

Being Global in a Non-Aligned World

Global associations like AIPC face the challenging task of managing a diverse membership while navigating differences in values. As the world undergoes political and socioeconomic changes, associations must transform their roles to better serve their members. This evolving landscape presents a significant challenge that requires careful consideration and adaptability, as **Sven Bossu**, AIPC CEO, writes.

At this year's AIPC Annual Conference, we had the pleasure of welcoming participants from 35 countries across the globe - from Australia to Canada and anything in between. This diversity brings a tremendous value to the conference and to AIPC, as it allows to share knowledge at a global level. At the same time, this needs to be balanced with the fact that business realities can be very different per region, therefore requiring tailor made approaches. However, the biggest challenge will be around values.

From the start - back in 1958 - AIPC had global ambitions, which have resulted into today's global AIPC Community. We have members in almost 60 countries and have the ambition to further increase our geographical footprint, focusing on Africa and India in the next two years, as we realize that the expected increase in trade in these regions will result in a booming event market and therefore an increased need for the value AIPC brings.

Each new addition brings value to the association and its members in terms of knowledge, sharing of best practices and - very important - it stimulates the continuous improvement of AIPC's value proposal in terms of products and services to offer/develop.

GLOBAL APPROACH

This global approach also allowed us to have global companies as business partner, with a win-win on different levels. Just as example: Steve MacKenzie, Chief Innovation Officer at Momentus Technologies, is a permanent teacher at the yearly AIPC Academy, providing upcoming venue leaders to opportunity unique

access to an industry leader. The same goes for Populous' design director Adam Paulitsch.

At the same time, AIPC does face a number of barriers, all impacting the key success factor of any association: the member engagement, which - at AIPC - is measured by participation of the members to our (virtual) events.

First of all, there is a very practical barrier: having members spread across different time zones and geographical locations makes coordination and collaboration challenging. Just as an example: if we want to hold interactive webinar, we need to schedule them at least at two slots in order to ensure that Asian, European and American members can participate, which of course has an impact on cost, but also on the level of interaction which can be created.

A second challenge is related to cultural and language barriers. Fortunately, the very nature of the business our members are in - international exhibitions and conferences - makes this perhaps easier than for other associations. Nevertheless, it remains an important point of attention when organizing events, especially when it comes to interactive formats such as workshops or discussion groups.

Thirdly, there are the financial constraints at the level of the members and of the association. Our summits and flagship educational activity - the Academy - all take place in Europe. For the summits, this is related to the fact that we organize them just before major industry events (IMEX in Frankfurt and IBTM in Barcelona), leveraging the presence of our members at those

events. However, a number of our members do not attend these events and/or do not have the budget to attend. This has resulted in the roll-out of a set of regional summits (Africa, APAC and South America), having a positive impact on engagement levels but stretching our resources (both human and financial).

GETTING ON WITH THEM

I think all these barriers are known to all global associations and - to quote the late Queen Elizabeth - we should just get on with them. But in this non-aligned world (as the cover story of the June edition of *Foreign Affairs* stated) another barrier has become far more important: politics and socioeconomic factors. In an excellent article written by ESAE's Ioannis Pallas recently published on the website of Boardroom, an analysis was made of the impact of these factors or to put it in Ioannis' words: "*From embracing ESG and DEI policies to actively addressing the public and incorporating political criteria into decision-making, associations are transforming their traditional roles to navigate complex challenges and better serve their members in today's ever-changing environment*".

This is indeed no longer about practical matters, but about values, resulting into uncomfortable discussions. It is one thing not to bring an event to a destination of which the values are not aligned with the values of the association, but how do you manage a global membership in a world in flux? For me, this will be the biggest challenge for global associations and there will be no single answer.

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

