Curaçao Port Authority:  
Building towards the Future

Meet the Chamber  
Michael Marugg,  
Member of the Board

Shaping the Future of Our City Center:  
The Downtown Management Organization

Entrepreneur in the Spotlight  
Renato Ignacio

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BENCHMARK RESORTS & HOTELS
Dear readers,

The inner city of Willemstad has been on UNESCO’s World Heritage list for 20 years and has yet to be developed to its full potential, not only as a shopping and cultural center, but surely as a residential area.

In terms of the shopping area, the case for expanding the tax- and duty-free concept and maximizing the number of products available in this framework is in its final stages. The cultural role of the inner city too is being highlighted, and the residential function revived through several physical and fiscal incentives for those wanting to live the “city life.” While the inner city is thriving, numerous investments in both new buildings and the renovation of older monuments in the Pietermaai district are also adding to the city experience, and in Otrobanda, the new hospital is being built, creating room for growth, revitalization and repositioning. This edition aims to highlight the potential of these developments and what this means for Curaçao.

Besides expanding the development of the inner city of Willemstad, Curaçao is revisiting the future of the energy sector, and the maritime, logistics, and tourism sectors through renewed investment in the dry dock, the harbor and the positioning of Curaçao as a unique destination in the global tourism market. Results are being achieved through foreign investments into these pillars of our economy. The cover story of this edition therefore features the Curaçao Port Authority and the future of Curaçao’s harbors.

If you have any questions or need any information with respect to this edition or any other actual or foreseen developments in Curaçao’s economy, please do not hesitate to contact us. The Curaçao Chamber of Commerce is your partner!

Kind regards,
Willem “Billy” Jonckheer

Letter from the Editor

Dear readers,

The edition of the Curaçao Business Magazine includes articles on a wide variety of subjects, including some new series like ‘The Cultural Connection,’ which focuses on highlighting cultural entrepreneurial ventures in Curaçao; ‘Innovation Across the Generations,’ which showcases small- and medium-sized family enterprises that are essentially the motors of our economy; and ‘The Link To Your World’ on building Public Private Partnerships in upgrading Curaçao’s public sport facility, Sentro Deportivo Kòrsou.

This focus lies specifically on the development of our downtown area, Willemstad, featuring a cover story on the Curaçao Port Authority’s vision for both maritime industrial and real estate development in Curaçao (in all potential ports but particularly in Sint Anna Bay). In addition, the magazine also contains an interview with the Downtown Management Organization about their vision for the downtown area, and features a variety of companies and organizations based downtown throughout.

Over the course of compiling the magazine, one thing remained clear: the choices we make for the downtown area in the coming years will be crucial in determining the success of our economy, both in terms of growth and innovation. Regardless of the size of the company, each and every one of us feels very much connected to ‘Punda and Otrobanda,’ and we will all reap the benefits should this area attract the life it once did. The UNESCO World Heritage Site has so much potential, and together we can use this to effectively put Curaçao on the map, setting it aside from anywhere else on the planet – in terms of both tourism and investment.

Over the past seven months, the Government and private sector have both taken huge strides to ensure that growth is consistently injected into the economy – focusing on signing MOUs and agreements that determine our future. This collaboration between government and private sector is so important in shaping the future we want. We have limited resources and we should make evidence-based decisions to make the most of every guilder and dollar as we invest in our future.

As some may already know, this will be my second and last edition as editor of Curaçao Business Magazine. It has been a pleasure working with you all this past year. I look forward to continuing to explore new challenges, both in my current job as a policy officer at the Directorate of Foreign Relations, and continuing to build bridges between the public and private sector, at home and abroad.

Sincerely,
Neelam Melwani

Letter from the President

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Celebrating 25 Years of Success: ATLAS Risk Solutions
Michael Marugg, successful entrepreneur and member of the board of Curaçao’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

According to Raul Manotas, Curaçao Port Authority, “Curaçao has so many opportunities... Everything revolves around our waters.”

Kevin Jonckheer, Downtown Management Organization: “Curaçao has a beautiful city center from its broad streets to little alleys... it’s got so much to offer to locals and tourists alike.”

Renato Ignacio is a young entrepreneur whose company, Minubia, is based in Curaçao and is literally reaching for the clouds.

Barber, a three-in-one concept store located in Pietermaai, a renewed area of downtown Willemstad, opened its doors in June 2016.

TED stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design. Since 1984, it’s become a worldwide phenomenon, and made its way to Curaçao. Learn more about the ‘Ideas worth Spreading,’ from Nephtalie Demei.

Curaçao is home to its very own ‘health-olution.’ Learn more about different sectors of the wellness industry, and let this healthy wind of change blow you away!
Meet the Chamber:

Michael Marugg,
Member of the Board

Text Tahnee M. Bruin
The Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the voice of private enterprise in Curaçao. It represents the general interests of the Curaçao business community, registers businesses, and provides information and services to local and international companies with an interest in doing business in and with (other businesses in) Curaçao. In order to do this, the Chamber has various executive divisions and a board of directors. The board consists of nine members who are elected by the voting members of the business community, five of which represent the corporate sector (companies with an invested capital of at least 100,000 Antillean Guilders) and four who represent the small business sector (companies with an invested capital of less than 100,000 Antillean Guilders). Board members serve a term of three years and can be re-elected; furthermore they represent the different sectors of the business community. In this edition, Curaçao Business Magazine would like to introduce you to Mr. Michael Marugg, an entrepreneur and developer who is on the board of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

What is your background?
I was born and raised in Curaçao. After completing my studies at Triniteit College in Curaçao, I moved to Colombia where I obtained a degree in dental mechanics. In 1979, I returned to Curaçao after completing my studies and my first job was at a local dental clinic as a dental technician. I opened my first company, a dental clinic, in Aruba in 1982.

The change from dental technician to entrepreneur and developer is quite large. How did you end up in this business?
I started off as a dental technician. Even though I enjoyed my work very much, I wanted to do something different. My entrepreneurial spirit led me to the hospitality industry in the early 1990s, and then I was set on pursuing a business career in this business as well. Soon after, I found another passion of mine: real estate and development. In really enjoy real estate development – recently, I transformed a dump areas in Caracasbaai into a tourist area, complete with restaurants, apartments, a dive shop and a docking area. I’m really proud of my accomplishments in this industry.

You mentioned that you lived in Aruba, what made you move back to Curaçao?
I moved back to Curaçao for family reasons. At the end of the day, Curaçao is and always will be home.

What does a day in the life of Michael Marugg look like?
Let me start by saying no day is like the one before, and I don’t have a 9 to 5 work day. It varies a lot but I am very busy, and I sleep about 4 to 5 hours a night. I really enjoy what I do, so that keeps me going.

How did you become involved in the Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and Industry?
About three years ago, the Director of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry asked me if I was interested in joining the board. I was actually not familiar with the role of the Chamber and what it did, and was therefore hesitant to join. The director was very persuasive and assured me not to worry because within a few days I would catch up with the inner workings of the Chamber. I gave it some more thought and after learning more, I decided that it was indeed important to be an active voice in the business community. I decided to run and became a board member of the Curaçao Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In your opinion, what is the role of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry?
The Chamber has a very important role and most people on the island don’t understand what the Chamber means for our society and for their business. As a member of the board of the Chamber of Commerce, I represent the business community in Curaçao. There are so many diverging interests and priorities and that makes it a very difficult job, where you have to work with various stakeholders. I think locals could make better use of the Chamber if they better understood all that it had to offer them, as business owners and citizens.

What is your vision for Curaçao for the next five years?
Curaçao has a lot of potential, and it’s up to us to realize it. Although it may seem impossible, my dream is that we are able to work together. I hope that people open their eyes to see that we can offer so much more if we work together. Private sector, government and civil society need to understand each other’s interests and concerns, and we need to make sure we’re all moving in the same direction. Only together can we make Curaçao the most beautiful and happiest islands in our region.

What would you advise to locals who are living abroad and are considering returning to Curaçao?
Young professionals are promised a lot of things but most of them face challenges upon returning to the island because no one is helping them. The important thing is that they take the space to look for help, and maintain their positive energy and hope for the future. Curaçao can only move further if we work together, and that doesn’t mean across sectors, but also across generations.
The Winners of Guardian Group’s 9th Best in Business Awards

ABOUT THE AWARDS

In 2016, Guardian Group, a financial planning and insurance company based in Curaçao, hosted its 9th annual ‘Best in Business Awards,’ an award developed to promote Curaçao’s lively entrepreneurial culture, and support the efforts of the best local entrepreneurs.

This year, over 50 entrepreneurs applied to win the ‘Best in Business Award.’ The first place was 10.000 guilders cash, several hours of coaching and support, and other fun prizes. Second place prizes included tickets for a trip to Puerto Rico, as well as hours of coaching. Third place included one month of coaching and a breakfast at Santa Barbara, and other goodies.

Curacao Business Magazine had the opportunity to interview the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners six months later, giving them a chance to reflect on what was for all of them, an important accomplishment in their entrepreneurial careers. The winners of the awards offered very different services, with very different products to diversified client bases. One thing that they could all agree on was how great the opportunity was to participate in the Best in Business Awards, and how much they took away from the experience.

From the 50 applicants, five companies were chosen to continue the ‘race’ to 1st place. This included advertisements for their companies with Guardian Group, as well as a radio interview and other press moments. From these encounters, and specifically based on the radio interview, Guardian Group selected the Top 3 companies to give a pitch. On their annual ‘Pensionendag,’ they announced the winners.

In this article, CBM will give you a better idea of what makes these motivated entrepreneurs tick, how their companies function, and their biggest takeaways from the ‘Best in Business Awards.’

1ST PLACE: URBAN CHASE
Co-Founder and (Creative) Director, Ryan Navarro

“When we tell people we won the ‘Best in Business Award’ it makes us more credible. Because we’re already well-known on the island, people always think of us as rappers and film-makers – entertainers. By winning the ‘Best in Business Award’ for something completely different, we created a new name for ourselves, and a new credibility, that people remember.”

Urban Chase is a phone game app, where the user picks a character to explore the streets of Curaçao, picking up coins and prizes along the way. The idea behind the game was actually to create a platform where people could play, learn and win – connecting businesses in Curaçao to clients around the world in a unique way. Urban Chase is one of the many products offered by Ryan Navarro, also known as QD El Mago, and his business partners, Yasser Casseres and Xavier Navarro. They were famous on the island, as Area 51, a local urban music group before they developed their app. Their mission was to revolutionize the gaming industry, bringing people in Curacao closer to local businesses in a time where the economy really needed the extra stimulus. Play the game, and win great prizes – a win-win for users, companies, and Urban Chase.

Speaking with Navarro it was obvious that while him and his co-creators, who have equal shares in the company, knew that Urban Chase was an innovative idea, they got partners on board far earlier than they had expected.

According to Navarro, “We gave it our all — all our time, all our money, all our brains. We knew it would go somewhere. That’s the best way to build trust in your product – give it all you’ve got and don’t hold back. If you don’t believe in yourself, then you can’t expect anyone else to.”

Not only did they learn about themselves and their company during the experience, but they were able to spend time reflecting on their product and its growth. “We spent time working on our pitch – not really on the content side of it, that was second nature to us. We’ve given so many sales pitches, so it wasn’t about the pitch. We make movies, so we used our talents to create our presentation, an introductory movie, for our pitch. That worked out really well.”

This statement, was indeed justified because in their industry, projects can cost a lot of money. “We invested the 10.000 ANG prize money and additional funds to create a 3D version of Urban Chase Curacao. This 3D version will be cooler than the previous one. We can’t wait for it to be ready.”

While a variety of Navarro and his partners clients are Curacao-based, Navarro hopes that Urban Chase will reach the shores of the rest of the Dutch Caribbean and maybe the Netherlands. Urban Chase can be the future of advertising and branding, and Urban Chase is ahead of the game.
2ND PLACE: CAAG SOFTWARE  
Founder and CEO, Ries van Lomwel

“Looking back, our biggest takeaway from the awards and the process to get there was not just the brand awareness and the credibility it created, but the fact that we really had to reflect on our product and our market when making our pitch.”

