

America's Image Abroad in Crisis: CEOs Issue National Challenge

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Launch Campaign to Strengthen Image by Unlocking Power of Travel

Business leaders joined public officials today at a Capitol Hill rally to call national attention to the growing crisis of America's declining image abroad. Recognizing the impact on economic and national security, these leaders called for a nationwide effort to strengthen America's public diplomacy efforts by leveraging the potential of travel and tourism to create "people-to-people" diplomacy. The newly launched Discover America Partnership issued a national challenge to attract 10 million more international travelers to the U.S. annually.

"America's declining image has an enormous impact on the country's economic and national security," said Stevan Porter, president of InterContinental Hotels Group and chairman of the Discover America Partnership. "Research shows a 42 percent increase in favorability of the U.S. among those who have visited the country. As a nation, we must do a better job of welcoming international visitors. With each new visitor we have an opportunity to share what is best about America - our people, our values, and our vitality."

The Discover America Partnership is supported by some of the country's foremost business leaders, including August Busch III (Chairman, Anheuser-Busch), J.W. Marriott (Chairman, Marriott International), Jay Rasulo (Chairman, Walt Disney Parks and Resorts), Jonathan Tisch (Chairman, Loews Hotels) and Andrew Taylor (Chairman, Enterprise Rent-A-Car).

"In the effort to win hearts and minds, we have a unique card to play," said Jay Rasulo, Chairman of Walt Disney Parks and Resorts. "That card is an invitation - an invitation to visit America, meet our people and experience our values."

The Partnership will run a non-stop advocacy campaign designed to educate policymakers on the power of travel and the American people, highlight the unnecessary obstacles to welcoming more visitors and, through exhaustive research, determine how the U.S. can better compete for international visitors.

Global Image Plunges:

A May, 2006 study by the Pew Global Attitudes Project captured the problem: the United States suffers from a rapidly declining image abroad. In most nations, favorable opinion of the U.S. is well below 50 percent.

The decline in America's image abroad has serious economic and national security implications. For example, the Pew study captured a direct relationship between favorable opinion of America and support of the nation's anti-terrorism efforts.

The decline in America's image is also a pressing business issue. America's share of the growing worldwide travel market dropped by 36 percent between 1992 and 2005, costing the nation \$43 billion in lost revenue in 2005 alone. The nation's international tourism balance of trade declined more than 70 percent over the past 10 years - from \$26.3 billion in 1996 to \$7.4 billion in 2005.

A Way Forward:

The 2006 Pew study revealed a noticeably higher global opinion of Americans (the people) versus America (the country). In Germany, for example, positive opinion of Americans was 29 percent higher than that of America. Similar results were recorded in France (28 percent), Japan (19 percent), India (11 percent) and elsewhere around the globe.

Experiencing America first-hand plays a positive role in shaping international opinion. A 2005 study conducted by GMI documented a 42 percent increase in the number of people who held a positive image of the U.S. if they had previously visited the country.

The travel industry is uniquely positioned to empower the American people as ambassadors and play a critical role in the public diplomacy process.

Call to Action:

To address the issue, some of America's foremost business leaders are launching a national effort, the Discover America Partnership, to harness the power of travel to strengthen America's image abroad. The leaders of the Partnership have issued a challenge - to America and to the travel industry - to attract 10 million more international travelers to the U.S. annually.

The Discover America Partnership will pursue an aggressive and ongoing public education campaign to draw national attention to the issue and to push for solutions. The Partnership is funding extensive international research to gain a better understanding of America's declining image, and what can be done to attract more travelers to the United States.

The Discover America Partnership will open our nation's eyes to the window of opportunity before us - to unleash the nation's greatest asset in the fight to strengthen the U.S. image.

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