

## **Growing Market for Talk**

### **A new crop of Hispanic motivational speakers finds corporations, associations, and schools eager to pay for a pep talk.**

By [Rick Laezman](#)

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Florida-based research firm Market-Data Enterprises has compiled the first-ever list of top-earning Hispanic motivational speakers. The list points up how the Hispanic public-speaking industry has entered “the growth mode,” according to Carlos Conejo, a corporate speaker who ranks fifth on the list. Mr. Conejo notes the range of styles and subject matter of the top speakers as a response to needs in the Hispanic community.

Samuel Betances, the top money-maker on the list with estimated billings of \$1 million, is a veteran civil rights activist and “edutainer” who speaks about public policy and educational achievement. Pegine Echevarria, Consuelo Kickbusch, and Jimmy Cabrera also work the school circuit, talking to faculty gatherings or student assemblies.

On the business side, Mr. Conejo concentrates on companies with large Hispanic workforces or that want to tap the Hispanic market. Louisiana-based Julio Melara represents the pure strain of motivational speaker, geared to front-line salespeople. Fred Soto conducts leadership training seminars.

A diversity message appears in most speeches, with the speaker utilizing personal experiences to illustrate the point. “I am the least boring person in the world,” declares Joachim Deposada, a clinical psychologist who teaches team-building. Mr. Deposada has spent more than 30 years as a professional speaker; his client list includes several NBA teams. He is also a truly international speaker. Nearly 65 percent of his appearances take place outside the United States, in countries as different as Argentina and Saudi Arabia.

In contrast to Mr. Deposada – who cites his Spanish accent as a humorous advantage at the podium – Julio Melara doesn’t focus on Hispanic issues or audiences. “We are all looking for the same thing,” he says, and he delivers it by talking about success through time management and positive thinking. A lifelong overachiever, the former publisher and radio station owner now speaks 44 times a year and is currently involved in three book projects.

Both Mr. Melara and Mr. Deposada work to establish their brand beyond speaking engagements. Books, audiotapes, and CDs are some of the favorite brand extensions. MarketData reports that none of the top Hispanic speakers has authored a U.S. bestseller, although Mr. Deposada has several bestsellers in Latin America. Normally, sales occur in conjunction with speaking assignments or via the Internet.

“In this industry, they say it takes about seven books to get noticed, and 10 years to become an overnight success,” jokes Mr. Conejo. “Products create a different revenue stream. ... If I can get money off the Internet, I can be more selective and raise my [speaking] fees.”

Mr. Melara also mentions his ability to increase his price – another indication of an industry on the upswing. The consensus fee among those interviewed for this article hovers in the range of \$5,000 to \$6,500 per appearance. Mr. Conejo says an established speaker may work with many speakers’ bureaus and booking

services, each targeting a specific market such as schools, nonprofit associations, or conventions. In exchange for landing the business, a bureau takes 20 to 25 percent of the speaker's fee.

For the future, Mr. Conejo sees schools as a growing market. Several of the top speakers have already capitalized on the need for student motivation. Retired Lt. Col. Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch talks about perseverance, using her entrée to the speaking circuit as an example. "I started out eight years ago knocking down doors," she says. She had retired after 20 years in the U.S. Army, ending her career as the highest-ranking Hispanic woman in combat support. At the time of her retirement, she had just been selected to become a battalion commander and was well on her way to the rank of colonel.

Instead, Ms. Kickbusch chose motivational speaking. Today she spends approximately 18 days each month on the road, making an estimated annual income of \$400,000.

With a background in sales and standup comedy, Pegine Echevarria offers an unconventional presentation to audiences. "I'm competing against MTV," says Ms. Echevarria, who mixes her message with humor about cultural issues. "The more I make people laugh, the more they retain the information that I'm giving them. And the more they retain, the more likely they are to implement the message."

Growth of the Hispanic speakers' circuit addresses a problem acknowledged by business and social leaders – a lack of role models for rank-and-file Hispanics.

"Who do you see at big events? Mostly politicians, celebrities, and sports figures," says Mr. Conejo. "It's nice to see Jennifer Lopez or Edward James Olmos, but can they speak? And can they connect with the average person? Professional speakers fill that need, and we look at the [speaking] platform not as a right, but as a privilege."

**Source:** HISPANIC BUSINESS Magazine

<b>Top Hispanic Motivational Speakers</b>	
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Estimated annual revenues</b>
Samuel Betances	\$1,000,000
Pegine Echevarria	\$435,000
Jimmy Cabrera	\$375,000
Fred Soto	\$350,000
Carlos Conejo	\$336,000
Julio Melara	\$312,000
Joachim Deposada	\$275,000
Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch	\$250,000
Rosita Marcano-Lopez	\$75,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,408,000</b>
Source: MarketData Enterprises report, "The Market for Self-Improvement Products & Services"	