

The Challenge of Changing Negative Images of Russia

Deborah Anne Palmieri



Dr. Deborah A. Palmieri

It's something everyone understands. A lot of hand-wringing and complaining takes place behind closed door. But few have risen to the challenge of trying to change, in a comprehensive way, the negative image of Russia pervasive in U.S. media reporting. This is a key issue for business, because until this barrier is addressed and changed by injecting more fair and balanced reporting of the positive dimension of Russia, our commercial, investment and trade levels will remain artificially low relative to their potential.

A lengthy analysis is provided by researchers from our Applied Business Research Center on this topic, so I won't get into reasons, causes, fundamentals and solutions here. But I will share with you how the Chamber has undertaken a special campaign to bring about positive change and awareness by tackling this issue. Our comprehensive campaign as a non-governmental, non-profit organization has a six point program advocating the following action items.

1. Counter the Criticism, with a Fair and Balanced Program on the Benefits of Business in Russia. This communications outreach program is designed to provide regular press releases to major newspapers, business publications, television and radio outlets about positive developments in the business climate in Russia and will help provide **fair and balanced** coverage. Right now, there is little response to negative press.

2. Meet with the Lawmakers on the Hill Program. Remarkably, it is a rare occasion that people who support business with Russia are meeting with lawmakers in Capitol Hill. This includes senators, members of the House of Representatives, key senate and house committees and subcommittees-Foreign Relations, Finance, Homeland Security and many more. Meetings with these decision makers are absolutely necessary to get across the views of the business community.

3. Reach Out to America Business Speaking Tour Program. While there is the occasional business conference or briefing in large American cities, mainly clustered on the East or West coast, a broader sector of Americans needs more and better information on Russia. We need to get out the word to Main Street America, talk about business successes, tell them about opportunities in Russia and provide the business education greatly needed to counter stereotypes and open doors to understanding and economic cooperation.

4. Business Information Russia Program. We need to increase our ability to provide basic information about Russia to reply to inquiries pertaining to visas, business, trade, importing, exporting, travel in Russia, Russian company activities, culture and more.

5. Support for Applied Business Research Center. We founded the Applied Business Research Center (ABRC) in early 2004, because of the great need for practical, applied business research dealing exclusively with U.S.-Russian commercial issues and problems. The ABRC is the nation's only think-tank devoted exclusively to this issue area. Its goal is to produce vital research of interest to U.S.-Russian business activities, and to understand better the Russian business environment for foreign investors and the American business community. We have already produced over a dozen outstanding research papers on business with Russia.

6. Expansion of Our Website www.russianamericanchamber.org. Each month, we have thousands of visitors to our website, www.russianamericanchamber.org. We have upgraded our website and look forward to offering more interactive services in the future.

We invite all members and friends of Russia to join us getting out the message to boardrooms and the business community about the positive and rewarding side of doing business with Russia. Together, we can make a difference! □