

The Voice of AIPC West With the Night

AIPC CEO **Sven Bossu** reflects on how associations need to invent new ways for developing standards and practices which allow their members communities to grow.

When I was offered the opportunity to take over the helm of AIPC early this year, I had some very clear ideas on where I wanted to take the association. And I still do - the ideas are simply quite different. It is something I share with many of my colleagues in the ecosystem associations: the world we knew came to a halt and we need to invent a new one. And we must remember our purpose when doing so.

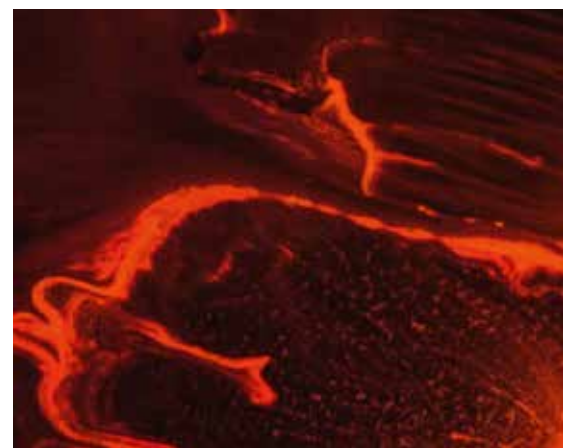
During the AIPC Annual Conference in September, I more than once thought about Beryl Markham - who wrote the book "West with the Night". She was unconventional, passionate and courageous. She grew up in Kenya, spoke Swahili and went hunting with the local tribes. Later she became a famous trainer of race horses, before turning herself into one of the first bush pilots. And she was of course the first person to fly solo, non-stop across the Atlantic from Britain to North America in 1936, where she landed after 21 hours - with a broken engine. This is one of her most famous quotes: "*I have*

learned that if you must leave a place that you have lived in and loved and where all your yesteryears are buried deep, leave it any way except a slow way, leave it the fastest way you can."

NEXT NORMAL

And listening to colleagues over the last months, that is exactly what we are doing as an industry. We are not slowly evolving towards the next normal. Instead, we are implementing changes expected to happen in five to ten years in less than six months. New territories are being explored, new products and services are being rolled out and all of us are have become aficionados of re-inventing business models. The risk for any organization in these circumstances - associations and private companies alike - is that we lose sight of our purpose. What do we want to contribute to the society and world we are living in?

It is worthwhile to "zoom out" for a moment and really think about this before stampeding direction revenue diversification, product development and go-to-market strategies. The very basics of what associations do, has not changed: we create a community around a common cause. In the case of AIPC, it is a community of event venues which have



a common goal - provide excellence to their customers. And it's our belief that the best way of doing so is by creating a community of practice: a group of people who "share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (for those interested in the topic: *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*. By Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, Harvard Business School Press, 2002). Nothing new here and I believe this is something shared by a lot of associations.

Now let's take it one step further: The structural characteristics of a community of practice are again redefined to a domain of knowledge, a notion of community and a practice.

For AIPC the domain - or the common ground, giving meaning to the actions of the members - is venue management. The community is AIPC's stronghold: our community consists of senior venue managers who are fierce competitors on the one hand AND who are willing to interact and share ideas in order to grow as a group. The third pillar is the practice: the specific focus around which the community develops, shares and maintains its core of knowledge. And it's the latter which AIPC needs to fundamentally change.

DIGITAL AGILITY

The business of venues is clear: experience management. Together with event organizers, venues create unique experiences by offering spaces, facilities and services which allow to do so and by contributing to its educational, research and quality standards programme, the members of AIPC have developed the practice and have grown as a community. Now, an additional practice needs to be created which needs to be interwoven with the existing one.

Digital - despite popular belief - is not new to event venues. This was demonstrated by the agility some of our members came up with digital solutions - including interconnected venues, TV studios and even the use of holograms. Technology being tested by venues was - in record time - put into production and offered to customers, in many cases with remarkable results. And while it should not be a surprise to anybody that priority was given to speed, we should neither be surprised that the notion of practice was somewhat left behind - resulting in questions around standards, pricing models and much more. Things which remain to be nailed down, as both event organizers and event venues will admit.

Which brings us back to the purpose of AIPC: bring together a community

of event venues, striving for excellence. Well, that notion of excellence will need to be adapted via an additional practice. And similar to Beryl Markham, we will have to be passionate, unconventional and courageous. Exactly the stuff venue managers are made of. And as an association, AIPC will need to be equally bold to ensure that the additional practice is shared and developed by its entire community.

The importance of associations when it comes to defining standards, which allow communities to grow and develop, cannot be underestimated - whether it is medical, financial or in the field of organized events. It is now up to us - association managers - to come up with new ways for developing standards and practices which allow our communities to grow, with our purpose as starting point and the voice of our members as guidance.

This article was contributed by Sven Bossu, CEO of AIPC, with which Boardroom has a special partnership. AIPC represents a global network of over 190 leading centres in 64 countries with the active involvement of more than 1000 management-level professionals worldwide. www.aipc.org

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