



Designing wonder: Marketing handicrafts to tourists in Bolivia

Connecting the handicraft and
tourism sectors in Bolivia

Focal group with Bolivian artisans during which they shared their experience in customer service and discussed ways to improve it. © Radia Meghnm

Uniterra is a Canadian volunteer cooperation and international development program that is jointly operated by WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and CECI (the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation). The program supports inclusive economic development to benefit women and youth in 14 countries across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Uniterra works with key private, public, and civil society partners to facilitate growth and change in markets that have the greatest impact on the marginalized.



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"We have received strong support from Uniterra volunteers in the elaboration of a specific plan for the handicraft sector. The program has helped us carry out a market study to assess what was needed in the sector and how it should be addressed."

Raúl Perez
Advisor, Agencia La Paz Maravillosa

In Bolivia, the internal market for local quality handicrafts — such as sweaters, garments and household products — is limited. Greater sales potential does nonetheless reside in the more than 1 million tourists who visit Bolivia every year¹. However, even though tourists are the biggest purchasers of handicrafts in the country, the lack of appropriate information leads many of them to buy products that are not made from traditional materials and sometimes not even made in Bolivia².

Developing capacities in marketing and customer service³

At the beginning of 2016, a strategic alliance was developed between the Uniterra Program and La Paz Maravillosa (LPM), the municipal tourist development agency. The mission of LPM is to enhance the experience of tourists who visit La Paz, in particular by improving access to and appreciation of handicrafts and other rich cultural assets of the Bolivian people. Over the past year, three Uniterra volunteers have been working with LPM to achieve this goal.

1. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL>
2. Fichas "The Uniterra program in Bolivia" y "Bolivia Country Sheet"
3. Market Facilitation Pilot Interventions Questionnaire + Interviews with-3 volunteers working with LPM, as well as with Raul Perez, LPM, and Ximena Rodriguez, Uniterra Program



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Key themes of the story
Handicraft, tourism

Marketing and customer service were identified as two areas that needed to be improved for artisans to reach more potential customers and improve sales. For this reason, Unitererra volunteers have been working with handicraft partners to train them in design, merchandising, social media, and customer service. In addition, the Unitererra Program has supported LPM in the creation and promotion of city tours and maps that promote handicraft shops, thereby increasing the chances of direct sales. Unitererra volunteers also help organize networking events for artisans to meet high-end hotel and restaurant owners, as well as support the organization of various fairs gathering tourism and handicraft actors, therefore reinforcing the importance of artisan work as a tourist attraction for Bolivia.

Results

Unitererra volunteers have trained more than 200 artisans in graphic design, resulting in the development of brochures promoting artisanal products to the tourist market. This should positively impact sales and help position the handicraft sector. In addition, between 50 and 100 handicraft stores have begun to benefit from customer service training that the Program is currently implementing with LPM. “Through the creation of a relationship based on hospitality, honesty and trust, we expect that customers’ experience will improve and sales will be positively impacted,” says Catheryn Bergeron, Graphic Image and Commercialization Advisor.

Scale-up, Replication, Sustainability and Innovation

The success of these initiatives in the handicraft sector has attracted the attention of other artisans that would now like to collaborate with both the Unitererra Program and LPM. The 100% Bolivian handicraft tourist route, for example, has already grown from 9 to 14 stores. Working with a local partner like LPM, who has the capacity, the mandate and resources to create synergies between tourism and handicrafts, ensures that the knowledge and experience that Unitererra brings to Bolivia will have sustained impact.

“Previously, there were 3 top handicraft stores in La Paz. With Unitererra, we worked on a 100% Bolivian handicraft tourist route through which we have trained 14 stores, and at least half of these stores have increased their sales. Now, more artisans want to work with us because they can see that this initiative makes a difference.”

Raúl Perez

Advisor, Agencia La Paz Maravillosa

What’s next?

The internet and social media could also help make information available to potential buyers and boost handicraft sales in Bolivia. Unitererra volunteers are now working with LPM to develop an institutional website and a mobile application. The website will host a database with information on handicraft stores, and through the mobile app, potential buyers will be able to find store directions, and also rate the quality and prices of products, as well as share comments and recommendations.

The impact of this enhanced web presence on handicraft sales could be huge. In addition to the number of youth involved in the creation of these online tools, 600 artisans (women and youth, members from 20 handicraft associations located in La Paz) stand to benefit from the increased demand through the creation of linkages between the handicraft and tourism sectors.



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Catheryn Bergeron

Graphic Image and Commercialization Advisor, Unitererra, Bolivia

A graduate of the *École Supérieure de Mode de Montréal* with several years of experience in sales and marketing, Catheryn has significantly contributed to improving the businesses of hundreds of artisans in the handicraft sector over the past year.