

Global Connections

The New Hispanic Wave

A growing demographic seizes opportunities in Canada.

By Susan Baka

The Hispanic experience in Canada differs from the Hispanic experience in the United States in several ways. First, although people of Hispanic origin make up the U.S.' largest ethnic or racial minority, their numbers are far fewer in Canada. Latin American Canadians account for less than two percent of the population, but it is a growing and flourishing population.



Rodriguez

There have been five waves of Hispanic immigration to Canada. The largest and most recent, known as the "Professional Wave" or "Generation Ñ", differs from previous waves in that it is younger, better-educated, business-savvy, and more likely to speak both Spanish and English or French. Canada's Latin American population is also concentrated in a few regions of the country, namely British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec, with more than a quarter (28 percent) residing in the city of Toronto alone.

A 2012 study conducted by the **Toronto Hispanic Chamber of Commerce** (THCC) concluded the following:

• There are more than 500 Latin American-owned businesses operating in Toronto;

- One-third arrived in Toronto between 2007 and 2012;
- Many arrived with a master's degree;
- 44 percent are under 35 years of age;
- One-third arrived wanting to become entrepreneurs; and
- 70 percent are first-generation.

"We are increasing in numbers, but are also maturing as a society," says **Manuel Rodriguez**, president of the THCC and co-founder of **Unikron, Inc.**, a video production company. "The new wave of Hispanics comes prepared with [a] strong knowledge of the country before they arrive. They have done their research, have solid ideas, and are starting businesses."

He asserts that the Hispanic experience in Canada is different from that in the United States. "Changes in participation in politics, advertising, and marketing are happening faster in Canada," he says, "perhaps because the experience Hispanics in the U.S. have had is something from which we are learning."

Business associations on the rise

One trend that may be fueling recognition of the Hispanic community in Canada is the number of Hispanic business organizations that have become active in recent years. In addition to the THCC, there is the **Hispanic Business Alliance** (HBA), known for its annual 10 Most Influential Hispanic Canadians Awards program, which launched in 2007; The **Latin American MBA Alumni Network** (LAMBA), which seeks to connect Latin American MBA graduates with one another and with corporations in Canada; the **Canadian Colombian Professional Association**; **Hispanics in Mining**; and **Red-MELOG**, an organization that supports Latin women from the



Ospina

Global Connections

Ottawa-Gatineau area in their professional and entrepreneurial initiatives.

“There is also strong interest in all things Latin, be it in trade, research, sports, culture, fashion or cinema,” explains HBA Director **Mauricio Ospina**.

Visible government interest

Opportunities for Hispanic Canadians have grown with the Canadian government’s Global Markets Action Plan, a program that seeks to advance Canadian business interests in markets throughout the world, and has identified Latin America as a priority region. The Canadian government has also established Free Trade Agreements with Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, and Peru, and signed an agreement with Honduras in late 2013.

“Canadian companies in the Americas are highly visible in the resource extraction, financial, industrial, and agricultural sectors, and the knowledge and skills of Hispanic Canadians is essential to these companies and organizations seeking business and alliances abroad,” Ospina says. “With more than 600 million consumers, Spanish-speaking countries represent one of the fastest-growing markets, and Canadian companies realize the need to hire educated, bilingual people who can understand our culture when seeking alliances abroad.”

Alma Farias, a native of Monterrey, Mexico, agrees. Farias is the managing director of the **Latin America Region of Trade Partners**, a Toronto-based consultancy that assists Canadian organizations in developing businesses in Latin America by facilitating government and trade association relations and identifying key local business partners and projects. For the first five to seven years of the consultancy’s 15 in business, “we were not as busy,” Farias notes.

“But now, Canada is doing more business in Latin America than ever.”

Finding a niche

Her advice to Hispanic Canadians? “Be aware of your niche opportunities to take advantage of increased trade,” she says. “Immigrants trying to start a business should identify those Canadian companies doing business in the region with which they are most familiar.

Many Canadian firms are hiring Hispanic employees or contractors, and are often on the lookout for someone who knows the country and culture they are targeting.”

One such niche-finder is Spanish teacher **Margarita Caropresi**, a lawyer who immigrated to Canada from Mexico in 1989. Caropresi operates multiple ventures, including businesses that provide Spanish lessons to individuals and small groups, offer simultaneous translation and interpretation services, advise Latin



Caropresi

American and non-Latin American Canadians about each other’s cultures, and publish a magazine about and for migrant workers in Canada. Before transitioning to an online-only publication, *Atoctli*, Caropresi’s magazine, had a combined circulation of 40,000 in Mexico and Canada. “It focuses on teaching both sides about each other so

they can speak the same language.”

The increased interest in the Latin America region is increasing enrollment in Spanish-language schools and classes among Canadians, and boosting their business dealings in Latin American countries. “At least 75 percent of my Spanish-lesson clients are businesspeople,” says Caropresi, including executives from financial institutions like Scotiabank and numerous international trade professionals.

Opportunities in play

Toronto is set to host the **2015 PanAm/ParaPanAm Games**, which will bring 10,000 athletes, officials, and coaches to compete in 51 sports at more than 30 venues in and around the city. The Games will create an estimated 15,000 new jobs, and the Organizing Committee (TO2015) of the Games has committed to embracing supplier diversity in its procurement activities.

TO2015 assigns credits to diverse suppliers during its evaluation of request for proposal (RFP) submissions, awarding 10 percent of the total score for diversity. Although supplier certification through bodies that welcome Hispanic enterprises such as the **Canadian Aboriginal & Supplier Minority Council (CAMSC)** is not yet mandatory, it is encouraged, and suppliers gain extra credits in RFP scoring if they are certified.

“CAMSC is a great organization because it gives us opportunities to compete in corporate Canada,” says Rodriguez, whose year-long membership helped

Global Connections

him win a PanAm video production contract. “CAMSC has provided us with a lot of exposure as a minority-owned company—not just with PanAm, but also by helping us make direct connections to financial institutions and corporate Canada. It has helped position us really well, and CAMSC uses minority suppliers for its own services. We are doing video production for them, too.”

After the Games

“We have to remember that the PanAm Games will come to an end,” Rodriguez adds. “But opportunities gained will demonstrate that we can produce at the level any other Canadian company can. After 2015, Hispanic companies will have a greater influence, because we realize in Canada that diversity is important.

Just because we are different from the mainstream does not mean that our quality of product and way of producing is not as good. There is no difference.”

Rodriguez believes that the future is bright for Latin American-Canadian entrepreneurs. “Hispanics are very social media-savvy, and making connections is something we do well in our culture,” he explains. “That’s why organizations like the THCC feel an obligation to expose our members to opportunities like PanAm, which we constantly do. In our globalized world, as Thomas Friedman said, ‘The world is flat’—and now we can compete.”

“One thing that I adore about Canada is that it is very open and welcoming to any entrepreneur,” Caropresi adds. “Here I am, an im-

migrant and a woman who is a bit older, and I can be proud of how I have been able to reinvent myself, refine my business and help others. There are great opportunities and resources for entrepreneurs here.” ♦

Susan Baka, *president of Bay Communications & Marketing, Inc.* (www.baycomm.ca), *specializes in helping corporations, governments, and associations attain leadership positions in niche areas*



such as diversity and entrepreneurship by developing strategies and communication vehicles that resonate with their target audiences. Her firm was one of the first 10 certified as a woman business enterprise in Canada.