



VERBATIM



Gabriel Reyes
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Gabriel Reyes took a circuitous route to found 10 years ago this month his Hollywood, Calif.-based PR agency Reyes Entertainment. He started out as an actor but found his true calling in PR and marketing after a disastrous meeting with a casting agent back in the '80s.

"I remember having an epiphany one day," he recalled. "These casting directors sit in a room all day with a camera and see 200 to 300 guys for a 30-second commercial. I walked in and I realized that, as I was doing my audition, the casting director wasn't even looking at me. She was having her lunch. I

think that the issue is that American mainstream media doesn't have any idea of who Hispanics really are. Hispanics ourselves have an image problem. So I thought that the way to do this is for me to get some kind of career in communications, so that I'm able to work on behalf of Hispanics."

That was then. Today Reyes is doing his part to "unmarginalize" Latinos working in Hollywood and share their accomplishments with both Spanish- and English-language media. He counts among his clients ABC, CBS daytime, Warner Home Video and Univision's Cristina Saralegui.

Reyes, who was born in Mexico but moved to Texas when he was 12, took time to discuss his entry into Hispanic entertainment PR and marketing with Marketing y Medios' Nancy Ayala, before serving on a panel during this week's NATPE (National Association of Television Program Executives) conference in Las Vegas.

Q: Who was your first client?

A: I started working with Nely Galán [of *The Swan* producing fame] called ProPix. We had a deal at HBO. The company's mandate was to begin producing Latino entertainment in English for American Latinos. I don't think HBO Latino was even launched yet. It was so early on, we're talking early '90s, that the term Latino market wasn't even in play yet. People still had the idea that it was all Univision and Telemundo, and that if you were Hispanic, why would you want to watch Latinos on American television? That's the kind of stuff that I would get all the time. But HBO had the vision to create programming for Latinos in English. And I thought, I've died and gone to heaven in working with [Galán]. At first I was her development executive, I was reading all these scripts and meeting with talent and directors, etc. etc. But at the same time, I was putting together pitch letters to local newspapers and local television stations telling them what we were doing. It was a very novel thing at that time, and most people didn't get that.

Q: Most probably didn't know who Nely was at that time.

A: When I met her, she was launching the Fox Latin American channel. She wasn't really on the map. I really started banging the drum about how we felt very strongly that English-speaking Latinos were being completely ignored by media in the United States, and we were expected to consume media coming from Latin America, especially television coming from Latin America, even though we didn't feel like any of that spoke to us. We were really hungry to develop and see images of ourselves living in the U.S. and our experience in the U.S. That was really unheard of way back then. One of the shows that we did manage to produce was *Loco Slam*, which was a Latino comedy special that was executive-produced by Paul Rodriguez. Carlos Mencia was in that show with a bunch of other Latino comedians who have gone on to bigger and better things. I started to put Nely on the map in terms of public relations and marketing [with articles in] *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*. That was around 1993-1994. It kind of went up after that. Very soon after that, we were able to get a bigger deal with Fox Television, and that's when Nely reconstituted the company and called it Galán Entertainment. I became her director of creative affairs at that time, handling a mix of development and PR and marketing. That's when people started to notice who was behind some of these efforts. I started to get calls from people saying, "I love what you're doing with Nely. Can you do that for me?"

Q: And you're still working with Nely?

A: Yes. Even after all these years, she's still my client, which is a rarity these days. Nely was very supportive when I told her I wanted to strike out on my own.

Q: *Who were some of your other earlier clients?*

A: I got *Latina* magazine [in 1995]. One of the big coups was when they were trying to figure out who should be on the cover of the first issue. I spoke to [then editor] Christy [Haubegger], and I said, "I think you should put this woman named Jennifer Lopez on the cover. She has *Blood and Wine* coming up, she has a new movie called *The Money Train*. She was in *My Family/Mi Familia*, which was her very first film. I said, "I think she's very talented, and I think she's going to be very big." So we put her on the cover, and it was her very first cover and her first in-depth story in any magazine, and lo and behold, as the magazine came out in May of '96, that's when it was announced that she was cast as Selena [in the same-name movie]. It was perfect because right as the magazine came out, there was a press conference announcing Jennifer Lopez as Selena, so I passed out a lot of the magazines there at the press conference. Nobody really had an in-depth story on Jennifer except us. So that was a great first step there. I remained with *Latina* magazine as its publicist for the next five years, and I still had my own company. I also began to work with the studios and networks. What I felt was before then we were a marginalized market. That is to say, everybody thought we were all in Spanish, and there were these two parallel worlds existing side by side, and never kind of meeting. To this day, I think there's some of that still left with the whole Spanish-language world. Sometimes mainstream media has no idea. My idea was that I was going to build a company that was going to pull down those barriers, to say that it doesn't matter what language you speak, we are Latinos living in the United States. Some of us speak English, some of us speak Spanish, most of us speak both, and we deserve to be in mainstream media.

Q: *It sounds like your business model started as informing the general-market about Latino entertainment personalities, but you also deal with Spanish-language media. Please explain how you work with both.*

A: Because I felt like I would have no limits, I would have no barriers, I began to be an expert in both English- and Spanish-language media. Some of my clients originated in the Latino space, but they wanted to be promoted in mainstream, so I did that. Some of my clients originated in mainstream space and wanted to be promoted in Hispanic space. I've been going back and forth between those two worlds. And the whole idea was, why not? If you're looking for consumers for your show or project, why would you market in only one market, why not do both?