Caag Software is about four years old. It started off as a software solution for financial institutions to provide a more effective way to manage customer information. Eventually, because of market demand, Caag expanded to an enterprise platform solution (EPS), developing a broader application that focuses on making businesses more efficient by using innovative technology. Caag has built a range of EPS modules such as but not limited to inventory management ( eCommerce ), document management and reservations management. The main objective of Caag’s solutions is to allow a company’s management team to measure the operational performance indicators so that they can steer their company accordingly.

The development of a broader application meant the assistance of a bigger team, so Caag looked for developers – not just in Curaçao but in the region, and the team just kept growing to best serve their clients. “What makes the company unique is not just the fact that our team is based around the world, it’s how we’ve managed to pick the right people, and the way we continue to work together.” Van Lomwel explained that Caag has an innovative equity vesting structure, to ensure that everyone’s interests are aligned – so, when the company is successful, everyone’s shares increase in value – and although money isn’t their sole incentive, it does help in ensuring that they are all on the same page.

When we asked van Lomwel about the “Best in Business Awards,” his face automatically lit up as he said, “I enjoyed every bit of it.” During the time of the awards, van Lomwel mentioned that Caag had several meetings with possible clients.

Nevertheless, van Lomwel did mention that Caag, as many start-ups do, pivoted its strategy a lot in the beginning, redefining its interests and services to best meet the market.

“Building a business and selling a product is all about storytelling. The ‘Best in Business Awards’ helped us reflect on our story, especially because we were competing with people from such different industries. It really did come down to the quality of the story we told. Participating helped us learn how to adapt our story for possible customers, and also gave us a new opportunity to reflect on what the key elements of our story needs to be.”

3RD PLACE: NOOSH  
Founder and CEO, Qiomy Neuman

“The idea of winning or losing doesn’t exist when you participate in the Best in Business Awards. If you win, you get 10,000 ANG, which you can then invest in your company. If you lose, you get some of the best people in Curaçao’s business world analyzing your company. Noosh had nothing to lose, and I came out a lot stronger than I went in.”

Noosh is about two years old. Its focus lies on changing the way that people look at foods, linking nutritious to delicious. They focus on creating, making and distributing fresh cold-pressed juices and superfoods in Curaçao. Their products are available in various locations, from supermarkets to gyms and wellness centers, across the island.

While the island is full of food choices and delicious cuisine, Qiomy Neuman noted that it was difficult to find options that were genuinely healthy, especially when she was on-the-go. That’s how Noosh was born. She teamed up with nutritionists, and built a company focused on providing healthy options, to meet the needs of a small but growing market. “Technology really helped us in developing our product. I initially worked with a nutritionist based out of LA. She would send me recipes, I would test them out and send back suggestions, until they were what we wanted.”

To her, the “Best in Business Awards” were a rewarding experience. Much like what other contestants had said, Neuman agrees that entrepreneurs need to be flexible and adapt their idea to the market. “I think my biggest takeaway from ‘Best in Business’ is that of rethinking. If I look back to when Noosh started, and compare that to where we are now, I wouldn’t have ever expected it.”

What she found remarkable is how open the jury was to discussing Noosh’s challenges with her and giving her advice plainly and openly. Noosh hopes to reach expand to other markets in the coming five years. “In five years, I want to be working in the region, I want to be bigger than Curaçao, and I will be. To be able to expand, I know I need to spend more time focusing my product and looking for ways to promote Noosh internationally, making it a staple in households in Curaçao and abroad.”
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Stay updated with the business pulse of Curaçao!
Press Release:
“Connecting the Dots” Business Conference

The Connecting the Dots Business Conference took place from 19 – 22 October. The Conference focused on: inspiring, innovating and accelerating. It was hosted by the Ministry of Economic Development, the Representation of the Netherlands in Willemstad, the University of Curaçao, the National Platform on Youth Development, the Curaçao Innovation & Technology Institute (CITI), Curaçao Export and Investment Promotion Agency (CINEX) and Startup Curaçao.

The conference included 15 keynote speakers and 20 workshops that participants could choose from. The Minister of Economic Development, Eugene Rhuggenaath, opened the conference. Thereafter, three entrepreneurs Nevita Mezas, Richard Martina and Chris Cirillo shared their accounts of failure in a segment named “Our Biggest Screw Ups”, focused on creating the space for entrepreneurs to tell their failures so other can learn from their mistakes.

The conference continued with lectures starting and workshops. Some of the topics dealt with these days were: unique selling points, innovative financial possibilities, challenger marketing, business networking, trend watching, e-commerce, FinTech, business canvas, technological entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, creative entrepreneurship, environmentally friendly ways of doing business, legal aspects of starting your business, taxes and cooperatives.

During this conference various international speakers presented, such as Oscar Kneppers of Rock Start, and Tristan Every of ATECH, as well as various local entrepreneurs such as Serena Israel of Chichi’s, and Remco Ernandes of CurAloe. Moreover, there was a panel focused on the creative industry that included Dolph van Stapele from Tula the Revolt, Gino Jacobs from Skempi, Pito Polo, and Ryan Navarro from Urban Chase.

On Thursday, 20 October, there was an Entrepreneur’s Square where entrepreneurs had the opportunity to meet various organizations such as MEO, CITI, ADECK, Korpodeko, sBAB, and SVB in order to gain information, advice and counselling to aid their own businesses. A networking event named the “Effectual Idea Lab” followed and gave participants a chance to stimulate their creative thinking by developing new products by collaborating with others.
Curaçao is blessed with incredible natural, deep harbors, and a port that is positioned in such a way that it offers security to vessels docked in its harbors. The trade and dry-dock industries have for many years comprised two of the five pillars of Curaçao’s multi-sectorial economy, the others being oil refining, tourism, and financial services, which too are all linked to the ports; some more directly than others.

In the coming 15 years, the Curaçao Port Authority, a limited liability company whose main shareholder is the Government of Curaçao, has big plans to develop the ports of Curaçao, and the territories along the ports, changing not only the business mix in Curaçao, but determining the island’s future through reorganizing the way Curaçao’s economy develops.

This edition’s cover story is based on an interview with the Chief Commercial Officer of Curaçao Ports Authority, Mr. Raul Manotas, whose job does not just entail attracting investment, but transforming how Curaçao’s ports operate while promoting sustainable economic development in Curaçao.

A Brief History of Curaçao’s Ports
Curaçao has always been a center for trade and ship repair. In 1634, following the Dutch takeover of Curaçao, the Dutch West India Company, opened its operations in Curaçao, making the island a center of trade, with a harbor open to commerce and private traders. Within a decade, the port in Willemstad developed into a small town, focused primarily on offering maritime services. The town was of course called Willemstad. Willemstad eventually became the center of the Dutch slave trade, and was known among the Spanish as a stopover in the illicit trade market. In 1827, Willemstad was declared a free port, eliminating taxes and excise, to attract more trade to its natural harbor.

The first cruise ship made its way to Curaçao is 1901. The potential of the harbor in Curaçao however was finally discovered when the oil was discovered in the Lake of Maracaibo in 1914, and the first floating dry dock, Koningin Wilhelmina, was built in 1926. The port also became a center for ship repair and oil refining. In 1960, a company was created to manage the activities in the port of Willemstad. This company was the predecessor of Curaçao Ports Authority (CPA), the LLC founded in 1981, primarily responsible for all Curaçao’s ports and the coastal territories along these ports.

For the first 18 years of its operation, CPA focused on security and efficiency – making sure that Curaçao’s port(s) were safe for ships of all sizes – ensuring quality, efficiency, safety.

“Curaçao has so many opportunities. Import and export mainly occur via the maritime industry – it’s really a growing sector. Everything revolves around our waters.”

TEXT NEELAM MELWANI

Curaçao Port Authority:

Building towards the Future
and security to the logistics, oil refining, and dry dock sectors. In 1999, with the rise of cruise tourism, the company broadened the scope of its focus in order to better cater to the island’s economic development by tapping into this emerging sector, building Curaçao’s first megapier.

From Tool Port to Landlord Port
One of the most significant alterations made to CPA over the years was the shift from the tool port model to the landlord port model. Manotas explained, “Previously, CPA would also invest in tools and companies would lease them from us to operate their business. In recent years, we’ve switched to a landlord port model, which allows us to make the land available to operators enabling them to operate and invest in projects that support the stipulated objectives of CPA with confidence.”

CPA is responsible for the management of the Port of Willemstad, Fuik Bay, Caracas Bay, Bullen Bay, and St. Michiel’s Bay. “CPA has a bird’s eye view of all the ports and the opportunities each represents, which allows us to strategically plan the development of the ports, and zones accordingly,” explained Manotas. The company has divided the ports and areas around them into different zones, and determines what kind of investments they are looking for – based on the sector and zoning: maritime industrial companies or real estate development companies.

Curaçao’s Ports in the 21st Century
Throughout its history, ports have been central to Curaçao’s development. While the island’s geography gives it a strategic advantage, Manotas explained, “We need to use the resources we have. The sea port in Willemstad has its limits that impede further development – amongst others, its depth and the fact that the bridge prohibits boats higher than 55 meters from entering parts of the harbor.”

CPA therefore sees the added value of complimentary port development in Curaçao, creating new opportunities for progress, for example at Bullen Bay. According to Manotas, “To move forward, we need to start development of Bullen Bay as a deep sea port and use it for maritime industrial development. There is so much potential there, and the development of Bullen Bay will really determine Curaçao’s future.”

Accrording to Manotas, the development of Bullen Bay would also let Curaçao take better advantage of international developments. The expansion of the locks of the Panama Canal, for example, could allow Curaçao to serve as a transshipment hub, if the ports could receive these new larger vessels. Manotas noted that this would very much be possible at Bullen Bay.

CPA has developed a zoning and cluster plan for Curaçao’s ports, determining which areas should be used for maritime industrial services, and which parts would best work for tourism, or retail. “We want to strike the ideal mix of local and international investors, stimulating small and medium enterprises, while also injecting consistent growth into our economy through sustainable port development.” Manotas added that, Bullen Bay, in their view should really be used for maritime industrial purposes, while Sint Anna Bay should be developed to add value to the downtown historical center.

CPA is ultimately also concerned about the environmental impact of port development – environment is therefore a fundamental part of the port development equation. CPA is ISO 14000 certified, and they are encouraging other companies in the port to ensure compliance with this certification as well. “The resources we have are natural,” Manotas said, “Making sure that investors or companies do not destroy our coastal waters and territories through their operations sits among the top of our core principles – the effects of which can be detrimental, especially for a country focused on tourism as well as industrial development.”

Port cities and countries around the world, too, are seeking the appropriate mix in terms of how best to use their ports. Manotas explained that a unique selling point of Curaçao is the network we could create between Bullen Bay as a seaport, the airport, and the free trade zone. To do this, it is imperative that Curaçao continues to expand on the premise of a network port model. “This requires increased connectivity, cooperation and synergy across sea, air and land clusters.”

The Potential of Cruise Tourism
In the recent years, the cruise tourism industry has grown significantly and Curaçao still has a lot of untapped potential. Right now, approximately 600,000 cruise tourists come to Curaçao each year. It is estimated that each cruise tourist spends about 75 USD in Curaçao, reaching a total of 45,000,000 USD per year. While this is already significantly contributing to the island’s economy, Raul Manotas noted, “Our goal is to allow Curaçao to cater to 1,000,000 cruise tourists per year, and increasing the daily average spending from 75 USD to 100 USD. It is for this reason that we will start developing Curaçao’s second mega-pier at the end of 2016.” The new mega-pier at Rif Seaport will be able to receive the largest cruises traversing the world’s oceans, the Oasis and Quantum class. Manotas added, “According to the cruise companies, these are the largest ships we’ll be seeing in at least the coming ten years. What we’re also seeing is that smaller higher priced cruises appeal more to tourists than before – they are more comfortable and intimate – providing a refined cruise experience.”

To attract more cruise tourism, Manotas explained that CPA, responsible in large parts for these negotiations, often partners with regional destinations. This is important because cruise companies do not provide guarantees,
so a port could be developed and prepared to receive cruise ships without guaranteeing that the island will be included in the routes determined by the cruise company. According to Manotas, “We are located in the deep southern Caribbean area, so we need to connect with other partners in the South to provide a feasible itinerary. We work together with Aruba on this very often. With the second mega-pier in the pipeline, Aruba was an important partner. They too are developing to cater to these larger ships.” Together, the two islands are among few ports in the region where the Oasis and Quantum class ships will be able to dock – this gives the islands a strategic edge over other parts of the region.

