

Psychological marketing?

After a less-than-stellar year, the Puerto Rico Tourism Co. is playing mind games. No longer focusing on where potential tourists live but on how they think, the agency is betting \$20 million that housewives and their families desperate to get away will want to dance under the shining stars of the Caribbean and explore beyond the shore.

BY GABRIEL PARRA BLESSING
gabriel@casiano.com

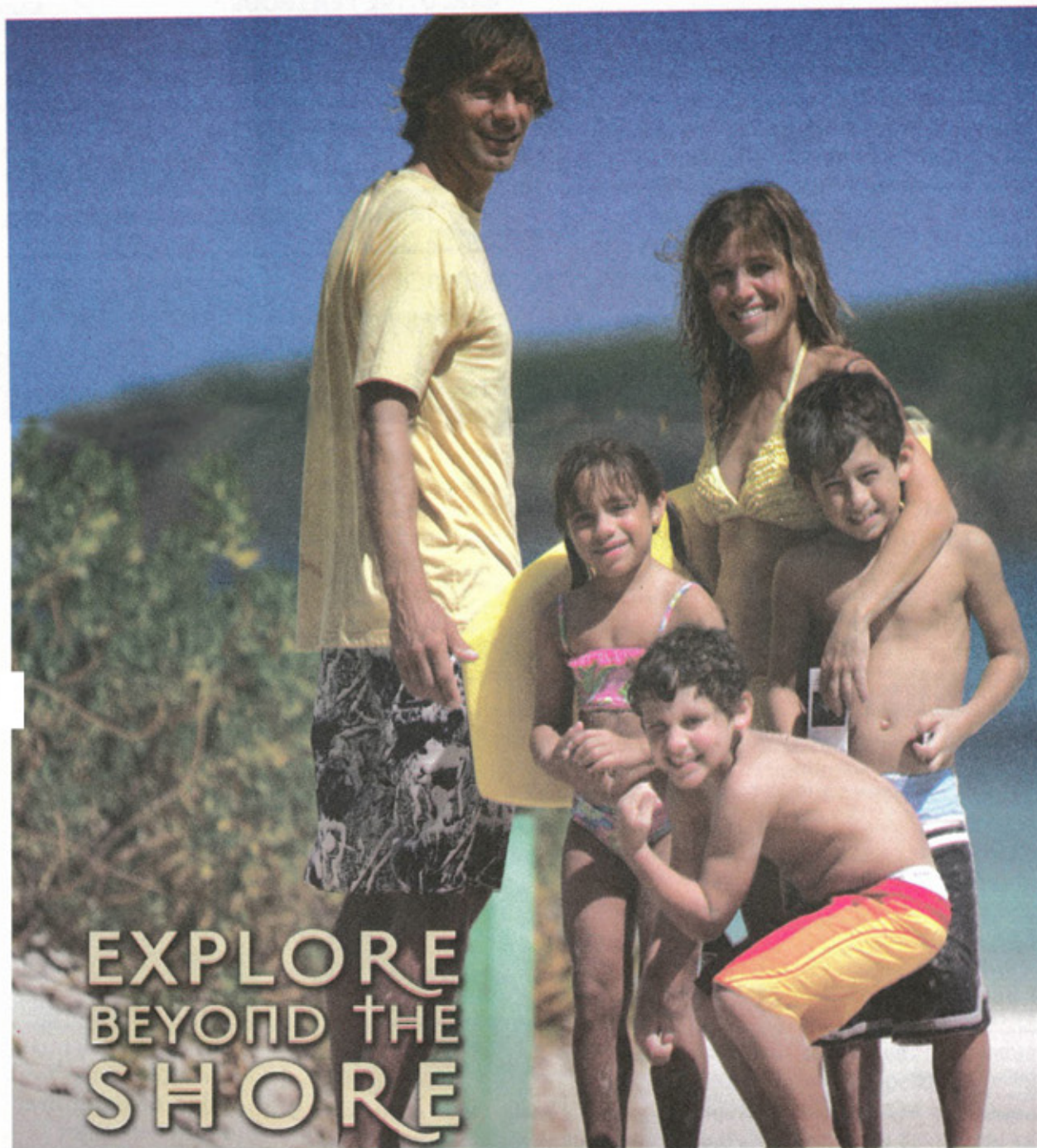
The Puerto Rico Tourism Co. (PRTC) is in the process of reinventing itself. Yet, despite a new booking engine for island hotels, attempts to adopt Mexico's Fonatur model for development to Puerto Rico and a new "psychographic" approach to marketing (see related stories), most of those interviewed in the tourism industry ranged between feelings of cautious optimism and downright pessimism, remaining highly skeptical that anything will change.

As CARIBBEAN BUSINESS has been reporting for months, discontent with the PRTC has reached a fever pitch among some in the industry. As one source who, like most, refused to be identified because of possible recriminations, said "the biggest enemy we have right now is the Tourism Co. And there is nothing we can do about it so it's best to just be quiet and let them go along."

Another pointed to misleading data offered by the PRTC, such as that showing *paradores*—on which a significant amount of marketing dollars has been spent—having a better Thanksgiving weekend this year than last, a notion belied by the *parador* owners themselves.

And so it is that after a lackluster year, and on the cusp of the much-anticipated high season, the PRTC is asking itself a \$20 million question: "Who wants to visit the island of enchantment?"

Mickey Espada, PRTC deputy executive director and acting chief marketing officer, thinks he has a pretty good idea, except he would phrase the question differently, engaging in the sort of rebranding that occurs every four years or so within the agency. Who wants to explore beyond the shore? He refers to his target audience as "advancers," who in another day and age may have been somewhat pejoratively known as yuppies (young urban upwardly-mobile professionals). Just as professionally ambitious as their 1980s predecessors but more likely now to be suburban—and more likely to drive an SUV than a BMW—these advancers are up to their ears in their careers, are committed parents, are voracious media consumers and long to trade the wintry winds of the Northeast for the perpetual summer breeze of the Caribbean, if only for a few days.



Every commercial the PRTC places in the mass media this year—every television, Internet, print and radio ad—depends on Espada being right about precisely who these advancers are, based on a psychographic profile of their lifestyle tendencies that dictate the media choices that they make. Instead of going after selected markets based on geography and demographics, the idea is to target media most likely to be viewed, watched, seen and listened to by advancers throughout the U.S. mainland.

"The restructuring of our media campaign is a reflection of the restructuring the Tourism

Co. itself is undergoing," Espada told CARIBBEAN BUSINESS. "The idea behind the restructuring has been to do more with less by being more efficient, and although we are spending fractionally less on our marketing efforts, we are reaching a much wider audience by channeling our campaigns through the media we know advancers tend to watch."

Thanks in large part to the proliferation of choices available in mass communication—from a handful of TV networks to literally hundreds of cable outlets and print media that cater

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to the most esoteric interests, to say nothing of the Internet—Espada contends we now live in a psychographic rather than geographic or demographic world.

"Understanding the psychographics of the best consumer will lead to the best media options," he explains. In other words, it theoretically allows a promoting agency such as the PRTC to pick and choose from a vast array of media, and ultimately to get more bang for its buck by choosing those media outlets that are most likely to reach its target audience. As Espada points out, the idea is to "complete the target," not compete for the target.



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