

INDUSTRY  
VIEWSAIPC Annual  
Conference 2021SVEN BOSSU is  
the CEO of AIPC.

# Elevating organised events

**Sven Bossu** tells us why he is looking forward to the upcoming AIPC Annual Conference in June.

**T**he theme of AIPC's Annual Conference this year is 'elevation', reflecting the ambition of the AIPC community not only to reopen for organised events, but also to take these events to the next level. It also made us think about how to make sure we reach our global membership, while offering a great experience.

I will start by being fully transparent: our Annual Conference last year was our first hybrid one and we learned a lot. Our list of things to improve did not seem to end and we were struggling when trying to find a magic formula. The key question was: how can we combine a digital conference with a live one and offer great value to all participants? Some examples: if you have a session where all speakers are 'streamed in', what is the value for the persons attending the live event? You might as well sit at home. And a networking lunch is great for the people on-site but watching each other eat sandwiches via Zoom is just not the same thing. We also faced the interesting challenge of time zones and how we offer the same value to our global membership – from Sydney to Toronto.

## OBJECTIVELY SPEAKING

So, we took a few steps back and asked ourselves the most important question: what do the participants want? What creates value? In our case, that is straightforward: networking, learning and sharing ideas.

The next step was to define how this is best done in a digital environment and in a live environment, which turned out to be very different. So, we took the decision not to create a cocktail and go for the pure thing: we completely split the digital and live conferences and will in fact have two conferences, one following the other. Doing so offered several advantages when

it comes to creating value, because instead of desperately trying to find a (sub)optimal mix, you can choose the best fit-for-purpose solution. It does come with some consequences though.

## LEARNING CURVE

For the digital conference, we wanted to offer participants an interactive version of the BBC World Service, so you get access to a similar, high-quality programme that fits your time zone. In practice, this means we start the digital conference days at 03:30 European time and run till 23:00. This also implies that you have shifts of audiences; you start with viewers in Oceania and Asia, followed by Europe and Africa, and end with the Americas. As a result, some of the content needs to be repeated to reach all audiences, but it must be scheduled in a way that viewers in a specific time zone have access to a programme with as few repeats as possible.

That said, 100% digital comes with a lot of upsides: it enables you to customise both format and content to the expected viewers at a given moment. It also allows you to fully leverage all the tools the digital platform used offers in terms of gamification, networking or experience and mitigates operational risks.

The same goes for the live conference, taking place in the SwissTech Convention Centre in Lausanne. Instead of putting in place camera teams and streaming technology, we could focus on offering the best possible on-site experience, leveraging the assets of the centre to function as a perfect platform for learning and networking – including breakouts, networking lunches and the much-missed coffee breaks.

The route chosen by AIPC might not be viable for all organisers, but I would recommend at least considering it. 