

INTERVIEW

“Centres have to embrace today’s digital economy”

Interview with Aloysius Arlando, CEO of SingEx Holding, on competition and the critical role centres play in their local economies, the importance of freedom of speech and what will be his priorities as newly elected President of the International Association of Convention Centres, AIPC.

tw: You said the annual AIPC conference was targeting content to the leading and pressing issues facing senior convention centre executives. Which two ones were actually most discussed in Sydney?

Aloysius Arlando: Two key issues discussed revolve round adapting to competition and the critical role centres play in their local economies. We can only expect competition to intensify, and centres will need to review and strengthen their business strategies and capabilities so that they can sharpen their competitive edge and at the same time continue to be relevant to the destination’s economy. Centres can no longer focus just on hardware and software assets but must have the ability to successfully embrace today’s digital economy. Executives will come to grips with digitalization, not for its own sake, but how it has to permeate through key functions of the centre to achieve their desired objectives be they driving revenues or creating better customer experiences.

What do you think are the biggest issues facing convention centres today in general and which opportunities do they entail?

How to trend-set and trail blaze in today’s digital economy. It’s not about embracing digitalisation for digitalisation’s sake, but about what does digitalisation mean for a centre or do we want digitalisation to do for a centre. To drive revenues? For better customer experience? So, this transformation process needs to start with a firm vision and strategy. Centres are striving earnestly to adopt appropriate digital transformation initiatives that can help engage customers and grow the business. Digital transformation is not just about adopting new technologies. It is also about getting the right digital talents to support and be integrated into the organisation, while our existing talents must all be prepared to embrace the new direction moving forward through edification process, as well as partnering with digital accelerators to ensure speed-to-market.

Can you give an example for such a partnership of a venue with a digital accelerator and what benefit it brings along for both sides?

Centres are exploring to varying extents partnerships with digital players to accelerate their efforts to boost effective marketing outreach; meeting of customers’ needs; and delivery of delightful customer experience. For example, centres can partner with digital accelerator companies to deliver innovative outcomes such as a customer-focused dynamic websites and virtual immersive experience eg VR and live 3D representation to create greater value for the customers and to form a deeper understanding of what customers really care about.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term as President? What will be your first priority?

For members: That every member derives value through their participation in AIPC and tapping on the collective wisdom of the association. I plan to better understand from members in the different regions, what are the issues, challenges and opportunities they are facing so that we update or devise programmes that meet their collective needs. For AIPC: To position AIPC as a progressive, thought-leader in the global MICE industry.

Where will the industry be five years from now?

Convention centres will move beyond being venue providers or even partners and solution providers, to community builders. That means being an integral player in a destination’s brand positioning and delivering economic and social value to the destination.

How important is the freedom of speech and of science for our industry and your members?

