

**Plenary Session F**

**Selling the Promise: Credibility through Branding**

**The Issue:** In making their purchasing decisions, buyers are driven by their perceptions of products and services, the companies that produce them and the countries where these companies are located. Often it is the national image which has the greatest influence on the buying decision. This represents a major problem for many developing / transition economies as they are saddled with an unfavourable image, however unfair or inaccurate this may be.

Some form of strategic response is called for.

Image-building through national branding is being pursued by many countries. Few are finding it a successful venture. They are, on the other hand, finding it expensive, delivering few short-term benefits, and having little immediate impact on export performance.

Perhaps they are going about it the wrong way.

**The Proposition:** The service sector is potentially the most effective ambassador for a nation. Through its service sector, a country can demonstrate:

- the quality of its human capital and capability of its workforce;
- the reliability and sophistication of its business community;
- the quality and responsiveness of its public sector;
- its capability to respond and adapt to the requirements of the international market.

In short, a viable alternative to a conventional national branding campaign is to build the national image by "branding through services".

**Focus of the Debate:** It is suggested that the debate concentrate on the following:

1. Is the strategic challenge to have a positive national brand or to avoid having a negative national image?
2. What constitutes a positive national brand?
3. Are there any developing / transition countries that have a positive national brand and what are the key factors that accounted for this success?
4. How is the success of a brand measured? What are the indicators?
5. Does "branding through services" represent a viable alternative to current image-building efforts in developing / transition economies? If so, what should be the major components of such a branding effort?