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# TheMover

The independent voice of the global moving industry.

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International Mobility Alliance . Page 28



# TheMover

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## REPORT: IMA CONFERENCE 2018



● Above, left to right: delegates booked 30-minute meeting slots with one another; below and right: 151 people attended the conference.



# Four nights in BANGKOK



● Left: a relaxed, friendly atmosphere; Steve Jordan and borrowed guitar; right: delegates with personalised gifts.

A report on the first ever IMA conference in Bangkok, by Steve Jordan.

It was in the sultry heat of Bangkok that 151 members of the mobility industry gathered for the first ever International Mobility Alliance conference. It was new and so expected to be different.

Anything new is always something of a risk and starting a new industry event, in the midst of a crowded convention calendar, was bold and gutsy. But founder Patricia Jade Ooi said that she had a lot of support and inspiration to move forward.

And that did seem to be so. When I arrived the day before the conference started, many delegates had already been there for two days. They had arrived early to take in the delights of one of the world's most vibrant cities and spend some time together. The atmosphere was relaxed, friendly, and charged with anticipation. Everyone expected it to be a success. They were not to be disappointed.

Despite her modest style, it was obvious that Pat had worked very hard to get everything 'just so' for her inaugural event. The Partner4Partner Scheduler, sponsored by SIRVA, enabled delegates to book a 30-minute slot to have each other's undivided attention and it worked flawlessly with very few, if any, no shows.

The refreshments were a nice touch too and there was plenty of space for people to get away from the crowd if they wanted a quiet moment of reflection or to have an unscheduled meeting. The food was lavish with many delegates saying they felt lost in the variety of food served.

Thank goodness there was no roll call! Instead, Adrian, the vivacious MC, kicked off the proceedings with a warm welcome, there was a brief introduction from Pat and then Craig Somerville representing Operation Smile, the conference's designated charity, gave a moving presentation of how the funds are used to provide surgery and post-operative care for children with cleft lip and palate. It was estimated that the sum donated by the IMA2018 community would change (and perhaps save) the lives of six children.

I was invited to be the keynote speaker followed by Fred Schlomann, Vice President, APAC for Airinc and Calvin Chin, Global Operations Manager from Altair Global. The common theme of the presentations was the impact of technology and what it takes to stay in and succeed in the business.

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## REPORT: IMA CONFERENCE 2018



But if there was little difference of proceedings with other industry events, I did detect a different atmosphere all around. Maybe it was just because it was new. I don't know why it felt different, but it did. When people went out, they tended to go together – no private parties or groups, just friends, connecting and spending quality time together. Everyone looked out and took care of each other. There were no egos to be massaged. The entertainment was simple, no lavish dinners and one-upmanship, just a bottle of beer at the Titanium bar down the street from the hotel listening to the all-girl Unicorn Band blasting out *Proud Mary*. Exquisite!

Pat had put in some of her own touches too. She presented everyone with a personalised gift to thank them for attending. She kept everyone in touch during and after the event so nobody had a chance to feel left out in the big city. By staying true to her 'hostess with the mostest' title, Pat made sure she looked after and entertained all of us during the Celebration Dinner which fell on Makha Bucha Day, a Buddhist holiday, while the streets outside were eerily quiet.

## Pat had put in some of her own touches too. She presented everyone with a personalised gift to thank them for attending.

The entertainment at the Celebration Dinner was a little unconventional too. Pat kicked it off with a heartfelt speech. There was an excellent six-piece band to keep everyone singing along during the meal. Then, in a complete change of pace, M T Rajah from Kellys Express in Indonesia took to the stage dressed as Gandhi: a remarkable likeness and very funny. Calvin Chin from Altair did a different and unexpected version of Tai Chi kungfu. In between performances, there were lucky draws from various delegates who shared a gift from home reflecting their culture. Gifts included a silver minted Krugerrand, an Egyptian bust of King Tut and an aboriginal boomerang. The Italian delegation - Francesco Argiro from Bliss, Max Ajroldi from Franzosini and Giovanni Moscarello from Bolliger - did a very good Pavarotti rendition of *La Donna È Mobile*. Lorena

Pau and Stefani Silva from Mudinmar, Spain delighted everyone with an enchanting display of a flamenco dance called the *Servillanas*. And even I borrowed a guitar from the band and braved the critics with a song *Leaving on a Jet Plane* to end the evening. One delegate said to me during the dinner, before I picked up the guitar, that it was nice to see people having fun again at a conference. I hope he felt the same after my performance. Everyone, however, agreed that it had been a great evening and an excellent conference throughout.

It would be wrong to pretend that everything was perfect, it wasn't. But the failings were trivial and before the conference closed speculation was rife as to the date and location of IMA 2019, with many wanting to sign-up immediately. Pat, if she knows, is keeping that piece of information very quiet for now.

