

Brazil and the Olympics Games 2016: The Show Must Go On...



By *Olga DeMetri*, Vice President, [LEVICK](#)

In approximately 60 days, Brazil will host the XXXI Olympiad. As the [2016 Games](#) near, Brazil is a nation in crisis facing one of the most significant economic, political, and health related instabilities in recent history. Indeed, the nation confronts a deep recession, one of its worst in 25 years, a crippling corruption scandal within PetroBras, and political turmoil with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. To add to this already potent mix, the nation faces an uphill battle against Zika, a national health crisis that has infected 1.5 million Brazilians and has spread beyond its borders throughout South and North America. With all these compelling factors at play, how can Brazil successfully host the Olympics? What can it do to ensure that there will be excitement and participation? Their risk exposure and crisis management posture serve as a valuable lesson to other nations, particularly those preparing to host large-scale, international events.

As the first Latin American country to welcome the Olympics, Brazil bears a significant responsibility to ensure that the games are executed effectively. After all, Rio 2016 will not only highlight the best in the world of sports but will showcase the country and by extension the region. Therefore, the success of these games has much broader implications. It is clear that Brazil's current communications strategy has not

succeeded in mitigating any of the negative fallout from the multiple issues the country is facing.

Therefore, as any crisis communications professional will instinctively note, the time has come for Brazil to implement a crisis communications initiative to counter negative perceptions before they expand even further. The central goal of the campaign should focus on alleviating fears held by athletes, sponsors, and tourists surrounding the viability of the games. In addition, it should address security and safety concerns in light of recent developments. From a communications perspective—and in light of the crises at hand—the Brazilian government and its Olympic Committee must strongly emphasize that the proceedings will go on and that internal economic, political and health dislocations are being handled. In fact, all future event hosts should note this lesson: a crisis must be tackled directly and rapidly to avoid the entrenchment of uninformed opinions. In this case, Brazil must redouble its efforts to demonstrate that it is ready to serve as a host and oversee the execution of a successful Olympiad. It cannot simply rely on pronouncements but, rather, must exhibit this commitment through observable actions.

As part of its crisis response, Brazil should immediately initiate regular updates for the global community on the Zika virus and promote the availability of its medical experts for press interviews. Through such transparency, Brazil can counter the growing fears and misconceptions over the virus. Additionally, it can work closely with the Olympic Committee as well as sponsors to disseminate its messaging widely. Key points that the Brazilian Government must emphasize include mosquito eradication efforts at the Olympic village and similar activities to stem the spread of the virus including studies on mosquito migration. Brazil should also utilize social media tools to instill greater confidence in the Games. By highlighting preparedness efforts online through imagery and tailored messaging, Brazil can convey the perception that

it is still stable despite the current crisis.

The Brazilian government and Brazilian Olympic Committee should also engage regional governments and non-governmental partners to build interest as well as enthusiasm in the upcoming games. By emphasizing the regional point of pride in hosting the Olympics, it can also establish the stakes for all. By joining forces with neighbors and other nations, Brazil can build excitement which will help spur regional tourism and encourage greater attendance. An added incentive for countries in the region includes tourism in-flows from sporting enthusiasts traveling to Rio for the games and staying on to explore the Americas. As part of Brazil's crisis response, it should also redouble its outreach to international sponsors. They can create incentive packages for those traveling to and/or participating in the games. Whether through airline, hotel and other tour bonuses, sponsors can encourage regional and international participation in the games. Above all, Brazil must continue to convey to international audiences that the country is stable, secure, and most of all, ready to host the first *successful* South American Olympics.

Let the games begin.

About the Author: Olga DeMetri is a Vice President at [LEVICK](#), a crisis communications firm. Ms. DeMetri has extensive experience counselling Caribbean and Latin American-based clients on crisis communications matters.