

# Media Master

✦ Luis Baron uses mixed media to capture the Hispanic market.

When Luis Baron lived in Colombia, he produced nationally-aired "novelas" or Spanish-language soap operas. His most well-known were "Paraiso Tropical" and "Senora Bonita."

Now Baron is comfortably ensconced in Sarasota, where he founded *La Guia del Golfo* magazine in 2000, with little print media experience and the working capital of his first few ad contracts.

"When we started the company from scratch, we didn't know anybody. We had no credit history, we didn't know the system," says Baron. "It's the worst when you are nobody in this country and you have to pay cash."

Now Baron is CEO of TV Net Media Group, publisher of *La Guia* magazine (circulation 29,000), *SieteDias* weekly newspaper (circulation 23,000), and since February, *La Voz Hispana*, which he purchased this year. Founded to serve the Peruvian community in Sarasota and Bradenton, *La Voz Hispana* is targeted to new immigrants and small business advertisers. While a full page in the glossy *La Guia* costs \$1,000, a *La Voz Hispana* page costs \$400. In one month, Baron says his team tripled the advertising sales and boosted circulation from 5,000 to 8,000.

Baron's revenues in his first year were \$39,000 and \$1.3 million in 2007. *SieteDias* accounts for 38 percent of revenues, *La Guia* 54 percent and *La Voz Hispana* 8 percent. The company has 19 employees, including local writers, designers, salespeople and a Colombia-based editor.

Reaching a growing Hispanic market is a complicated task Baron seems to be mastering.

"The notion that what you do is put brown-faced people in your mainstream ad and

translate it into Spanish has got to go," says Kerry Stackpole, interim executive director of the National Association for Hispanic Publications. "Savvy advertisers are catching on to speaking to these populations differently."

While print media ad revenues plunged by nearly 10 percent nationwide in 2007, Spanish-language publications continued to thrive in comparison. Yet as the nation's burgeoning Hispanic population gains prosperity and technological savvy, publishers are reformulating strategies for an increasingly diverse market.

Baron is busy making the most of the 3 million monthly hits on his newspaper and magazine Web sites to reengineer his company for the digital age. His unified Web sites will include video, audio, and for the first time, web advertising.

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publisher of *La Guia* magazine (circulation 29,000), *SieteDias*

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More than 70 percent of the bilingual Hispanic population goes online, says a Pew Research Center study, but Hispanic publishers lag behind mainstream media in responding to the trend.

Baron is also targeting micro-communities to better serve advertisers and readers. Instead of rushing to take his award-winning lifestyle magazine, *La Guia*, to larger markets, he is augmenting his family of publications to deepen his company’s presence in Tampa Bay’s Hispanic community.

“We want to target what Hispanics you need to reach. We’re trying to fill the whole spectrum of Hispanic people with different economic levels, people more familiar with English than Spanish,” says Baron.



The 440,000 Hispanics who reside in Sarasota, Manatee, Hillsborough and Pinellas are 30 percent Mexican, 30 percent Puerto Rican and 19 percent Cuban with growing populations of Colombians, Dominicans, Peruvians and Venezuelans comprising the balance, according to the U.S. Census. They comprise about 14 percent of the population of the four counties, and are the fastest-growing minority population.

“We used to have people coming from Colombia because of political insecurity. Now we have more people with money coming from Venezuela and Ecuador. Some are coming from the Northeast and looking for a position in the area because they are bilingual,” Baron says.

According to Hispanic Business Inc., advertisers spent \$3.3 billion to market to U.S. Hispanics in 2005, less per capita than was spent on other audiences. The number of Hispanic-owned businesses is growing three times faster than the national average, according to the U.S. Census, and Hispanic buying power is expected to surpass \$1 trillion by 2010.

“Advertisers are struggling with what is the Latino identity and how can we reach them,” says Stackpole. “Hispanic newspapers have a deep focus in their

communities. They really help advertisers target their message.”

Baron’s own life story parallels the market’s advancing diversity and sophistication. He is one of a growing number of well-educated, affluent South Americans who have left unrest in their countries to settle in Tampa Bay, while retaining strong emotional ties to their people and cultures. Baron moved with his wife and three children from Colombia in 1999. An architect by trade who also owned a television production company there, Baron traveled to the United States to practice English but stayed for the security and educational opportunities it afforded his children.

“I met Luis when he was newly emigrated to this country,” says attorney C.J.Czaia of Czaia and Gallagher, one of the area’s first fully bilingual law firms. “He’s a very astute businessman. Sight unseen, I signed a year’s contract for an ad on the back of his magazine. If you want to get the pulse of the Latin community at every level, Luis and his organization is the place to go. He’s a visionary, a calculated risk-taker, a thinker. He does his research.”

Baron soon made the leap to multiple platforms, founding *SieteDias*, a weekly tabloid newspaper, the Web sites [www.revistalaguia.com](http://www.revistalaguia.com) and [www.7dias.us](http://www.7dias.us) and La Guia TV, a weekly Spanish cable television show in Sarasota featuring news and personalities.

Even as he launches *La Voz Hispana* and a redesigned Web site this summer, Baron is thinking ahead. He’s been working on a bilingual publication for a year and wants to cover more of the unreported issues among the Spanish-speaking communities to appeal to a wider readership.

“Many things have happened in this area. People I’ve met are in a better position. Now we want to grow and change as our community is growing. We have people thinking about 401(k)s and retirement. We have readers who are very interested in the economy and politics. They are more familiar with the American system,” he says.

Baron likens his company to the newspaper in his hometown of Bogotá, managed by three generations of an established family. Similarly, his TV Net Media is family-operated with a long-term outlook.

“In Colombia, we don’t have the idea to build a company to sell it. When you get married or buy a house, it’s for your life,” says Baron. “This is not a 100-meter race, it’s a marathon, and I am running the first laps. The most important part of our company is our philosophy to help the Hispanic community take the next step to grow and improve their lives.” ■