“We often negotiate with cruise lines and the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) by offering them a customized itinerary product.” Recently, together with Panama, Colombia, Dominican Republic, and Aruba, Curacao presented an itinerary to these stakeholders. Building itineraries with partners is appealing to the cruise ships because it gives them five reasons to travel south, below the hurricane belt, rather than just one.

In addition, Manotas did mention some of the measures taken to ensure the flourishing of the cruise tourism industry in Curacao. “To remain competitive, we provide cruise lines incentives. Recently, we incorporated a new kind of reduction, the volume discount. Essentially, this means that based on the number of passengers a cruise ship brings to Curacao, they will receive a percentage discount on the applied user fee. We also apply discounts during low season, to make sure there is consistency in the cruise market.”

**The Industrial Edge**

The port of Willemstad is steadily becoming a more important asset to the island. Recently, Damen Shiprepair and Conversion signed a concession with the Curacao Dock Company (CDM), and will start operating from Curacao, using the existing areas and increasing its operations in Curacao. SubCom, an undersea cable company, recently expanded its presence in the port and moved all its operations in the Caribbean to Curacao.

With a new concession with Damen, it is imperative that Curacao continues to develop its maritime industry, in a large part through private-public partnerships. “The deal we signed with Damen is a great start.” Essentially, as Manotas explains, this deal will allow Curacao to become a center for ship repair and possibly even sustainable dismantling of vessels, something that is still largely scarce in the region.

In addition to this, CPA and a Spanish cement company recently signed a letter of intent to bring the production of cement to Curacao and utilize Curacao’s position to better connect the company with the Latin American and Caribbean market. The cement company will be run in a sustainable way with limited environmental impact. The fact that they will be moving to Curacao sets a clear pattern for future investment.

“The idea is to continue to attract stakeholders that add strategic value to the ports of Curacao, especially for the industrial cluster of the economy.” Nonetheless, Manotas did indicate that this is a tricky business, most of these projects are expensive, and require large investments that CPA looks for internationally. Maritime industrial projects are not the only ones in the pipeline; real estate projects in the port also make Curacao more attractive for international investors.

**Reshaping Willemstad**

Similar to the Curacao Tourism Board and other partners in the tourism sector, CPA has a master plan that includes its properties in the downtown area. CPA collaborates with partners like Curacao Airport Holdings, Curacao Industrial & International Trade Development Company, the Ministry of Economic Development and Ministry of Traffic, Transport and Regional Planning. Collaboration between the organizations ensures alignment.

Essentially, the fundamental idea of CPA’s master plan and the Tourism Master Plan is the
same: make downtown Willemstad a great place to live, vacation and work. This means investing in real estate development and prime waterfront properties. According to Manotas, “Sint Anna Bay needs to become a spot for renovation and innovation – a mix of retail and residence that keeps people coming back downtown.”

A large part of Curaçao’s downtown is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, adding to Curaçao’s unique mix. “While our objective is to increase the number of cruise tourists, we acknowledge the opportunities the downtown properties present in regards to the stay-over tourism industry. The city center has to cater to tourists’ needs.” In CPA’s plan, the downtown area will have the perfect mix of hotels, apartments, restaurants and stores, to keep people coming back for more.

For CPA, this means promoting the availability of duty-free products, high-end products, and artistic and cultural products. In addition, it means continued development in the ‘experience’ of Willemstad, including the food and beverage and recreational industries downtown. According to Manotas, the only way to accomplish this is to ensure that people want to live downtown again. CPA is currently negotiating the conditions of the development of the ‘Kop van Scharloo’ being part of the Sint Anna Bay with potential international investors.

Curaçao’s Future

“At the end of the day, CPA’s vision is to contribute to the sustainable economic development of Curaçao, that means a lot more than identifying international partners – it means supporting the SME sector as well, giving them adequate space to grow and develop.” For example, the creation of the second mega-pier, and the renovation of the first, will be a unique opportunity to ensure that the SME retail sector is able to equally and fairly participate in the local market in this industry.

CPA is always looking for bright young minds to contribute to their work. “My one advice for future generations is to study. Educate yourself and learn about what’s out there. That’s one of the biggest success factors in life – that paper that says you obtained your degree, but more importantly it helps you add value to the development of your country.” CPA is regularly present at career fairs, both locally and internationally, providing students with information about the work of CPA and opportunities to work at companies based in Curaçao’s ports. “We look for companies that will create jobs in the local job market, and who will invest in our people.” A large part of the concession deal with Damen, for example, was their investment in a training academy for locals who would want to work at the dock.

CPA’s plan for Curaçao’s port development is long-term, and the impact that this could potentially have on Curaçao’s economy is significant. Moving forward, as Manotas mentioned, “Collaboration with local and international partners is key.” Stakeholders in Curaçao will need to work together to make sure that this is all possible. Curaçao has always benefited from its diverse economic portfolio; this is what makes the island unique in comparison to other Caribbean islands. CPA envisions a Curaçao that continues to get the most out of this diversified economic portfolio – striking the perfect balance between tourism, industrial maritime services, trade and environmental protection. “CPA’s activities serve as a catalyst for Curaçao’s economic development, but the development of Curaçao is something that we need to work on together. We can’t guarantee the success of our diversified economy if we do not collaborate to make it possible.”

The inherent nature of an island is its dependence on marine based activity. For Curaçao, a country with limited local production, focusing on sustainably developing waterways and ports offers a wide-reaching spin-off effect for the overall economic development of the island. It is imperative that Curaçao continues to expand its possibilities based on utilizing one of its greatest resources: the waters that surround it.
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Exit Planning is not just about selling your business; it entails consciously working on a plan to continuously increase a company’s value, in building up to the ideal exit moment. Research indicates that business owners, who do not have an exit planning strategy, received considerably less for their business, or were unable to eventually sell their business. Consultants point out that too many business owners have unrealistic expectations regarding the selling price of their business, which then complicates the sales process. In an exit where there is no sale but rather a business transfer to the next generation, it seems that only 30% of the businesses continued to achieve long-term success.

Many business owners in Curacao have managed their own company to maintain a certain lifestyle: the owner makes all major decisions and excess funds are often withdrawn from the company to acquire luxuries and support high standards of living. Moreover, poor financial reporting to avoid paying high taxes also affects exit potential of a business.

In the seminar, Blijleven explained that an effective exit plan starts with expert guidance, a service that is offered by a certified Exit Planner. This professional assists in coordinating a business owner’s exit and selling strategy, through optimizing the company’s structure, improving financial reporting, and by implementing other improvements to maximize the business owner’s profit when selling a company that he/she has worked hard to build. A good exit planning consultant oversees the whole operation – from initiation to the eventual sale of the company, and ensures continuity and coherence in the process.

During the session, Blijleven also focused on the importance of involving other relevant individuals in the exit process – not just family and advisors – key personnel for example, to assist in a smooth transfer of power.

The seminar ended with an opportunity for the guests in attendance to network over a few drinks and exchange their views on this subject.
Entrepreneur in the Spotlight: Renato Ignacio

Minubia: Everybody Always Mobile, Always Connected

This edition’s Entrepreneur in the Spotlight is Mr. Renato Ignacio, founder and CEO of Minubia, a company based in Curaçao that opened its office in Bogotá, Colombia in early 2016. Minubia also has clients living in other parts of the Dutch Caribbean – Aruba, Sint Maarten and Bonaire, to name a few.

A smartphone. In short, according to Mr. Renato Ignacio, that was the start of Minubia, a company that now offers a variety of enterprise mobile solutions to businesses in Latin America and the Caribbean. Enterprise mobility is an up-and-coming trend that enables and promotes employees to work outside of the typical office environment, while constantly being able to connect to their work. The essence of enterprise mobility is essentially far greater than just the mobile technology, and actually allows for the relationship between an employer and employee to change – creating more flexibility in working environments, where results, rather than the number of hours per day a person works, determines their success.

About Minubia

Minubia is an innovative company, that, in the line of enterprise mobile solutions, offers ‘Minubia Cloud ERP,’ ‘MiOrder,’ and ‘MiFlow.’ Each of these different products is linked to Minubia cloud, the ‘brain’ behind all Minubia’s solutions. The database contains everything ranging from customers, products, tasks, GPS tracking, orders and messaging, and employee information. The cloud gives you insight into the workings of your company, providing each user with the information they need to do their job effectively.

‘Minubia Cloud ERP’ is a cloud-based ‘Enterprise Resource Planning’ allowing companies to effectively connect to the workforce, making information readily available on a ‘cloud’ in real-time. This allows for employees to work from anywhere at any time. Essentially, investing in something like this could make complicated work processes obsolete.

‘MiOrder’ is a sales tool that efficiently manages sales speed and order processing. Lastly, ‘MiFlow’ is a workflow management tool that allows companies to keep track of progress through using the cloud services.

What’s a ‘Cloud’?

A ‘Cloud’ is an online workspace that is always available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from anywhere around the globe... where you have access to a secure Internet connection. A cloud provides you with a system to centrally manage...
your work – without accumulating a pile of papers on the side of your desk. It updates automatically, and all users can access it at the same time, without delay… updating the contents in real time. It’s easy to use, and above all, Minubia aims to provide its clients with far more than just the technology, Minubia gives the one-on-one attention a company needs to actually use all the resources linked to the cloud.

Dedication Pays Off
According to Ignacio, who studied software development and business informatics, “We have so much potential at our fingertips, and in 2013, we were doing so little with this technology – just taking pictures and messaging. Mobile devices are supposed to make our lives easier; we wanted to maximize the use of smartphones.”

Ignacio highlighted the importance of timing and dedication for starting a business. This is Ignacio’s third company, and he says, “This was just the right time.” In 2013, there was enough technology available to make Minubia useful, and enough people had a smartphone, making the product increasingly attractive to potential clients.

After developing their basic product, he picked up the phone and used it for its most basic use – calling a long list of potential clients one by one. Quickly, he realized that it was far easy to reject an innovative idea on the phone, than it would be in real life. So, he took to the streets, driving to companies and organizations on the island, and having meetings and giving presentations with. A year and a half later, Ignacio saw the fruits of his labor.

“My father is my biggest inspiration – he too has his own business. No matter what kind of day he had the day before, he’d wake up and go to work and be better than the day before – not just to provide for his family, but also to offer the best of the best in every way he could.” This core principle is what keeps Ignacio going everyday. He believes in his products and he knows if he does, then other people will as well.

Growing Minubia
The great majority of Minubia’s customers are from the wholesale, distribution and financial sector. Minubia’s focus lies in personalizing solutions for customers, something that can be time consuming and complex. “We always try to design our solutions in a way we can easily adapt it to meet our customers needs. We focus on the simplicity of our solutions. Most of our end users have not used business software before, so we try to make things as easy as possible.” Minubia’s focus lies on developing one-on-one relationships with their customers.
same way, I always knew I couldn’t do it on my own. It’s about all the people I surround myself with – I find the ‘right kind of people.’ No one who works for Minubia works there by accident.”

According to Ignacio, Minubia is only successful because of its dynamic and professional team. A good idea is nothing, if the people who you work with don’t believe in it as well. In terms of employment (and everything really), Minubia plans five years ahead. This allows them to know what kind of people they are looking for and at what time, and they can add people to their shortlist over time, even if the position hasn’t opened up yet. When it does, they know exactly who they can reach out to. They regularly interview potential candidates just to know what makes them tick. Skills are something that can be taught, but a person’s ‘why,’ that’s what makes them unique, and that’s how you know if they fit into your company or not.

Measuring Our Own Success Keeps Us Sharp!
Ignacio mentioned that they spend a lot of time reflecting on their product, services, and processes. They document their successes, as well as their mistakes to make sure they never make them again. “If we do something wrong more than once, that means we didn’t learn from it… and the learning part, that’s most important to us. That’s why we measure everything.” Because we measure everything, we can predict how long it will take to finish a product or to land a customer. Minubia quantifies everything. Most of the time, Ignacio says, it’s much better to take a risk and make a mistake, learn from it and move on rather than asking ‘What if?’ No matter the outcome, it will always be lucrative, especially if there is little chance of success. “We experiment frequently, not just to improve our products, but to keep us sharp.”

