

## Focused on New York

An Interview with **Cristyne L. Nicholas**,  
Chief Executive Officer and co-Founder, **Nicholas & Lence Communications**

**EDITORS' NOTE** As the former President and CEO of NYC & Company, Cristyne Nicholas established creative and strategic marketing initiatives to rebuild NYC's tourist industry following the devastating September 11th attacks with the city's first-ever consumer television campaign, creating citywide promotions and attracting perception-altering events including the World Economic Forum, the Republican National Convention, Country Music Awards, Broadway Under the Stars, CultureFest, the NYC



Cristyne L. Nicholas

Half Marathon, and the 2014 Super Bowl. Mayor Bloomberg appointed Nicholas to serve as a founding member of the Latin Media and Entertainment Commission and Governor Andrew Cuomo named her to chair the Tourism Advisory Council. Nicholas spent much of the summer crisscrossing the state to promote New York's vast tourism resources through iconic events as well as helping to rebuild tourism to areas hit hard by Hurricanes Sandy and Irene with targeted TV campaigns for Coney Island, Long Island, and the Catskills. She began her career in government and politics as a campaign aide to U.S. Senator Bill Bradley (N.J.), as Press Secretary to U.S. Representative Helen Bentley (M.D.), and as a campaign press secretary for President George H.W. Bush. She also served as Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's Director of Communications. She currently serves as the Chairman of the century old Broadway Association and on boards such as the ABNY Steering Committee, The Pelham Picture House, and Percent for Art.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Nicholas & Lence Communications ([nicholaslence.com](http://nicholaslence.com)) is a New York City-based strategic communications, public relations, and government affairs firm with clients such as the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Statue Cruises, Brookfield Property Partners, United Airlines, and the International Equestrian Group. It specializes in media relations, community and government relations, crisis management, destination marketing, and corporate positioning.

**What was your vision underlying the start of this business and why did you feel the timing was right?**

I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit and I wanted to try to build a business from scratch and see how successful it could become.

**Is travel and tourism the main focus or is it broader?**

We thought the focus would be mostly travel and tourism but it's amazing how it has evolved into many different facets. A common thread for most of our clients is that they do business in New York or want to do business in New York.

**How do you characterize this firm?**

It's a communications firm. Whether we're communicating to the media or to the public, or as my partner, George Lence, does with government affairs and

decision-makers, we have to help hone and deliver the appropriate message across all the different size companies we work with.

**Is the tourism messaging for New York City where it needs to be today?**

The message early on from 1999 to 2001 was much different than it was after 9/11.

It was tough to market a city that people were afraid to visit, as well as a city whose own citizens were in a period of mourning, so we had to strike a delicate balance.

Mayor Giuliani was a terrific leader and pulled together the New York City business sector and the arts and culture sector, making it clear it was in the city's best interest to keep the city open and welcoming. He gave us the green light to move ahead to market the city, but we were still very cautious about how we went about it.

**What was the secret to your success?**

Our first step was to go after the low-hanging fruit, as we wanted to make sure that New Yorkers would be there to sustain the arts, hotels, etc. We asked folks close by to take a vacation in and support their city – to be a tourist in their own town and as a boost to patriotic tourism. This began in the five boroughs, and grew outward to the Tri-State area. In a matter of weeks, it became the Northeast Corridor and then it became a national effort. I recall that the first parade following 9/11 was on Columbus Day and a group of 800 Oregonians showed up wearing "Oregon Loves NY" T-shirts. We arranged for them to march in the parade, which received national media attention sending a message to others that "To Help New York, Go to New York." We welcomed 5,000 Canadians on November 5th and many similar international visitors from around the globe. We had help from many television networks in New York in the form of free ad space.

We did our first television commercial, and celebrities like Robert DeNiro, Billy Crystal, Barbara Walters, Whoopi Goldberg, Ben Stiller, Derek Jeter, and Yogi Berra showed up, wanting to help.

Then we went international and we're seeing the benefit of that now. We saw the huge impact of what New Yorkers could do. They felt it was their obligation and duty to support Broadway shows and, in so doing, support the city.

For a good two weeks after 9/11, actors would come onstage after the show and, with the audience, sing "God Bless America." There would not be a dry eye in the house – people were holding hands with strangers. What we did with NYC & Company really helped people feel the pride in New York.

**Should more be done to bring attention to tourism in the U.S.?**

I give credit to President Obama because he pulled industry leaders like Jon Tisch, Roger Dow, and Bill Marriott and created what is now Brand USA. Whenever a visa waiver constituent comes into the U.S., they pay \$15, and part of that money goes directly to Brand USA. So it's private-sector money, not taxpayer government money.

**Are you surprised with the unified voice behind bettering New York City and how critical is the private sector role in that?**

The private sector role has always been crucial to New York's success. Our diversity of industries is what makes New York such a powerful city. New Yorkers want to have buy-in and there should be even more partnership. If we are overtaxed and overregulated, crime goes up and businesses could leave.

**Are you ever concerned about New York not remaining a global leader?**

I trust it will remain a global leader but certainly that concerns me. We can't rest on our prior successes. For instance, I view movies and TV shows that are filmed here as an important part of marketing for the city and state. Although it doesn't seem like a lot in terms of the greater budget, many of these movies or TV pilots are being made in New York on a shoestring budget. If they can go to Toronto and save money, they will.

I remember when *Home Alone II* came out. Every kid wanted their parents to take them to New York City. Those kids are now the parents and they are taking their kids to New York. ●