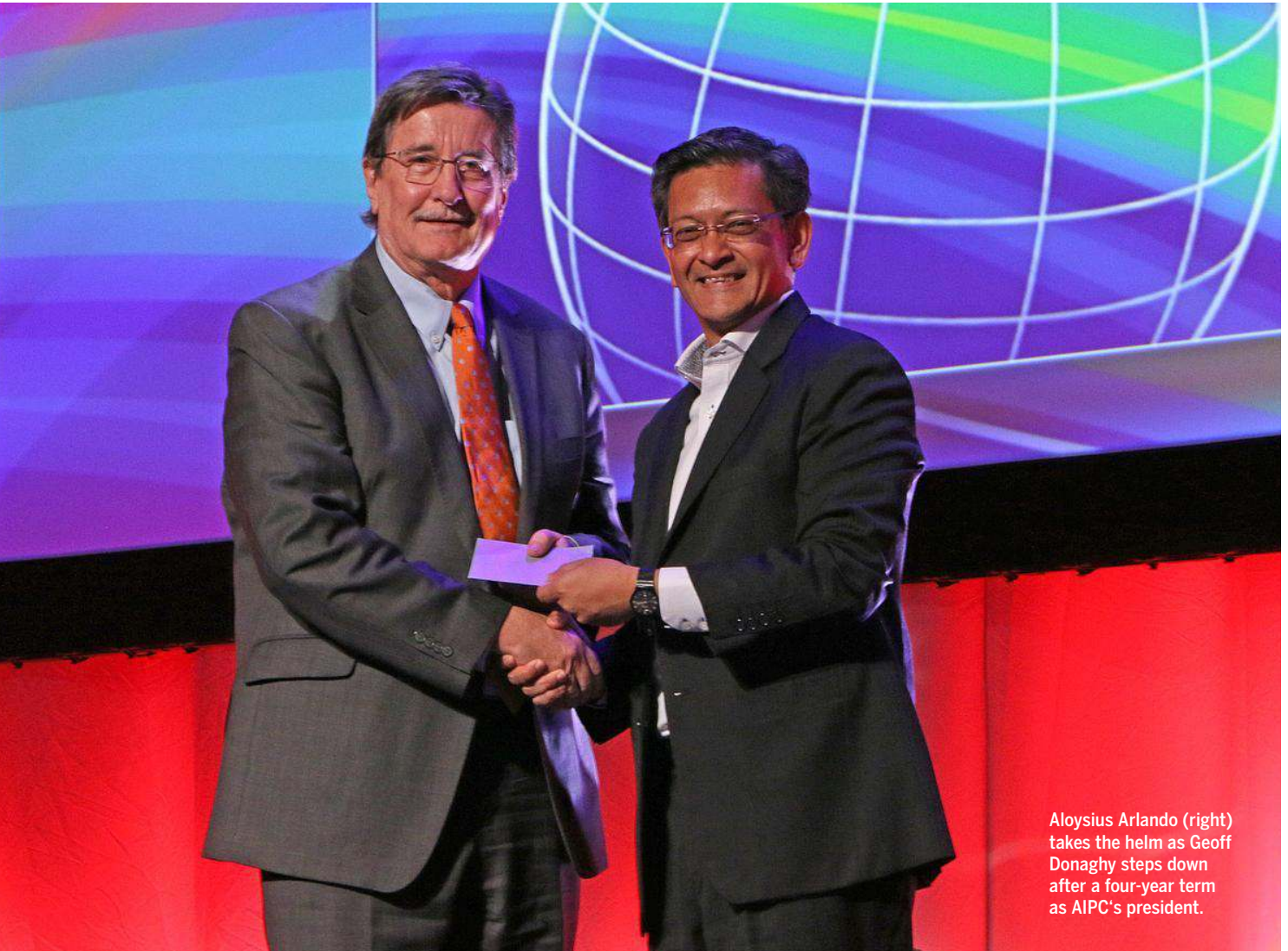
The primary focus of our industry and members in general is an enhancement of trade, business, knowledge exchange and network development. In this context, information sharing, training and development and the freedom of intellectual expression become essential for synthesizing ideas and achieving economic and social outcomes.

Few organisers rule out to stage certain congresses and conferences in countries that do not

“Convention centres will move beyond being venue providers to community builders”

Aloysius Arlando,
AIPC





Aloysius Arlando (right) takes the helm as Geoff Donaghy steps down after a four-year term as AIPC's president.

share the same values when it comes to democracy and an open society – can you understand them or would you like them to consider or to let them know something from your point of view?

We live in an interconnected world, both physically and digitally. What happens in Asia matters in Europe and USA, and the converse is true. Trade events and conferences provide an ideal platform for players in an industry to come together, exchange knowledge, glean new insights, discover new products and services; and spark off new business ideas and solutions. Convention centres are best placed to enable these event platforms to achieve their goals while at the same time generate socio-economic spin-offs for that destination and local communities. While societies have different value

systems, we should celebrate such diversity and take a pragmatic approach towards engaging different communities so that the full benefits of trade events and conferences can be reaped.

Formerly open or more liberal societies and governments around the world shift away from freedom of press, speech and society. This raises concerns among travel and meeting planners. How has our industry and how have your members been affected and taken action so far?

Our industry is all about bringing people together, fostering relationships, getting them connected and driving positive outcomes. For this to be effective, it requires travel and face to face interaction. As government policies change or become unfavourable or external shocks like healthcare or terrorism occur, the meetings industry has shown to be a resilient one. These trying times rally our local and global industry players to continue our advocacy on the value of the meetings industry; and render support to fellow industry players who may be affected.

INTERVIEW: FRANK WEWODA

www.aipc.org

INFO

► **Aloysius Arlando** is the Chief Executive Officer of SingEx Holding managing the Singapore EXPO Convention and Exhibition Centre, among other venues. www.singex.com