

# Latin America has room to grow on Internet, experts say

September 26 2012, by Mimi Whitefield

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Google's managing director for Spanish-speaking Latin America says the Internet has become the "focus group for the world" and the smart advertiser uses it to anticipate consumer behavior rather than just to tout products.

Adriana Norena, of Google, told some 600 media and marketing professionals gathered Monday for the Festival of Media LatAm 2012 that consumers, in the process of seeking information online, reveal important information about themselves.

[Google](#), for example, noticed clusters of Internet users seeking information about [flu symptoms](#) and began reporting these flu trends to health agencies as an [early warning](#) for areas of [flu outbreaks](#), she said.

Advertisers should be using Internet trends to predict [consumer behavior](#), she said, because the endorsement of consumers is becoming more and more powerful.

If consumers like or dislike something, they quickly share their feelings online. "The power has been shifted" to the consumer, Norena said.

She said Latin Americans are embracing the four screens - PC, tablet, smart phone, and television - very quickly.

"Content has become liquid, and it needs to flow seamlessly from one screen to another," Norena said.

Victor Kong, the chief digital officer for the Cisneros Group of Companies, outlined the success that the telenovela "La Viuda Joven" (The [Black Widow](#)), a thriller and a mystery with a love story woven in, has had beyond television.

"La Viuda Joven" has more than 1 million followers online, and Venevision has created special Web-only content related to the telenovela.

Aficionados repeatedly watched clues online to try to figure out who the killer was, he said.

Cisneros' Venevision also has had success with online voting for the Miss Venezuela contest, one of the most popular televised events in the country. Some 4 million votes were cast in various categories when Venevision gave online users a chance to vote for their favorite contestants and 800,000 cast votes online as the beauty pageant was being televised live, Kong said.

Norena said that there are 130 million Internet users in Latin America, and they tend to spend more time online than consumers in other areas of the world. They are the highest consumers of video in the world, for example, and five Latin American countries are the most engaged in social networking in the world, she said.

The main theme of this year's Media Festival, which concludes Tuesday with a black-tie awards dinner, was whether "Latin America is fit to compete" in the digital age.

From a consumer point of view, "Latin America is ready," said Norena, but she added, "There is a need for companies to start reworking the way they engage with consumers."

The keynote speaker, Andres Oppenheimer, said that he has been traveling around the world trying to get the answer to the question about Latin American competitiveness for the past several years. Oppenheimer, a Latin American columnist for The Miami Herald and host of his own TV show, pointed out that Latin America still lags woefully behind most areas of the world when it comes to education and an emphasis on science and technology.

Oppenheimer said he once asked Bill Gates what Latin America needed to compete at a higher level.

"He said 'humbleness,' " related Oppenheimer. And Oppenheimer agreed that Latin Americans do lack humbleness compared to Asia, where he found that there is a "family culture of education" and that many people are not satisfied with their current level of attainment and aspire to do better.

"When I go to [Latin America](#) and talk with ministers of education, they say, 'We're doing great.' That leads to complacency. We need constructive paranoia. The Asians are paranoid."

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