Keep on Innovating
Ignacio’s role models say so much about his company and its model. When we asked him who is role models in the industry were, he mentioned Elon Musk, CEO and CTO of SpaceX and co-founder and CEO of Tesla Motors (amongst others). The reason for this is his dedication to make his dream reality – starting somewhere one day, and knowing where you want to be one week, one month, one year, or ten years down the road and making it happen.

Similar to Musk’s ideas, Ignacio says the most important part of his business model is to keep innovating – making his own product obsolete by creating something newer and better before the market does. “We try to capitalize on our own products and predict what the next invention is going to be that could make our product obsolete. Then, we build the new product and making it obsolete before anyone else has the chance to do so.” Minubia’s first product is already three years old, and of course, they are constantly upgrading it to best meet the needs of their customers, but more importantly to hold on to their market share by always raising the bar, and making something better than what they made before.

Curaçao is the Best of Both Worlds
Aside from being from Curaçao, Ignacio emphasized that Curaçao is a good place to build a business. While it takes a lot of effort, the market is small which makes it easier to connect with customers. It does take time and patience, especially when it means creating demand for something people might not even know they need yet.

Ignacio focused on the importance of looking at the market in Curaçao – finding ways to make a product that appeals to the whole market, and the chance is if you can do that in Curaçao, then your product will survive abroad. According to Ignacio, “Curaçao is the crossroad between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. Its strategic location and influences from so many different countries makes it a unique market – one where so many different cultures come together.” This is the perfect incubator for a start-up or a new idea – because you have the space to change, experiment, learn and grow, as long as you plan ahead.

The Future is Bright
Like his role model, Elon Musk, Ignacio is driven and motivated. We asked him how he started his day, and his answer was simple: “Every morning, I challenge myself. I have a list of goals – weekly goals, monthly goals, yearly goals. Everyday I ask myself, which goal am I going to achieve today? It’s about having a vision and a dream – starting somewhere, and making sure you finish exactly where you want to be a couple years later.”

Minubia hopes to continue to improve the quality of life by making tasks more efficient, and giving their clients more time to enjoy the things in the world outside of the office – the things that matter. It’s not just about the product, it’s about the effect that the product has on the lives of those who use it – that is what drives Renato Ignacio and what is at the essence of Minubia’s success.

As Minubia continues to reach new markets, plans have been drawn up for what kind of company they want to be ten years down the road… down to their next hire in order to get there. This long-term thinking and endless dedication is what will continue to be a deciding factor as Minubia signs their next deal, enters a new market, or makes one individual’s life a whole lot easier with a product that they might not even have developed yet!
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Curaçao Business Magazine had an opportunity to interview Mr. Kevin Jonckheer, and speak to some other members of the board of the Downtown Management Organization (DMO), a group of business owners who are responsible for the upkeep and development of ‘Punda.’ According to Mr. Jonckheer, its president, “We need to equip ‘Punda’ to become the ‘cute, cozy downtown’ that we all want it to be. It’s up to all of us, and not just DMO, to inject life back into our historical capital, so we can enjoy the ‘Punda’ we all once knew.”

Challenges
Many locals say that going to ‘Punda’ is not what it once used to be. Empty store fronts indicate how retail businesses and local commerce has shifted from the downtown areas to the numerous malls and strip malls that are more accessible and ‘central.’ The lack of parking makes coming to Punda relatively difficult and inaccessible for some, and the lack of adequate public transportation makes it increasingly inconvenient to come downtown.

Additionally, as the kinds of tourists that visit Curaçao continue to change, calculating sales based on the tourism market is increasingly unreliable. Mr. Jonckheer’s biggest fear however lied not in the lack of accessibility to Punda, but rather in the number of opportunities that Curaçao hadn’t taken advantage of – something that’s central to his vision for Punda’s future development. “We have to move forward,” Mr. Jonckheer stated, “and the private sector and government must trust each other to do their part.”

Opportunities
“We are excited for the future of our downtown historic city. It is great to see so many positive initiatives taking place in our downtown area. Imagine what we can do if we implement all of these plans. The downtown area is mentioned in the Tourism Master Plan, the tourism industry is focusing on this, so it is just a matter of time.” – Miles Mercera, Curaçao Hospitality and Tourism Association

Rather than focusing on the numerous challenges the downtown area faces, Mr. Jonckheer was certain that with the right recipe, Curaçao would be able to pump new life into its historical city center before it is too late. The development of Punda is highlighted as a key point in Curaçao’s Tourism Master Plan, 2015 – 2020 (http://www.curacao.com/media/uploads/2015/10/07/CUR_TMP_Oct-05-15_Final.pdf). ‘Punda’ is what sets Curaçao apart from other islands in the Caribbean and around the world, and all stakeholders and political
parties agree that this is the island’s distinctive charm. The plan calls for “transform[ing] the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Punda/Otrobanda, into a vibrant rendezvous area for tourists.”

According to Mr. Jonckheer and the rest of DMO, the future of ‘Punda’ lies in ownership – something that’s also very much highlighted in the Tourism Master Plan. ‘Punda’ is a raw display of Curacao’s history and evolving culture, with influences from the region, Europe, Asia and elsewhere. Most importantly however, it’s the people of Curacao, from the business owners to the public servants, that will ultimately create the full ‘Punda’ experience – one that will leave both locals and tourists coming back for more.

**Finding a Balance Between Culture, Cuisine, and Shopping**

According to Miles Mercera of the Curaçao Hospitality and Tourism Association, “The downtown area has so much potential. Currently we see a rise of small pubs and restaurants opening up, which is exactly the kind of passion we need in our city. We should continue to foster these types of developments and most importantly continue to dream big; moving forward with passion and vision! It’s all about partnership, that’s us!”

When speaking to politicians and business owners alike, the development of ‘Punda’ lies in making it an area where culture, cuisine and shopping need to meet. It’s important that ‘Punda’ offers opportunities and activities for everyone – the foodies, the adventurers, the shoppers and the explorers. The vision is a ‘Punda’ where everything is possible and anything is available. “Focusing on attracting people – both tourists and locals – back to Punda is central; making this a place where people come together, walk around, shop and most importantly enjoy the experience.”

The Tourism Master Plan creates the common vision for accomplishing this – and it is clear that a lot of opportunities are available for investors.

With a new plan to revamp the city center, the possibilities are endless – new museums, little cafes, and new boutiques are popping up left right and center in the Pietermaai district, and area located very close to the World Heritage protect site.

According to the Tourism Master Plan, “Data suggests that this Punda/Otrobanda area has a unique opportunity for combining cruise tourism and stay-over tourism in terms of opening hours, shopping mix, and food and beverage, as well as entertainment in general.” It’s all about us being able to tap into these opportunities to create the right mix.

**Leaving a Legacy**

For many building owners, while they are looking to rent, selling is not an option. Many of these buildings have been in their family for years, and is just part of their family. The most unique part of ‘Punda’ is the connection that locals feel in relation to the area. Mr. Jonckheer’s biggest fear was the building being sold off to a big-time developer and not remaining in his family. The only reason he could provide for this was his love for the island and his attachment to this place he’s called home for his whole life.

For many, ‘Punda’ remains close to their heart. They remember growing up strolling through the streets, spending time looking in storefronts, walking alongside the floating market eating a juicy watermelon, or simply hanging around after school. Most other islands have downtown shopping districts specifically built for tourists, which is something Curacao does not have – the idea is that ‘Punda’ should belong to everyone and be for everyone, and as such, everyone should take its development into their own hands. It’s because of these long traditions that Punda’s magic remains intact, even in these pressing times.

**The Possibilities are Endless...**

“The Tourism Master Plan provides a new common vision for Curacao, one which everyone can support. That, in itself, is something that we can celebrate... now it’s about execution. We need to move quickly to make something out of our downtown area,” Mr. Jonckheer fervently added. As our tourism industry continues to grow, as more cruises pick Curacao as a destination, we need to ensure that they get to experience the ‘Punda’ we all once knew, giving short-stay tourists a whiff of Curacao that will leave them coming back for more.

Needless to say, the opportunities for investment in the city center are plenty and the opportunities endless. It’s all about making the right kind of investments and looking for the right kind of client, striking a mix and appealing to all.

Mr. Jonckheer continued to encourage young entrepreneurs to make realistic investments, and be more aware of Curacao’s unique position: “We are not the center of the universe,” he explained, “rather, we are a corner of the universe, and we need to focus on making Curacao and ‘Punda’ a diamond in the rut.”

**An International Touch**

The history of Curacao is built on immigrants and explorers – and over the years it has transformed into a melting pot that people of so many different cultures and traditions have come to call home. It is the foreign investment that keeps the economy working, and it is the island’s welcoming nature that keeps people interested. According to Mr. Jonckheer, “’Punda’ and its development are the future of Curacao... it’s about making the investments that count, injecting growth into our tourism industry, and boosting our multi-sectorial economy that will bring Curacao into the future. That’s something that we all need to do together.”
The Kingdom of the Netherlands Signs MOU with the Dominican Republic

After three years of ongoing negotiations, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Dominican Republic signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The signing took place in Santo Domingo where the Minister of Economic Development, Eugene Rhuggenaath, signed on behalf of Curacao; Prime Minister William Marlin, on behalf of Sint Maarten; and the Kingdom Ambassador to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Marijke van Druinen-Littel, for the Netherlands and Aruba. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miguel Vargas, signed the MoU on behalf of the Dominican Republic.

The MoU contains several areas of cooperation including commerce, education, health, regional security, trans-shipment and tourism. In addition, the MoU has provisions entailing technical and political consultations in order to ensure the momentum is kept in developing protocols to give content to the signed document. This provides renewed opportunities for the business community in Curacao, stimulating foreign direct investment and increased cooperation between the Dominican Republic and all parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Curacao Renews Open Skies Agreement with the United States of America

On 26 September 2016, the Minister of Traffic, Transport and Spatial Planning of Curacao, Suzanne Camelia-Romer, and the U.S. Consul General to Curacao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten, Margaret D. Hawthorne, signed an Open Skies Agreement between the United States and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in respect of Curacao.

This Agreement’s aim is to deepen the commercial and economic ties that exist between the United States and Curacao, which is achieved by establishing a framework for a modern commercial aviation relationship. It will in turn lead to the creation of various opportunities for growth in air transportation services, as well as offering potential benefits for travelers, airlines and businesses. It is expected that by facilitating the development of air links, both the Governments of the United States and Curacao will advance economic growth in sectors beyond aviation, including tourism.
CURAÇAO’S CONCESSION AGREEMENT WITH DAMEN SHIPYARD GROUP

On 9 September 2016, the Minister of Economic Development, Eugene Rhuggenaath, and the CEO of Damen Shipyards Group, René Berkvens signed a concession agreement. This agreement is in regard to the future operation of the current Curaçao Drydock Company (CDM).

Damen will establish a new company in Curaçao, namely Damen Shiprepair Curaçao. As stated in the agreement, Damen will start operations in the two graven docks and on the available quays, but will also bring a floating dock for extra capacity. Additionally, a total of $40 million will be invested in the infrastructure and training facilities for personnel.

Damen Shiprepair Curaçao will become part of the Damen Shiprepair & Conversion group that currently operates 40 dry docks in 15 shipyards around the world. For Curaçao this offers the opportunity for renewed dry dock facilities injecting new growth into the development of this pillar of Curaçao’s economy. It will create more jobs, and give Curaçao the potential to become a hub for ship repair in the Caribbean.

MOU WITH GUANDONG ZHENRON ENERGY

On behalf of the Government of Curaçao, Prime Minister Bernard Whiteman signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Mr. Binyang Chen, president of the Chinese company Guandong Zhenron Energy Co. Ltd. regarding the future of the oil refinery located in Curaçao. The oil refinery consists of the refinery itself located at Emmastad, the Bullen Bay Oil Storage Terminal and the Curaçao Refinery Utilities.

The MoU contains provisions regarding cooperation and an investment agreement of $10 billion for renovation, modernization and complete inspection of the refinery. The Multi-Disciplinary Project Team (MDPT), headed by Werner Wiels, was also present during the signing. The MoU functions as the beginning of negotiations regarding the future development of the refinery in Curaçao and does not exclude participation of other investors or partners in the future of Curaçao’s refinery. The signing comes right before the end of the current contract between the Curaçao Government and Petróleos de Venezuela SA which is set to expire in 2019.
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Now, with a new location
The Cultural Connection series will highlight the success of cultural entrepreneurs in Curaçao. According to Helmut K. Anheier and Yudhishthir Raj Isar (2008), “Cultural Entrepreneurs are cultural change agents and resourceful visionaries who organize cultural, financial, social and human capital, to generate revenue from a cultural activity. Their innovative solutions result in economically sustainable cultural enterprises that enhance livelihoods and create cultural value and wealth for both creative producers and consumers of cultural services and products.”