Q: *Is it equally difficult to convince Spanish media that it should be covering what a Latino actor is working on in the mainstream, be it television or film or some other medium?*

A: Sometimes it is difficult, but if it's something that's palatable for their consumers, they will do it. More and more, they're apt to do it because Spanish-language media does pay attention to what's going on in Hollywood. They regularly cover it. But there is some resistance in some quarters, based on who it is, what the project is, or whether it conflicts with what their parent media company is. I've always been very creative in terms of how to get the more ink and the most notoriety for my clients and still keep all my relationships intact.

Q: *Sounds like you've seen the entire gamut as entertainment marketing has evolved, as both markets are covering the same thing.*

A: More and more, that's happening. By virtue of everything that's been going on. It's not only the unprecedented growth of our population and the spending power, and the fact that we are moving into positions of power and importance within mainstream U.S. Mainstream corporate America has begun to realize that there's this whole other demographic here. Contrary to popular belief, Hispanics do have money to spend and do outspend other groups in a lot of different categories. Once all that information started to come out, then it really became a snowball effect. Many companies and corporations very actively began to pursue this other market and began to integrate their outreach into their overall plan.

Q: *That brings us to some of your current clients. You've worked with ABC for a long time, more so in the last year.*

A: ABC is the one that I've put a lot of time in, not only *Ugly Betty*, which is one of the breakout hits, but I've been working with *George Lopez* since its inception back in 2002. We're going into a sixth season now, and *George Lopez* is going into syndication. We've played a big role in the success that, that show has had, and one of the groundbreaking shows in terms of Latino images on mainstream television. We work with *Ugly Betty*, *Desperate Housewives*; we work with *Lost*. It's been wonderful because ABC itself has done such a great job at including Hispanics at all levels in their shows. Most of their shows has at least one Hispanic in them, and I have to say that is a great asset in order to build viewership of Hispanics who maybe before weren't tuning into ABC programming.

Q: *Do you still work with any Hispanic media groups, print or television?*

A: I worked with [English-language Latino youth cable network] *Si TV* several times when it launched and [then again] about a year and a half ago. I did work with Telemundo when Nely was president of entertainment. Of course, I work with Cristina Saralegui. So, yes, I do work with Spanish-language properties.

Q: *What's it like working with Cristina, and what does that entail?*

A: With Cristina I feel such closeness to her because not only is she a wonderful role model, but she's an exceptional person herself. Her husband, Marcos, and their family are very kind and very generous and exceptional in what they do. They make my job very easy, because it's kind of a friendship situation where we can talk on the phone and talk like friends and then talk about work and what it is that we need to do. When we go to events, it's kind of like a family gathering. You kind of get together, you have a couple of drinks, you do your work, you go out to dinner afterwards. They're always interested in having fun in what they do. I think that's a great thing for me because I'm so focused on work that sometimes I forget to have fun. Now that she's branched out into other areas besides her television show, there's more of an opportunity to promote her in her different facets, not only in Spanish [on the entertainment side] but also in English. I'm doing a lot in

terms of her furniture collection [Casa Cristina].

Q: *On Jan. 18, you'll be part of a panel at NATPE called "Si Hablo English! Do You Want My Eyeballs and My Money?" What do you hope to impart during the conference?*

A: It's very apropos, and it's very timely for this convention to be hearing about the developments going on in the Hispanic world, especially vis-à-vis the younger generation that speaks English and consumes media in English since that still seems to be a novelty for a lot of people. I'm excited to impart some strategies and ideas about this market.

Q: *I remember you mentioned some time ago that your aspiration was to become an actor yourself. What happened?*

A: Yes, I started out as an actor, and actually lived in New York throughout the 1980s after graduating from The University of Texas with a degree in acting and directing. I was lucky enough to get work and immediately join the Screen Actors Guild and AFTRA, the American Federation of Television & Radio Artists, as well as Actors' Equity Association for stage plays. So I was very lucky to be able to get into the union right away and began to work in commercials. I did a couple of small film roles such as in *The Believers*, with Jimmy Smits, if you can believe that, and Martin Sheen. I was in a bunch of soap operas. But what I began to realize was how stereotypical Hispanic roles were, I was either playing the waiter or the South American revolutionary. So I started to think for myself that I wanted to fulfill more potential that I had, and it wasn't really happening on the acting side, not that I didn't love the craft of acting, but there was a lot of frustration in the actual going to look for work. At that time, being a Hispanic was really a liability. If you had a Hispanic surname or you looked Hispanic, casting directors wouldn't touch you, because you were just not going to get cast in any American project unless it specifically asked for Hispanic. ... The idea that I was going to go into PR wasn't jelled yet, but I really thought that I had to get into some kind of communications and promotion career that would help me to do this.

Q: *After 10 years, what's the next step?*

A: The next step for me is to continue the work that I've been doing, and obviously grow my business and also to begin to look at myself as a producer of projects. I need to look at other great opportunities to continue in this wave of Latino projects, and see how I can work myself in behind the camera on some of these other projects.

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