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## This Brazilian's Mission: Sell Dubai as Land of Opportunity

Contributed by Débora Rubin  
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When his ex-wife, Yasmin, moved to Dubai with the small Jeremy, in 2005, Marcelo was a little lost. The Emirates seemed one of the most improbable destinations. But the distance from his son, then aged five, was enough to make Marcelo Cunha, originally from Rio Grande do Sul, in southern Brazil, leave behind the life he had consolidated in São Paulo, in the southeast of the country, where he worked for an advertising agency.

First he made a test. He went to Dubai on holiday, to feel the territory. He liked it very much, came back to Brazil, resigned, packed his bags and moved to the Arab country for good in January 2007.

He went without a job, without speaking English - "the language spoken here" - fluently and without a project. He simply went. "Gaúchos (people from Rio Grande do Sul) simply up and go. Living so near the border gives this dimension of amplitude, the desire of winning the world," he explained.

He got there with his computer under his arm, carrying 5 kilograms of beans, 5 kg of mate tea and a little jerky. He also took his dog and tree cats. Few months later he started noticing the volume of things there were to do there.

The 20-odd years he had worked in Human Resources in large companies were left back. Now he wants to dive into foreign trade, so great are the possibilities in the Arab city, always in construction.

"Here in Dubai, the speed is different, things happen, the Arabs know what they are doing. In one week, the landscape changes. A friend of mine, an engineer, says that 25% of the cranes in the world are in Dubai," he exemplifies.

There, he noticed that there was great demand for products that Brazil can export. Marcelo is seeking fluency in English to represent a Brazilian company in the Arab country. While he does not reach that goal, he is communicating with many Brazilian businessmen interested in the Emirates.

He has already spoken to fruit exporters from the Northeast, to technology companies in Rio Grande do Sul and even to cheese bread producers (a bun typical of the southeastern Brazilian state of Minas Gerais).

"To have an idea of how much space there is for growth here, Sadia, which is very large, occasionally cannot supply specific products to the market. There has been no cheese bread on supermarket shelves for a few months now. That is, there is space for other companies too," he noted.

"And at groceries, the demand is even greater. You go to the corner market and ask: 'do you have passion fruit? Red guavas?' And the owner, normally an Asian who came here to try out a new life, answers: 'No, but if you can get some for me, I will buy them off you'."

Enthused with the world he discovered - and is still discovering - Marcelo decided to create a blog. The idea was to communicate to Brazilians that there is a place in the world called United Arab Emirates, which may also be called land of opportunities.

"I thought about establishing the blog to bring to Brazilians information about Dubai. I did not want to speak about my coming here, but about what goes on here, I wanted to remove a little of the bias that Brazilians have about the Arabs - like I had," he says.

Blog "Brazilian in Dubai, appreciating barbecues and chimarrão (the tea made from mate herb)" was established in May 2007 and, from then on, has already received 8,800 visitors.

Tracing the origin of the visitors, Marcelo discovered that they come from Africa, the United States and Asia. Most, of course, are Brazilian - as most of the content is in Portuguese. And among the Brazilians, most are from São Paulo.

"Many businessmen have already contacted me due to the blog. Some even invited me to the Big 5, to meet them," he said. The building sector fair took place in November 2007, in Dubai. And journalists also contacted Marcelo through the blog.

"Since the inauguration of the Emirates flight, Brazil has turned in this direction. I even felt this in the blog, the number of visitors has increased. In the beginning there were about 15 a day. Now the total ranges from 70 to 90.

Among the many ideas and projects for his new life in Dubai, Marcelo wants to take one of his great passions, chimarrão, there. More than importing mate herb, the gourd it is drunk in and other gadgets, the Brazilian wants to introduce this culture that is so typical of Brazilian southerners to the country - although it is a hot place (the drink is normally served hot).

"It is refreshing for some people," he guarantees. "I am going to set up kits with the items and with the history of chimarrão to give to the sheikhs here," he said.

Marcelo misses the green, seeing his son climbing trees. "The city is beautiful, there are flower, ornamental plants, all constantly irrigated - but greenery is lacking. After all, it is desert." He also misses the freedom of Brazil. "And, of course, his family, his friends... they thought I was crazy to come here."

The main reason for his move, however, his son Jeremy, adapted well to the new life. The boy studies at an international school. One of the reasons that caused Yasmin - who is a daughter of Lebanese parents - to move to Dubai was the chance to give her son a good education.

At school he studies with kids from Australia, New Zealand, the United States, India, China and also from the Emirates, learning from an early age how varied the world he lives in is. "Dealing with cultural differences in childhood is what gives you peace in the future," pointed out the proud father.

Marcelo's blog address: <http://marcelodubai.blogspot.com/>

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