Bar.ber: A Lot More Than Just a Barber Shop

Living in Curaçao in the era of globalization, it is inspiring to see young professionals exploring the roots of their cultural heritage, and pairing this with innovation to build a new business. These unique business endeavors are so refreshing when comparing these with the copy pastes of global brands that are popping up everywhere.

Curaçao is blessed with quite a few savvy entrepreneurs that are enhancing the link to Curaçao’s cultural heritage, creating space for a new hybrid culture – linking the past to the present in creative ways. CBM hopes to connect you to the unique cultures of Curaçao – through profiling different businesses in every edition.

About Bar.ber
Bar.ber, a three-in-one concept store located in Pietermaai, a renewed area of downtown Willemstad, opened its doors in June 2016. It’s a retro barbershop, men’s apparel store, and a coffee shop, with a workspace with free WiFi. In a short time however, they have already carved out a special place for their company, ensuring their presence through a strong client base, for many years to come.

While roaming the streets of Amsterdam, inspiration struck creative director and mastermind behind Bar.ber, Chiarra Lo-A-Njoe. While she was looking for a new challenge professionally, Bar.ber was a thought in the spur of the moment that eventually turned into a concept where Lo-A-Njoe could combine her passion with business in Curaçao. Eventually, Lo-A-Njoe wrote her business plan and approached Andy Pinnafort and Giovanni Giribaldie, and asked them if they would like to be part of this venture.

The result was Bar.ber: a partnership between three forward thinking Curaçaoans, who wanted to transform the idea of a barber shop into a place where people go, not just to get their hair done, but to have a great time and appreciate life. The three partners are part of an equal partnership where everyone is equally responsible for the success of the business, reporting solely to themselves and each other.
A Message to Others
According to Lo-A-Njoe, “Start something you love and are passionate about, but make sure you get enough sleep before you start your journey. Be prepared for all the things that can go wrong because they probably will. Always stay humble but take all the help you can get.” Her co-creators nodded in agreement.

To Pinnafort and Giribaldie, their craft, namely cutting hair, is their calling and second nature; making money is something they do just because it’s necessary. Both are well known barbers on the island with many years of experience and many loyal clients.

According to Giribaldie, “Bar.ber was only possible because we were all equally driven by the concept of the venture. It wasn’t just about cutting hair and creating masterpieces. It was about creating an experience.” The idea of a retro barbershop was their way of taking their years of talent and skills to the next level, creating a place that felt like home, not just for them, but for all of their clients as well. A place where getting your haircut is just as much of an experience for the client, as it is for the barbers. Giribaldie says, “We want to create a personal experience and build a personal relationship with each of our clients, so that they want to come back. It’s so much more than just a haircut or a shave.”

From beginning to end, Bar.ber is all about the experience. From its location in a renovated 18th century building, in an alley of the Pietermaai District, to the retro barbershop and sleek coffee shop and bar complete with black and white photos of R&B, Soul, Jazz and Hip Hop artists, there is no place like Bar.ber on the island. The two-story venue is complete with old tiles and fixtures, vintage barber chairs, and a retro-art rooftop terrace. According to Lo-A-Njoe, “It’s like you’re traveling through time, starting in the 1800’s and ending in 2016.”

The Cultural Connection
Cultural entrepreneurship means adding value to the community, not just economically, but through your craft and the experience that you offer. Many men make a regular trip to the barbershop – sometimes once a week. In some cultures, men stop by their neighborhood barbershop not only for a haircut or a shave, but to meet friends - have a drink and chew the fat. Old traditions die hard. Today, this trip to the barbershop is still engrained in Curaçao’s culture, as so many young professional men consider their trip to Bar.ber an almost religious experience. According to Lo-A-Njoe, “We tried to make Bar.ber a place for not just men, but for all. Come have a drink, relax, get your hair cut or don’t. Everyone’s always welcome. We want it to be a place where people can let loose, have fun and relax.”

Giribaldie explains, “There are many places on the island where you can get your hair cut, but as a barber I consider my job to be an art form, something that has all but disappeared on the island in the last years. At Bar.ber, Andy and I want to re-introduce our customers, or should I say canvases, to that incredible experience.”

The passion for preserving the experience of a barbershop, while catering to a larger market through the café and bar, and men’s apparel store, is certainly what sets them aside from anything else in Curaçao. They organize events so that they really become part of the neighborhood – a place people go to just relax. Pinnafort summed it up best: “Bar.ber brings quality and artistry together to create a place where one can experience something different unlike any other in Curaçao.”

Curaçao is a crossroads for cultures – Europe meets USA meets Latin America and the Caribbean. The most impressive part about Bar.ber is their ability to reflect Curaçao’s diversity in one place. That diversity is the essence of the local community, and that will continue to be an inspiration for the establishment.

Cultural entrepreneurship has significance in the social development of communities. The co-owners of Bar.ber are focused, more than anything, on bringing people across the community together and connecting people to each other. This barbershop is so unique that for some it is a nostalgic reminder of their past, with a twist, while for others, it is a completely new experience. What’s most unique about Bar.ber, is its large target group - welcoming anyone who wants to explore their world, and be part of the experience. According to Pinnafort, “Bar.ber is flexible in the ways that it caters to its customers; the staff brings the past to the present and the present to the past. It’s something we really try to do.”

Lo-A-Njoe explains, “While we want Bar.ber to be a place where young people come hang out, be themselves, and be better people and islanders, we hope to host social events to give back to the community, in ways that they haven’t done already - creating awareness for certain social issues affecting the local community.”

According to Giribaldie, “While Bar.ber is a concept store the barbershop will remain a barbershop and people come not only to get a haircut or their beard shaved. Everyone comes in to discuss current events and there is always conversation about politics, cars, sports, and family. In between the banter, jokes are told and laughs are had. And everyone is involved: the barbers, the customers getting their haircut, and the customers waiting to get their haircut.” Andy really loves this as well - ever since his beginnings, Giribaldie explains that as a principle no one ever leaves his chair after a cut or shave without learning something new.

Bar.ber is as any other business always looking for innovative ways to attract new customers and thus generating more revenue but according to Giribaldie, “We don’t really need to invest much else into the culture of our establishment – that’s the intrinsic nature of how we operate. We won’t be putting much energy in shifting our focus, or changing our style. We’d rather go with the flow, and let the communities that we’re part of decide. Barbershops are places of continuity; which is what we aim to be.”

It’s All About Their “Why”
Giribaldie explains, “Every time a customer walks in, it is like we get a new canvas to work on. Every time they leave happy, we are even happier than they are. This challenge – to reach and exceed their expectations and our own, that challenge – that’s very important to us.” According to Lo-A-Njoe, “It’s not about the money; if we wanted to be rich we would not be in this business. We wanted to give back to the community in a bigger way. We hope to pass along our passion to other people.”
Curaçao Taking Steps towards Gender Equality:

Lactation Laws

According to the 24th edition of the 2012 Journal of Laws, a law passed titled the ‘Lactation Law.’ Essentially, this new law, is not per se new, but an amendment to the existing pregnancy law in Book 7A of the Civil Code of Curaçao. The changes set Curaçao ahead of several countries in the region and the law is similar progressive laws passed in other developed countries in Europe with the intention to support women in the workforce, and bridge the gender gap that exists in the workforce.

Text Vanessa Vrolijk

What Changed?
First of all, pregnancy leave has been extended to fourteen weeks total, including six weeks prior to when the baby is due and eight weeks after the baby’s birth. The way in which weeks are divided is left to the discretion of the employer and employee.

Secondly, the new law includes a lactation that might confuse employers and therefore needs further clarification. Essentially, the second part of the updated law includes:

• The employee, who has given birth, is entitled to a maximum of 25% of their total working hours as per contract, to either go to her infant and breastfeed the newborn; or to use that time for expressing breast milk for the infant, for up to 9 months after having given birth.
• The employer is obliged to make space available to provide the new parent with a place where they are able to express breast
milk or feed the baby. While the law calls for an ‘adequate’ space, discussion continues as to what is meant with ‘adequate.’

While the term ‘adequate’ might provide for initial confusion, essentially the purpose of the law, to support women in the workforce when they have just had a baby, would solve this problem. Should a mother decide to breastfeed the baby, they should not be denied the opportunity to do so because their workspace or employer does not ensure that the ‘adequate’ conditions are in place. For the women that make the choice to breastfeed, they are not restricted from doing this because of working conditions.

Adequate Space
So what does an adequate space entail? Rest be assured it does not mean you have a remodeling job on your hands if you don’t want to! The basics are doable for any budget. Here are the basic requirements, with some tips for alternatives:

• Privacy: Basically, the space needs to provide the employee who wishes to express milk with privacy. A public kitchenette, lunch room or board room with people walking in and out unannounced are therefore not appropriate options. So what is? Maybe you have an unused office or meeting room or any kind of room with a door that you can close and/or lock. In case locking said room is not possible, announcing to the rest of the staff, that when a specific sign is on the door, that privacy is in order. It usually takes about 20 to 40 minutes to express milk. Making other employees aware that the room is being used in privacy, will assist the person in the process of expressing milk. Knocking or putting the employee under pressure to express milk will not help the person speed up the process, and under this law, can also be categorized as harassment.

Hygiene
The space needs to be hygienic. A dirty space, apart from not being conducive to helping the expression of milk along, can pose health hazards to the employee and the baby. Ensure that the space is free of trash, dirt, or anything that could harm mother or baby.

• Amenities
  • A comfortable chair at the very least;
  • Power outlets for both 220V and 110V: some milk expression equipment are electronic and require power to operate;
  • Comfortable temperature: usually this means air-conditioning considering Curaçao’s climate, especially during certain times of year;
  • Functioning light fixtures and window covers (curtains, blinds etc.);
  • No cameras;
  • A freezer or freezer compartment in a fridge, or at the very least a cooler with ice to store the expressed milk.

At the risk of overstating the obvious, a toilet or restroom does not in any way qualify as ‘adequate’.

If you have no spare space whatsoever, not even temporarily, you can always appoint a specific office, your office as boss or owner, usually qualifies in a pinch. Remember, that this is neither a permanent situation nor all day.. If you have any questions on the above or any other related questions, contact the Fundashon Lechi di Mama Kòrsou, a volunteer organization that will be able to answer your questions, as employer or employee, on all things breastfeeding as well as helping in setting up an adequate space as presented above, completely free of charge.

For more information, contact FLMK at +599 9 747 5852 or +599 9 662 5852, email fundashonlechimama@gmail.com or Facebook Fundashon Lechi di Mama Kòrsou.
Wintercourse
After its successful establishment, the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Geopolitical Studies (LACIGS) hosted its first post-academic course on 9–11 November 2016 with the theme: “Geopolitics in the 21st Century and its impact on Latin America and the Caribbean.” According to Mr. Humphrey Senior, responsible for the organization of the event, “many young professionals and civil servant were interested in learning about the region. This winter course, based on those held at the Geneva Institute of Geopolitics, was a perfect opportunity for students and professionals in Curaçao to get insight in the working of our region.”

This course provided an innovative combination of scientific and practical geopolitics methods and theories. The Winter Course started off with key note speeches from Dr. Gyula Csurgai, Director of the Geneva Institute of Geopolitical Studies (GIGS), and Dr. Mark Kirton, Senior Lecturer at the Institute of International Relations at University of the West Indies. This was followed by workshops given by Dr. Virginie Mamadouh, Associate Professor in Political and Cultural Geography at the University of Amsterdam, and Dr. Gyulia Csurgai held introductory workshops on geopolitics and geo-economics. In addition, various public lectures were offered by Professor Atilio Borón, Director and Professor at Programa Latinoamericano de Educación a Distancia en Ciencias Sociales (PLED), Dr. Juan Eduardo Mendoza Pinto from the University of Concepción-Chile, Jose Miguel Alonso Trabanco, and former Venezuelan Ambassador and President of LACIGS, Mr. Roberto Palacios.