# On stage at IMA



The IMA conference did not start, as so many do, with a tedious roll call in which everyone gently drops off to sleep. Instead, it started with a short plenary meeting that was fully attended. Three speakers delivered short presentations on different subjects but all with a common thread: technology.

## Steve Jordan

Steve Jordan is the editor of *The Mover* magazine. However, his presentation to IMA was nothing to do with publishing. Instead, he picked up on the theme of the conference *New Chapter: New Opportunities* and appealed to the generations to recognise their limitations when it comes to handling technology and not allow their businesses to be held back by undervaluing the talents of the young.

Steve said that he had seen many companies suffer because the older generation was determined to maintain control, restricting the development of the younger generation that followed. He said that had always been a problem but today, with technology developing at such a fast rate, it was even more so.

It is quite clear that young people think differently than their parents. They use technology differently, communicate differently and, through that technology, can make faster decisions. Steve said that his generation had technology thrust upon them and did their best to make it work for them. His children came upon technology much earlier and have a much better understanding of it and appreciation of the opportunities it creates. His grandchildren, however, had technology as part of their DNA, they could not imagine a world in which it didn't exist.

He said that this did not mean that anyone over 50 had no value; quite the reverse. They have the wisdom of experience which is vitally important. However, in Steve's opinion, they should use that wisdom to ensure that young

people are encouraged, valued and empowered to exert their influence on the organisation. If not, Steve believes they will leave and the company will suffer.

Steve also had a word of warning for the 30-somethings who might think that they have technology tamed. He said that in 15 years, statistically, computing power will be 1,000 times more powerful than it is today; in 30 years' time it will be 1 million times more powerful. He asked whether anyone would feel confident about using that kind of technology to its full effect. When they were older, the problem would be even more acute than it is today.

## Fred Schlomann

Fred Schlomann is the vice president, APAC for Airinc, an international mobility company that has provided data to assignees and their companies for over 60 years.

In his presentation Fred looked at the ways in which global mobility was changing, largely fuelled by technology. As examples he said that more than half of the world's population now has Internet access; three million e-mails and four million text messages are sent every second; and by 2020 it is predicted that there will be 26.3 billion devices connected to the Internet. Using current technology, the number of tasks that can be automated affect \$14 trillion in wages and a billion jobs. Fred said that in the last 50 years world GDP has increased six times, per-capita income has tripled and employee output has increased by 2.4 times.

This technology has had a dramatic effect on globalisation. For example, Fred

**Steve said that he had seen many companies suffer because the older generation was determined to maintain control, restricting the development of the younger generation that followed.**



● Fred Schlomann.



● Calvin Chin.

said that in 1958 IBM employed 100,000 people, mainly in the USA. Today the company employs 380,000 people but most work outside the US, mainly in India. Today 62% of people are interested in working abroad, 43% of US employees have worked remotely and the number of 'digital nomads', people who can work anywhere, is on the rise.

In recent years companies have generally increased their need for mobility and more of them have formal policies in place. However, what was particularly interesting was the areas in which mobility was expanding. 50% of the increase is coming from short-term assignments, 45% are going on one-way transfers. The number of long-term assignments is significantly lower than in the past. 31% of mobility teams are under cost pressure.

The top challenge for mobility professionals was aligning their programmes with the talent available. However, the top strength was getting people to go on assignment. It appears that there is no shortage of people wanting to work abroad, but the profile of the average assignee has changed dramatically.

#### Calvin Chin

Calvin Chin is global operations manager for Atair Global in Singapore. His company is a relocation management company that started in Texas 28 years ago and now provides global relocation services at origin, destination, in transit and administrative services. Since then it has spread its operations to ten locations worldwide.

### It appears that there is no shortage of people wanting to work abroad, but the profile of the average assignee has changed dramatically.

Calvin looked at the customer experience and the attributes of a preferred supplier. He said that a good customer experience is more than the sum of the parts. He said that it's possible for all touch points in a relocation to be positive but the overall experience can still be poor. "It's necessary to focus on the whole end-to-end experience, not just the individual touch points."

By contrast, Calvin said that not everything needs to be positive for the customer to be happy with the service. He used a trip to IKEA as an example: although a customer might not like the checkout arrangement, the need to assemble the furniture or the delivery option, they still might enjoy going to the store because the café is good or the price is excellent.

So what does an RMC look for in a preferred supplier? Operational capability was key. Although it was important for a company to have its own assets and workforce it was vital that it had sufficient scalability to be able to react at short notice when necessary. The process should be repeatable to guarantee a positive customer experience with sufficient flexibility to deal with exceptions and challenges as they emerge and prevent any re-occurrence if something goes wrong. People should be engaged

in the business and, especially for smaller suppliers, they should be empowered to take decisions if the senior member of staff is absent.

The company culture and synergy with Altair was also important to Calvin. The Altair values were 'Aim high, play it straight and make it fun'. They expected suppliers to show concern, appreciation, respect and empathy. As illustration, Calvin quoted the management consultant Peter Drucker: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."