

SMEs should explore Brazil

Opinion

Michael Sherlock

We will hear a lot about Brazil over the next four years and small and medium businesses with global ambitions should take notice.

In 2014 the Latin American nation hosts the FIFA World Cup and in 2016 the Olympics.

Brazil, along with China, India and Russia, is one of the top four emerging countries for this century.

I have visited the other three so when I was invited to speak at a franchising conference in Brazil in June, I was keen to go (the other motivating factor was that it was a chance to add to my list of countries visited, as I have set myself a goal to keep the countries visited ahead of my age).

My expectations of the franchise show were very low — a small event, with lots of international brands on offer. But I was also keen to see how South America was travelling economically.

I only had a limited time to fit a few countries in around attending the franchise show in Sao Paulo. I spent a couple of days in Buenos Aires, Argentina, looking at retail and checking out their local franchise brands. It was as I had expected; a country emerging from



Reconstruction of the national stadium for the World Cup and Olympics is one symbol of a vibrant Brazil.

Photo: REUTERS

its turbulent past, still scared by galloping inflation, with lots of potential, but not totally recovered.

After arriving in Sao Paulo late at night I noticed the difference and felt the pulse of the place. It was far more vibrant, confident and very self-assured. It's a huge place that never stops.

The next day I presented ourselves at the franchise expo and what a surprise — three huge halls packed with local brands and punters keen to find out about franchising.

Being the last speaker on a panel

of franchising experts from around the globe, I decided to lighten things up and compare the many similarities between Brazil and Australia. Both are relatively young and both have stable democracies.

Although Brazil's population of 192 million dwarfs our 23 million, we have similar export profiles, especially around primary production and mining.

Brazilians and Australians live on the beach and love to party. And both our national sporting teams don the green and gold. Of course there's a language difference, but

small and medium exporters seeking growth markets shouldn't let this obstacle put them off.

From the trip and talks with Brazilian businessmen and women, I got a real insight into this great southern land.

Let's hope we can forge closer ties in the next decade. Despite the language difference, we have a lot in common.

■ *Michael Sherlock is former chief executive of franchise Brumby's Bakeries and co-author of the business change book Jumpshift!*