Background
LACIGS is an accumulation of efforts by various professionals that started off as an inspired idea in Switzerland. Whilst following a summer course at GIGS, former Ambassador Roberto Palacios and Mr. Humphrey Senior felt the absence of material relating to their respective geographical areas, Latin America and the Caribbean. After various discussions, the idea arose to start an organization in the region that would focus on geopolitical issues and opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Together with Ms. Vanessa van Dijsseldonk, a young diplomat and academic, the institute was created and became a reality.

Curaçao was, for various reasons, the first choice for the location of the Institute. Curaçao is a country with a dynamic history and a unique location. As the part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Curaçao is an autonomous country rooted in the Caribbean and lies at the crossroads between the Caribbean, North and Latin American relations.

The aim of this institute is to create platforms to bring together scholars, academics, policy officers and diplomats, and representatives from the private sector and civil society, who are interested in broadening understanding of these topics, and to teach, learn, and exchange ideas on geopolitical topics involving and affecting Latin America and the Caribbean.

Geopolitics
Geopolitics is the analysis of the relationship between geographical facts on the one hand, and international politics on the other. These geographical facts include essentially unchanging natural features, such as rivers, mountains, and oceans, along with elements of human and political geography such as national boundaries, trade networks, and concentrations of economic or military power. In other words, geopolitical conditions are the facts on the ground that governments consciously or unconsciously take into account when determining policy. As such, a refusal to recognize or understand geopolitical factors in world politics is not so much unethical, as it is foolish – like an insistence on playing chess without learning the rules.

LACIGS takes this train of thought a step further by focusing on Latin America and the Caribbean. Some examples of geopolitical occurrences in Latin America and the Caribbean discussed during the Winter Course included the ongoing presence of China and the United States of America in the Caribbean and Latin America, the historical relations between Venezuela and Curaçao, and the integration of the Caribbean and Latin America.

By using the lens and tools that geopolitics provides, one can better understand why particular events occur and how governments react to these events, basing their response on the geopolitical situation that facilitates or prohibits governments from determining its policies. Should you have any questions regarding LACIGS, please feel free to email us at: info@lacigs.org.
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FDDK’s primary responsibility is to support, coordinate, and align sport development in Curaçao, guiding organizations that are focused on promoting sports and wellbeing. Curaçao Business Magazine spoke to Mr. Thakai Doran, the Director of FDDK regarding the importance of sport in community development and society, and his experiences with the private sector in promoting sports and healthy lifestyles in Curaçao. Recently, FDDK launched a new campaign, titled Un Mion Pa Un Mihó SDK to create support for the renovation of Curaçao’s sport center, Sentro Deportivo Kòrsou (SDK). Doran was born and raised in Curaçao, and has a background in hotel and sports management. From a young age, he always wanted to be a physical education teacher, but realized very early on that he also had a knack for sports management, and pursued a career in that instead. Over the course of his career, he’s worked for various private sector companies, until becoming the new director of FDDK in 2012. According to Doran, “I am passionate about what I do – I believe that sports are an important part of our community.”

The Private Sector and Sport
According to Doran, the private sector in Curaçao has always been very active in investing in sports in Curaçao, however the approach through which this is currently done is outdated and requires a renewed plan. Doran referred to a common example in Curaçao: companies often sponsor the printing of jerseys of sports uniforms every couple of years and as such often get their names printed on these as an indication of their support. According to Doran, “The way we think about supporting sports needs to change— we need to create new incentives to allow the private sector to invest in the long-term development of our youth and society.”

Doran explains how some companies in Curaçao are finding innovative ways to invest in sport development on the island:

- United Telecommunication Services provides FDDK with free internet and phone plans, as well as office space, to assist the organization in functioning at a lower cost.
- Aqualectra assists in finding ways to reduce energy costs.
- PWC provides free accountancy support to FDDK, again reducing overhead costs.
- The Bureau of Telecommunication and Post provides FDDK with technical assistance to reduce energy costs and transitioning to renewable energy.
The assistance provided by these companies does not necessarily result in a concrete project or program to directly assist in sport development in Curacao, but indirectly, by decreasing the costs of the functioning of FDDK, the companies are able to ensure that the budget of FDDK is spent effectively in promoting physical education and sport development.

This kind of investment and partnership is not for all companies in Curacao, and it is important that there is a healthy mix of both short-term project financing and long-term organization financing, the latter of which is lacking in so many areas. Doran provided examples like sponsoring individuals to get degrees to teach physical education in schools as another example where companies could lend a helping hand. “By creating incentives and equipping these teachers with the right skills, we will be able to invest in the youth through sport in a sustainable way, making sure that all children have access to sport education.”

Sports as a Tool
When asked about his motivation, Doran answered with a quote from Nelson Mandela: “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand.” He mentions that this really holds true in Curacao where youth unemployment is relatively high, obesity rates are one of the highest in the world, and school dropout rates are steadily increasing. Even in this situation, Curacao remains the country with the highest number of Major League Baseball players per capita, a champion Little League team, a football team that is ranked 73rd in the world, and celebrated athletes in track and field.

For an island of its size, and considering the lack of adequate resources, the sport industry demonstrates its potential to make a lasting impact again and again. Doran explains that with the right investments, he hopes to allow Curacao’s sports facilities and teams to reach their full potential, providing support to learning, amateur and pro-athletes in the coming years.

#UnMionPaUnMihóSDK
With this mindset, FDDK launched its new campaign titled ‘Un Mion Pa Un Mihó SDK.’ The idea of this campaign is to encourage a different kind of public-private partnership, where partners in Curacao invest in renovating the island’s sports center – focusing on making it

talent development center to cater to various target groups, including the youth – teaching them movement and sport, local sporting teams and clubs, and international athletes who would want to spend part of their training season in Curacao.

The idea of the campaign is for FDDK to reach its 1 million guilder goal before Curacao hosts the largest sporting event in its history: The Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) Games scheduled for spring 2017. During the Games, FDDK anticipates that Curacao will be receiving over 500 athletes and more than 500 spectators. In its current state, the stadium is not ready to handle this large capacity of athletes and individuals, and is in desperate need of renovation.

Together with the private sector and government, FDDK hopes to renovate the center for the Games and beyond, aiming to become the first completely energy neutral sporting facility in the Caribbean region, fully equipped with a development center and gym for pro-athletes, but also accessible to the rest of the community for all kinds of sport and movement activities.

Looking Forward
The #UnMionPaUnMihóSDK was launched in September, and while 1,000,000 is still very far away, Doran remains hopeful. He claims that as time passes, more and more companies are seeing the added value of sports and are changing the way they look at investing in the industry. “Sports can lay the foundation for so many basic skills that young people need,” Doran said in closing, “It teaches them discipline – they know they won’t succeed if they don’t practice. It teaches them team work – they learn that they need to trust one another to win. It teaches them dedication – they learn that even if something doesn’t quite work the first time around, it might the second time. And most importantly, they learn to have fun – it teaches them that even when they work hard and compete, they can have a great time with one another.”

FDDK recently closed a new deal with some of Curacao’s top athletics and the Curacao International Financial Services Association (CIFA). Through interacting with athletes like Churandy Martina, Liemarvin Bonevacia, Hensley Paulina, and Terrence Agard, CIFA understood the importance of the long-term investment in sport. These young male athletes are role models for so many in the local society, who might not have anyone else to turn to. They work together to promote Curacao’s potential and reach out to citizens on island alike.

The added value of sport in Curacao’s society is unparalleled, and it is time, as Doran says, that we look at this industry as one of Curacao’s largest assets, and use this to equip the next generation with the skills to succeed, and build bridges between and among partners.
Boosting Curaçao’s Knowledge Industry in Creative Ways

On 12 March 2016, TED once again made its way to Curaçao with a TEDx event titled Bridging the Gap. TED is a nonprofit organization that aims to spread ideas, through short, powerful talks. TED stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design, and was launched in 1984. Since then, they’ve developed into a global community, under the slogan, “Ideas worth spreading.” Each year, TED hosts an annual conference in North America, and TEDGlobal which is held in a different country every year. In addition, more than 2000 TEDx events, independent TED-like events, are organized per year.

Curaçao Business Magazine spoke to Ms. Nephtalie Demei, the license holder for TEDxCuraçao about her experience organizing TEDxCuraçao 2016, and the plans for the next TEDx event in 2017.

TEDx events are non-profit, but may apply an admission fee and sponsorship to cover costs. Speakers are not paid, and relinquish the copyrights to their materials, which TED may distribute and edit under a Creative Commons license.

About the Organizers

Nephtalie Demei and a team of committed professional volunteers spent tireless hours in their free time organizing TEDx Curaçao in 2016. According to Demei, “It’s incredibly inspiring to work with such a dedicated team for TEDx, sometimes we were sending apps and emails after midnight and getting answers from each other immediately.”

Demei was born and raised in Curaçao, and upon completing her studies in ‘Leisurology’ and working for some time in the Netherlands, she moved to Curaçao where she worked in the hospitality sector for a couple years. She then moved back to the Netherlands where she pursued her second degree, this time in education, and proceeded to get a job in a school in the Netherlands, first working with at-risk youth, and thereafter at a private school with upper and middle-class students. “I was intellectually bored at my day job as a teacher. I enjoyed being around my students and I worked at a very nice school, but something was missing. I started watching some of my favorite old TED talks to feel inspired and my search led me to TEDxAmsterdam. The next day, I was sitting in a meeting organizing a TEDx event. I was hooked.”

TEDxAmsterdam was one of the first TEDx events organized with a TED license – and until today, it is still considered one of the most popular TEDx events across the globe. After a year of working on TEDxAmsterdam, Demei built her own team and organized TEDxEducation, a high profile event where participants too were curated. “In TED events, the audience is as important as the speakers. Their role is crucial – it’s important to have the right mix of people.” The idea of a specialized TEDx conference on education was a reflection of Demei’s thoughts on the education system and reform needed to give teachers space to be more creative in the classroom.

In many ways, TED is an example of informal education, and perhaps that’s what’s most appealing to Demei. “We really want to inspire people to go out and make the dreams and plans they’ve been sitting on for so long reality. To overcome the fear of failure and to dream and dare discover. I hope our participants take that away with them.”

Finding Partners for TEDxCuraçao

Moving back to Curaçao, Demei recognized the power that a TEDx event could have. “People really needed to be inspired, and needed to have platforms to share their ideas and experiences. There was a clear need for TED.”

It was Demei’s first time organizing a TEDx event in Curaçao and the team encountered many challenges along the way. Sometimes
they had to explain the concept and the brand, sometimes they didn’t. All in all potential sponsors were enthusiastic. “Sponsoring a TEDx event is a great way for a company to profile themselves. It says a lot about how the company works, and its ‘why.’ TED is all about innovation and exploration – ideas central to so many brands.” As such, Demei mentioned that when people learned more about what the event was and what TED stood for, they were very willing to work with the team.

As such, they developed partnerships to fly in their speakers with InselAir and KLM, and provided their international speakers with free accommodation at Blue Bay. Digicel was also a sponsor and provided complimentary sim cards for the speakers. In addition, the Movies Curaçao provided them with two theaters to be used to host the event and District 1850’s sponsored the reception and after-party space. These and many other partnerships were imperative in determining the success of the TED conference, and really contributed to what TEDx Curaçao could offer in its first year.

In contrary to what Demei had done previously, TEDx, although non-profit, covered the additional costs of the event’s organization by charging participants for tickets. Tickets for a first theater sold out far quicker than the organization expected, and therefore a second theater was booked to meet the demand.

When looking for sponsors, the sponsoring team, led by Peter Reijmer, often approached progressive companies, where innovation and creativity are central. “TED is a cool and professional brand – and there are many companies that want to be linked to it. The international marketing of TED talks in general really impacts how we are able to sell TED in Curaçao. Sponsoring a TED event is a clear sign to employees and customers alike – it really adds a positive upgrade a company’s image.” Companies should ask themselves: do I stand for innovation and new ideas, creativity, social responsibility and planning for the future? If the answer is yes, then TED is definitely for you.

