexican economy became strong enough to fully support the practice of public relations. And it wasn't until the 2000 Mexican presidential election that the field became increasingly viewed by political candidates and business owners as a necessary component of their campaigns and organizations. Since then, communication consultancies have increased exponentially and, as a result of government decentralization, the area of lobbying has also expanded.

Generally, a sense of mistrust can be used to describe the Mexican public's perception of public relations practitioners. As a result of continuous political corruption in the past and highly publicized business scandals, their representatives are also often perceived as deceptive.

Due to the misconception widely perceived by journalists that public relations practitioners are manipulators of the truth, they are often, in their investigative reporting, seeking to uncover business and political scandals.

Aside from trying to shed the distrustful connotation surrounding their profession, public relations professionals also struggle to implement proactive strategies because of the Mexican economy's dependence on the United States' unpredictably fluctuating economy. And because of a distinctly unequal distribution of wealth in the country, practitioners are faced with the difficult task of informing a public with high illiteracy and poverty rates, limiting greatly the practitioner's use of technological communication and print media.

Political change has also sparked change in the way representatives of the Mexican government communicate. They have developed a common code of ethical behavior and have focused on methods of transparency rather than manipulation. The amount of media focus on business scandals resulting in public distrust of business representatives has also pushed public relations practitioners to adopt methods of transparency.

The relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists in Mexico is much the same as that in America. While Mexican PR specialists are advocates for the organizations they represent, Mexican journalists strive to achieve balance in their reporting, especially now that journalism in Mexico has begun to move, in large strides, away from being linked to political authorities and closer to a system of investigative reporting. Four of the underlying rules American practitioners follow are also found in the Mexican public relations practice, including: (1) Always be organized; (2) Never volunteer random information; (3) The condition "off the record" is non-existent; and (4) The phrase "No comment" is never a good defense strategy. As is the custom in American public relations, Mexican public relations specialists are expected by journalists to have all printed materials ready for publication and making sure to include correct information and sources that are verifiable.

\*\*\*It should be noted that the relationship between public relations practitioners and journalists in Cancun (as opposed to Mexico City) is much more strained. There are a large number of incidences of corrupt and highly unprofessional behavior in the Mexican Caribbean by public relations practitioners working in this area. Because journalism in this area is more focused on objectivity and investigation, public relations practitioners are largely viewed as obstacles standing in the way of the truth.

### Part 3: Overview of public relations as it relates to students

Mexico is the third largest exporter to the United States, making it one of its most important trade partners. For any aspiring public relations practitioner interested in the business/corporate sector, Mexico's booming array of international trade products including oil exports, tourism, and the products of its many assembly plants known to the natives as maquiladoras, provides professionals with opportunities that not only take their skills beyond America's southern border but also around the world.

The experience and insight gained through working in Mexico also gives practitioners an edge on the competition back in the United States. Equipped with the cultural understanding of this particular public, the practitioner will then be able to connect with over 25 million Mexican-American residents of the United States, a number that is expected to double by the year 2050.

As a result of Mexico's trade agreement with the United States and Canada known as NAFTA, the Mexican economy strengthened enough to foster the field of public relations, which continues to grow exponentially as reported by the Global Alliance. This field has even emerged in higher education as a concentration, with 16 Mexican universities offering a public relations degree in communication. Though this number is low in comparison to the 139 universities in the country, this area of study is expected to grow as the profession proves to be an essential part of organizations today.

A number of communication-related student associations and internship opportunities in various industries are available for public relations students wanting to get a head start on their career. The most popular programs can be found in Mexico City including those for airlines, banks, public relations agencies, pharmaceutical houses, TV stations, and nonprofit organizations. And internships are also offered in cities like Monterrey, Guadalajara, Cuernavaca, and Oaxaca in organizational areas included in the list above as well as others such as tourism and health care. Web sites that can be used to access updated international internships in Mexico are: [www.internabroad.com](http://www.internabroad.com), <http://intern.studyabroad.com/>, [www.umich.edu/~icenter/swt/work/](http://www.umich.edu/~icenter/swt/work/), <http://www.umabroad.umn.edu/programs/wiv/internAbroad.html> (From the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, this Web site not only contains listings of internship programs in Mexico but also advice about interning.).

Some helpful printed materials include:

- **Transitions Abroad: International Internships:** A bimonthly magazine available in fine bookstores and local libraries. [This section of their Web site](#) provides a good overview of internship options and resources.
- **Directory of International Internships:** This directory, published by Michigan State University, contains listings of internships located around the world. It is available at many university libraries.

The Mexican system of higher education is very similar to the American system. While the number of years required to earn a bachelor's degree, or Licenciatura, may vary according to the concentration (the equivalent of an American major), with some degrees taking as long as five to six years, a four-year course plan is typical. Semesters are also commonly used by universities as a time division, though some use trimesters, especially in smaller schools and community colleges. Master's and doctoral degrees are also offered by universities after students pursuing graduate school choose a specialized field of study, or una especialidad.

Here is a list of Mexican schools which offer a public relations curriculum:

1. Universidad Autónoma España de Durango
2. Centro de Estudios en Ciencias de la Comunicación
3. Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara
4. Universidad Veracruzana
5. Gestalt Centro de Estudios
6. Universidad Latinoamericana
7. Universidad Mesoamericana de San Agustín
8. Universidad Americana de Acapulco
9. Universidad La Concordia
10. Universidad del Valle de México
11. Centro Universitario Español
12. Universidad Hernán Cortés
13. Universidad España
14. Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero
15. Universidad Tajin

There are also over 3,000 degrees offered by Mexican universities in the area of communication, with other concentrations similar to public relations in that they incorporate some of its elements and applications. They are: social communication, organizational communication, communication and information, graphic design in communication, and advertising in communication.

However, problems have plagued public relations education over the years. By 1976, only 25 Mexican universities offered bachelor's degrees in the field of communication. Two of them were public relations concentrations and only three were considering journalism as a concentration. While schools of communication science began growing exponentially in subsequent years, journalism and public relations curriculums eventually disappeared by the 1980s. Some critics believe that the modelo polivante or "the polivante model" was responsible for this. They see this, at the time, highly regarded concept as excluding the practices of advertising and public relations from its lists of serious disciplines causing schools to rank them low in the academic hierarchy and ultimately to do away with them. Public relations practitioners were viewed by schools as more concerned with selling the image of the organization they represent rather than with their conscience.

Finally, the 1990s brought an increase in the number of schools offering an education in communication and related careers with the number reaching approximately 190 universities. And by 2001, Mexican college students ranked communication the number eight most popular career path.

Though presently the field of public relations is saturated, businesses still question public relations students' preparation and remain skeptical about their ability to work outside of the media and within these organizations. Because of negative advertising for public relations job openings in classified pages of newspapers, a majority of corporate employers have acquired an unflattering and misleading image of the public relations practice that is often portrayed as being limited to stop-at-nothing publicity tactics. Needless to say, the major obstacle public relations students in Mexico face today is that they must first prove what they are not before proving what they are.

With regard to educational trends, much emphasis is placed on the public relations student's understanding of the media and the relationship between the practitioner and the press. Not only do most schools expect their graduates to have a firm grasp of the fundamentals of all areas of the media, but they also expect them to recognize their position and interaction with respect to the media. Public relations in an international context is also focused on in most Mexican public relations curricula to a greater degree than it is in America.

#### **Resources Used:**

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