Why TEDx?
TEDxCuraçao, like other TEDx events, is meant to be a local event, not a global one, this means it caters to the needs of the community and focuses on finding speakers that can inspire change on a local level. According to Demei, “We want TEDxCuraçao to be a ‘brain spa’. People come to TED and get interesting stories, that are long enough to get you interested and keep you engrossed. You leave out refreshed and tingly. Happy, bubbly and ready to take action. To me, that makes a TEDx event successful.”

According to Demei, there is no event anywhere on the island that can be compared to TEDxCuraçao. Not only is it a conference, but all speakers get one-on-one speakers’ training. TEDxCuraçao has also partnered up with TEDxAruba and has, since then attended the TEDx conference in Aruba, that focused mostly on sustainability. Curaçao’s TEDx attempts to keep it broad. “Our main requirement is to find speakers who touch the audience. Whether they burst out crying, or wail with laughter, it’s important that you can see – really see – that people are touched. You can feel the shift in minds when you’re at a good TED event, and that’s what happened in 2016, and what can happen again in 2017.”

TEDxCuraçao 2017
Demei and her team have already started organizing TEDxCuraçao 2017, which will take place on Saturday 13 May 2017. This year, the TEDxCuraçao team hopes to innovate further, creating online platforms before and after, and working with more partners to create a different TED experience. According to Demei, “There’s nothing more inspiring than watching the light bulb going on in people’s head; walking in and feeling all the energy, seeing people connect while inspired.”

“I always look forward to the moment I walk on stage, and feel the curiosity… excitement… and inspiration in the room,” said Demei, “That’s why I love TED, and that’s why other people love it too. It doesn’t matter what field you are in, this conference is meant to spark your mind.” Jason Silva, one of her favorite philosophers and a futurist says that pulling people out of their intellectual comfort zone and presenting ideas in unique ways that challenge people to question their assumptions is one of the most rewarding things to do. That’s TED and that’s what TEDxCuraçao strive to create on 13 May 2017.
While Curaçao, an eclectic island with a culinary fusion of Dutch, South American, Afro-Caribbean, Portuguese, Indian, Spanish and other Caribbean influences, has plenty of options that can provide a nutritional balance, the presence of physical activity still remains questionable. Although, like most Caribbean islands, Curaçao has plenty of outdoor activities on land or in its crystal clear waters to promote a healthy lifestyle, and yet, more than 50% of the population is estimated to be obese, and statistics indicate a steady rise in the presence of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes in children. The figures are all quite alarming, and have given birth to a new trend, that is slowly but surely on the rise. It might even be the right industry for your next investment.

The Fast-paced Island Life

Many could argue that over the past 50 years, islanders turned their backs on traditional diets made readily available by local produce and replaced these with highly processed and energy-dense foods imported from other countries. These new foods, that are often sold at a cheaper price, because they are produced in bulk then become the new normal. The question though is, if we go back to the basics – what were these creole food diets like prior to globalization?

Creole food is rich. For generations, the local diet in Curaçao included a hearty stew or soup, with a small portion of vegetables, a side of rice of polenta, also known as ‘funchi’, and lots of deliciously fried goodness. Despite its deliciousness though, the foods, regardless of their freshness have always been high in calories and fats. While they are part of culture and tradition, as lifestyles change, perhaps diets needed to as well.

Curaçao has also undergone an urbanization of its culture. Sedentary office cultures, the convenience of traveling by car and parking directly in front of your destination, and the decrease in price of unhealthy meal options has further aided the rise in obesity rates.

Curaçao’s Wellness Industry:

Your Next Investment?

Existing simultaneously with under nutrition, obesity is one of the world’s unconcealed yet ignored problems. This international epidemic of overweight and obesity – referred to by the World Health Organization as ‘globesity’ has found its way, along with all of its terrible effects, to a small island in the Caribbean Sea, Curaçao. Like with any other escalating trend, the unhealthy trend and its side effects has made way for a new market in Curaçao. The island is home to a growing ‘health-olution’ and leading this wind of change is a small but actively growing community of young local entrepreneurs.

TEXT TAHNIE M. BRUIN
While healthy options did not exist fifty years ago either, life has become increasingly 'busy' and faster which means that parents get home later from work, and quick meal options become the 'go-to' choice, and there are few genuinely healthy fast food options in Curaçao.

**The Juicy Game-changers**

Recently, a new generation of passionate and innovative local entrepreneurs are leading a revolution to create awareness, promote a healthy lifestyle, and remind the inhabitants of Curaçao that they can a different choice. A choice to not only live healthy and actively but to purchase local produce and support the local community contributing to Curaçao's local economy.

Farmer's markets and Wellfests are just the beginning but surely a place to begin in promoting a healthy lifestyle in Curaçao.

Noosh - a local company that offers nutritionist-developed cold pressed juices, salads and superfoods – participate actively in these markets and festivals. Since their inception nearly two years ago, there have been about five events through which they’ve further promoted their project. According to Qiomy Neuman, founder of Noosh says: “Health events are very important for the success of Noosh. They let us connect to our market segment, targeting specifically health conscious individuals and others who are exploring a healthy lifestyle.” Noosh also does a variety of different events, including supermarket tastings. According to Neuman, a variety of different marketing events is actually what Noosh needs to promote its products – supermarkets stands offer a random flow of people who are not specifically interested in the product or the market niche allowing you to possibly extend market share, whereas health events allow companies to develop a stronger relationship with the market segment.

According to Neuman, “Wellness events are beneficial for Curaçao because they help make the community of Curaçao more aware of what is available on the island. A lot of people might want to commit to eating healthy and living an active healthy lifestyle but they don’t know what is available on the island. The truth is that the industry is vibrant - there are several little companies that many haven’t heard of before. By organizing these events you can make people aware of the options available, and give the companies the exposure they need.”

**A New Fitness Craze**

CrossFit 5 Triple 9, a crossfit gym, called a ‘box,’ established almost three years ago based in the heart of Otrabanda, was also present at a recent wellness event. This box has 47% female and 53% male members and has recently launched CrossFit Kids. While most athletes at this box are between the ages of 24 and 44, CrossFit 5 Triple 9 has 11 athletes under the age of 17, 5 athletes between 55 and 64, and 24 athletes between 45 and 54. Ivan de Windt, coach at and co-founder of CrossFit 5 Triple 9, emphasized that their team attends as many wellness events as they can, after carefully learning about what the event could mean for their box and its members.

According to de Windt, “Building a strong relationship with people with the same interests as us, and who want to make our society more health conscious is imperative. Striving to collaborate with local companies is the best way to align with the right people to create more interest for CrossFit as an industry and as a professional sport.” De Windt continued, “For us, it is a matter of getting our name out there and our style of training known because a lot of people still don’t know what CrossFit is.”

Participating in Wellfest gave CrossFit 5 Triple 9 a new edge – introducing more people to the sport, while their gym has actually reached its current capacity. The fact that this is the case emphasizes the growing demand for a new way of living – where working out and going to the gym regularly is central. CrossFit 5 Triple 9 is looking to relocate to continue to serve its growing membership to promote a healthy lifestyle in Curaçao. “It’s our duty to make a difference in our community, and in people’s lives on the island. We want to make people more conscious of their health, and what it means to live a healthy lifestyle. For change to come, we need to work together to organize more wellness events that reach broader audiences.”

**Curaçao's Fresh Produce**

Fuik Microgreens was founded in early 2016 by local young entrepreneurs to produce organic non-GMO microgreens, and to teach locals about micro-greens and organic produce and encouraging them to appreciate and stimulate their sustainable local agriculture.

As Eduardo Goncalves de Andrade, one of the co-founders of the company, explains, “One of the best ways we can realize our mission is to participate in as many wellness event on the island. These events, and farmers’ markets are perfect places to introduce our products to the public, and give consumers the chance to learn more about what it is we do and why we do it.”

Fuik Microgreens could stock up a supermarket with microgreens, make them available to wholesalers, but the chances that the product would sell without creative marketing is doubtful, because people in Curaçao generally do not know what microgreens are and why they are so important. Therefore, Fuik Microgreens sees wellness events as an opportunity to make customers more aware of the potential of microgreens and why their product is so important, creating a need some didn’t even know existed.

“People understand our product when they can actually see it up close and speak to us about our passion,” claims Goncalves de Andrade. “This way we increase our market share but we also stimulate them to grow and eat their own produce rather than buying store-bought products that might be contain ingredients they would not want to consume.”

Consumers enjoy interacting with producers and learning about what makes their product unique – especially if they don’t know what the product is.

**The Wellness Industry is on the Rise**

Three very different companies founded by young entrepreneurs with a very similar mission: making people healthier and giving them the possibility to make healthier life decisions, to cope with the increasingly fast-paced island life and increasing expenses.

Eating healthy, being healthy and living active lifestyles are beneficial to Curaçao’s people, as well as its economy. These three companies are definitely pioneers but they are not alone – and they’ve created a new niche that is constantly growing, allowing their companies to focus, customize their product for the market and consistently expand to meet the growing demand.

It is becoming more and more obvious that a healthy, happy workforce contributes to economic growth and readily stimulates the economy, creating a win-win situation even though production prices for some of these products might seem steep. In so many ways, demand continues to increase and wellness events are organized regularly to serve the growing market, giving these companies the exposure that they require to be successful. Curaçao’s wellness industry is bound to keep flourishing, and both the benefits for its citizens and for its growing economy. The sector is continuously growing and the opportunities to invest are endless.
**A New Leader in the Pro-Sound and Light Industry: L’Amiga Curaçao**

This series sheds light on small and medium sized family businesses that have innovated and grown across generations. The family business model (or lack thereof) is actually proven to be one of the most successful business models that exist. According to Roberto H. Flören, the Head of the Business Faculty at Nyenrode Business University, “In the long term, family businesses are more successful and profitable than non-family businesses.” The reasons for this are their ability to be resilient in the face of crisis and to build strong ties to the community.  

TEXT: NEELAM MELWANI

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IL’Amiga is at first sight a small electronic store located in Heerenstraat in the center of Willemstad. A second branch of the store recently opened at Zuikertuin mall, an indoor shopping mall located in the populous area of Mahaai. Behind the business are a father and son, Doulat (father) and Gautam (son) Chandiramani, who have increased the success of their organization through keeping up with the times and taking calculated risks.

The Beginning

In 1974, based on a suggestion from a friend, Doulat Chandiramani, moved to Curaçao in search of opportunity. He worked for an Indian company on the island for about fifteen years, before venturing out on his own. “I had been working for other people my whole life, and realized that it wasn’t going to keep me happy. I therefore decided to start my own company in 1987.” L’Amiga started as an apparel store with a small electronics section. Doulat Chandiramani explained that clothing was a great place to start building a business – he was able to purchase apparel for a low price at the Freezone in Curaçao itself, and sell it with a quick turnaround, saving up to invest in the business he really wanted: consumer electronics.

“I was always an electronics man,” Doulat Chandiramani explained, “And I knew I wanted to continue in that line of business. Initially, I didn’t have enough to invest in that, but as soon as I did, I started following my dream.”

Growing the Family Business

In 2011, his son, Gautam, joined the family business, and with him came new ideas. Gautam Chandiramani got his Master’s in accounting and worked for PwC for three years in the Netherlands. Gautam grew up in Curaçao, and it had become home. After wrapping up his studies and getting some experience, he was ready to move back home.

Up until 2011, L’Amiga focused on consumer electronics, in one store. Shortly after moving back to Curaçao however, Gautam Chandiramani noticed that there was so much potential in the pro-audio department, a new market that was not as saturated that provided many growth opportunities. By 2012, L’Amiga became a multi-floor store, segregating consumer electronics and pro-audio electronics, a new market segment that had really taken off. In 2016, they opened a second branch in Zuikertuin Mall.

According to Gautam Chandiramani, “What we’ve seen in recent years is a decrease in consumer electronics, and an increase in the pro-audio market. We really needed to diversify our product and change our approach to meet the demands of a changing market.”

Bridging the Generation Gap

According to Doulat Chandiramani, “I never expected that my son would join the family business. I’m so happy he did though – he
joined me and we’ve been able to take our business to the next level. Youngsters have new ideas that the previous generation may not have.”

When asked what the one skill was that he needed to be part of the family business, Gautam responded with one word: patience. He explained that often times, when young people have a good idea, they want to role with it right away. “I’m really lucky,” he said, “my father has given me the space to make mistakes. I once ordered a line of professional speakers that stayed on our shelves for two years. Usually, our products have a relatively quick turnover time. I made that mistake once, and I’ll never make it again. The most important part was that I was able to fix it – I managed to move those professional speakers out by finding a creative way to do so.”

According to Doulat Chandiramani, working with his son has been a great experience. “The way I grew my business – it was never easy. I let my son make mistakes, because that’s how he’ll learn… through experience. I’ve had my share of experience, and he needs to have that as well. I had no one to guide me, but he can always count on me. We trust each other, and that makes it easy to work together.”

Taking Business to the Next Level
Both father and son agree that L’Amiga has what it takes to be the market leader in the pro-audio industry in Curaçao. Doulat Chandiramani, with a hint of nostalgia, noted that, “The world is changing faster than ever before, and businesses need to change with it.” When it comes to all these changes, resilience and continuity are so important, and that’s what sets L’Amiga apart. “People know us and they know our brand - that’s the best part of living in the same community. Our clients keep coming back,” he added with conviction.

According to Gautam, “Customers naturally flowed from him to me. They didn’t doubt my abilities for a second, because my father had already created a relationship with them. We really focus on our customers; that differentiates us from Amazon. We’re here to help our customers and learn from them.”

While the global economy changes and becomes more interconnected, service remains important. L’Amiga responded to this by not just selling their customers a product, but by becoming more service-oriented: assisting with installations, repairs, and replacements. For Gautam, this also means being more accessible for clients in other market segments and niches, which is how both him and his father justify their new location in Zuikertuin Mall. “Opening a new location was more a marketing move than a sales move - we don’t expect to see a surge in sales, but hope to best serve the needs of our clients from our second location.”

Looking Forward
In moving forward, both father and son agree that they look forward to a revitalized Punda, a city center that is as vibrant and full of life as it once was. According to Doulat, “Punda will never die. It’s been here for so long. We, as business people, need to offer something new and something better to keep people coming to Punda. That’s up to us as much as it is up to others.” The recent developments and activities in Punda are both allowing for people to come back to the colorful-lined streets of downtown Willemstad.

For Gautam, it remains important that L’Amiga continues to innovate and explore. “Our customers are my Wikipedia – that’s how I learned. I’ve done so much research to best learn what my customers need and what’s out there.” Essentially, L’Amiga hopes to one day be able to cater to the pro-sound industry across the supply chain, starting with ordering and ending with repair or re-selling. “Curaçao is different than anywhere else in the world, and our sound equipment needs are therefore very specific. That requires a very specific kind of sound quality - one that we can deliver.”

Reflecting on the Professional Relationship
All in all, it is clear that entrepreneurship is in the family’s blood. As Gautam mentioned, “I like to break my head. That’s part of being an entrepreneur. Nothing in business is rocket science, you just have to apply yourself and find a solution.”

Both father and son agreed that trust was of the essence. There is no set way of working in any family business, it’s a matter of experimenting and seeing what works and having open lines of communication to talk to one another. Gautam mentioned, “It’s a dynamic environment – family businesses do not have a set way of working, and you need to be flexible enough to develop it in any way you want. You decide how your business works, or doesn’t.”

The structure of L’Amiga as a family business has allowed the to be flexible - moving from apparel to consumer electronics to becoming a pro-audio and lighting provider has allowed them to change with the changing market tides.

To close, Gautam said, “Anybody can build a business – if they know what they want to achieve.” In many senses of the world, the future of L’Amiga remains uncertain, and so many factors will determine their success in the pro-audio industry. One thing they can look forward to is the flexibility and resilience that defines their success. That’ll be so important regardless of what happens next.
The Secret of Successful Implementations of New Technology Solutions

You invested valuable time and effort in new systems, new software and new procedures. You hired expensive consultants, invested in project management software and methodologies, purchased top-of-the-line hardware and software. After this, you can be sure that implementation of your new solution(s) will be successful, right?

TEXT VANESSA VROLIJK

WRONG!
That is, if you haven’t invested in the most crucial element of your success: your people, colleagues, employees or co-workers. The result may very likely be challenges in implementation of your solution, something that can be very painful to witness. This will be the result if you do not dedicate a substantial amount of your resources towards getting your people ready and in a confident state of mind!

Whenever you start something new in your organization, it means change. Research shows that humans generally tend to resist change by nature. We don’t like it; and we try our best to avoid it. Usually not even consciously! So what does that mean in our technology driven society, especially our working environment? Times are tough, and as organizations we need to have an edge so we can guarantee our increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Having an edge usually means striving towards more efficiency: leaner back-offices, shorter waiting times, keeping our customers happy enough that they stay loyal to us taking more competition into account.

To achieve this, technology offers us a broad range of systems and applications. We research, we weigh the pros and cons carefully, and we select, after an exhaustive process, the best solution for our business. We, then, proceed to invest a substantial amount of money to implement the solution; a process that sometimes takes months or even years. Then, after all this, the project is failing; nobody is using the system. At that point, it’s important to ask why.
Everybody is complaining, it doesn’t work; is it too difficult, too slow, too fast? Essentially, your people are using every excuse in the book to resist change.

Asking why something isn’t working is essentially asking the wrong question. The real question is how to work with resistance to the change within your organization, and how to lower the acceptance threshold to achieve your project goals. Start by investing in Communication and Coaching.

**Communication**

When?
The main takeaway is that you simply cannot communicate too much on the upcoming change! Whatever solution you may be planning to implement or have already implemented, you absolutely will need to communicate with the people in your organization. This starts as soon as you have either decided upon a solution (a new system, a new application or a new process etc.) or you acquired said solution and are at the start of its implementation.

How?
Start by communicating the basics:
- The necessity (the why);
- The desired timeline (the when);
- Their role in the change process (the who);

As the project kicks off, make sure people feel involved. Keep communication channels open. Share information like where you are in the project time wise, general progress and ‘wins’ so far. Pay particular attention to communicating how the implementation of this solution will benefit them, both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency in completing their daily tasks.

**Coaching**

Maybe it’s just me, but when I hear ‘Coaching’ I immediately associate it with the ‘touchy-feely’ approach to business! Basically, coddling the weak!

However, the essence of coaching entails guiding and easing the people in your organization to the desired situation and/or objective. In this case, it is especially useful and probably the only surefire method to get your people on board. The ‘Coaching’ employed here should be the guiding kind: easing your people into the new processes, methodologies and environment (virtual and otherwise).

This means creating awareness about exactly what is going to happen or is happening, what changes are expected but also what is expected, for how long, and from whom. Setting up a reward system will not hurt your cause. The reward should be appropriate to the desired objective and the scale of the project. Setting up an awareness plan is recommended: what kinds of awareness sessions are necessary, how many sessions are necessary, and who will be guiding these sessions.

These sessions are best done by professionals seeing as the sessions should trigger people, preferably from within (hence the coaching element). Without triggering people from within, the change process might not be seen as such, and the opportunity will be seen as ‘just another’ training or educational session where information is given as it were, coming from external sources instead of what you would want, which is the triggering of awareness from within.

You want people to comprehend and realize the benefits of the change, especially in regards to their work. This will generate the goodwill that you need, which will automatically lead to acceptance in most cases. Another aspect is training, any and all applicable to the new solution or system, should also be plentiful and varied: from group sessions to individual guided instructions, and using any and all tools available to engender knowledge about the new solution.

If you can afford it, depending on how far along you are in the project or how dire the circumstances are, you should hire a professional to coach your organization into the change, even though you’re seemingly going backwards. Your ‘Going Live’ might be postponed by a couple of weeks or months; but at least when you do, you’ll have your people standing at your side. At the end of the day, an organization is only as strong as the people who work in it.

When all is said and done, by involving and effectively communicating with your most important resources, the people who work in your organization, you have the key to success when it comes to implementing or introducing a new solution, system, application or process in your organization, regardless of the type, size or price tag.

**Already started implementing a project?**

So what should you do if you already have a failing project?
- Start communicating with your organization: organize Q&A sessions to find out where exactly the biggest bottlenecks are. You’ll notice that many of these are linked to fear and resistance.
- Find people in your organization who understand the project and feel positively about it.
- Ask and Listen: Take it from there, all the while keeping the communication lines open!
The Beginning: “It was just me and my desk”
Edgar D. Nunes started the company in 1991. “It was just me and my desk”, he says, “And I was determined to do better than the existing insurance brokers on the island.” At the time the market looked very different from now. There were many large and medium sized insurance brokers he had to compete with, and he realized he had to be creative and come up with something different. In 1993, ARS became the first independent insurance broker in Curacao to mediate and sell mortgages. They also started providing insurance for boats and yachts.

In three years time, Nunes acquired a decent portfolio that allowed him to move to a larger office and have five staff members on his payroll. This was good, but he wanted more. At the time, the company’s policy was to serve anyone in need of advisory services. In other words, they were not selective in the clients they provided their services to.

Three years later, in 1997, he had doubled the amount of employees to ten. Nunes proudly recounts the first remodeling expansion of the same building Atlas Risk Solutions still resides in. Today, Atlas employs 12 highly skilled staff members providing first-class service and optimum results for all customers.

Rebranding Atlas for the 21st Century
The company started out as an insurance broker, but over the years the firm rebranded to ‘risk solutions’ as this is a better reflection of what is provided to it’s customers namely “solutions” and not just insurance products.”. As an independent
insurance broker. ARS analyses primary risks and determines the risks to which each client is exposed. ARS is known among customers to do this in a thorough and fair manner, while always keeping the client’s best interest in mind and thus providing the best coverage at the best possible price at all times.

Nunes explained that part of their success depends on the working relationships with insurance companies. “It is important that they understand the vision of ARS to be able to react accordingly in order to provide and maintain the high quality of service that ARS guarantees to its customers.” As a result of this, paperwork must be done not only quickly, but also properly and in the best interest of the client.

While Atlas Risk Solutions is based in Curacao, Sint Maarten, Aruba, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba, they also have international clients. This is a different market and serves customers outside of the islands. The company is currently working on further expansion of its services and products in the global insurance market through innovative online tools and its correspondent partner, Arthur J. Gallagher Group, the 4th largest insurance broker in the world.

Recently, Atlas sold a surprising 75% of its private client portfolio to a competitor. The company chose to go forward with this difficult decision in order to be able to provide premium service to a higher segment of the, mostly corporate, market. For Nunes, saying goodbye to clients who had been with the company for many years was a difficult and in some cases an emotional decision. However, Nunes decided to make the call for rather essential reasons. He explains: “We wanted to be one step ahead of the developments that are taking place worldwide. It’s only a matter of time before car, travel, home, liability, accident and other simple risk insurance become available online. We decided to focus our resources, energy and knowledge on that part of the market that cannot be serviced online.” He continues to explain that ARS will be bringing tools to the market that will enable a quick and partly automated service. This tool will bridge the gap that non-operative time creates, like nights and weekends.

Nunes is extremely proud of the exceptionally skilled and motivated team that runs Atlas Risk Solutions. But how do you keep your team motivated? “By hiring only talented and motivated people and by getting all noses pointing in the same direction. Decisions are not imposed, but discussed, analyzed, documented and updated.” According to Nunes, the key answer to that question is to know the ‘Why’ of your company and making sure that each and every staff member understands it. Everyone is expected to be present at all monthly and quarterly meetings, and once a year, management presents a strategic plan, giving updates of where the company stands and where it wants to go, whilst involving and soliciting input from team members in the choices that are made for the next three to five years.

**Looking Back, Moving Forward**

As an entrepreneur, you go through a huge amount of hurdles. It might seem simple to some, but it is hard work. Everyday and always. Nunes says it was tough back when he started and it still is today. “Everyday brings difficult decisions that have to be taken. Having a company you built from scratch equals being emotionally attached to it and always going that extra mile to keep it going and growing.”

Nunes is concerned about the gap that will emerge in the world of risk management after the people of his generation, the baby boomers, are gone. So, when his son asked him what he should study, Nunes encouraged him to study Risk Management. Whether his son will be taking over the company or not, only time will tell. The glimmer in his eyes when talking about that possibility says it all. When you build a company from nothing you want to make sure it’s taken care of by someone you know will maintain the quality and who will hopefully carry it to the next level.

For now, Nunes plans to keep expanding Atlas Risk Solutions together with his committed team always guarding the best interests of his customers, as Atlas Risk Solution always has and always will.
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