

COVER STORY: IMA CONFERENCE



● Partner4Partner meeting.



● Benny Tan, Senior Vice President APAC for Altair Global in Singapore



● Jose Pose, Group Commercial Manager from K2 Corporate Mobility.



● Operation Smile.



● Patricia Jade Ooi opens the conference.

Networking IMA style

A report from the IMA conference in Bangkok, by Steve Jordan.

Those who travelled to Bangkok in February 2018 were all simultaneously enthralled, impressed and astounded that Patricia Jade Ooi had managed to get a new networking event up, running and successful in such a short time. Those same people, and many more, were equally awestruck that, in 2019, she did it again.

A new venture of any kind is difficult to get started. In the intensely competitive world of business networking, with competition from established events all around, it is a momentous task. Yet, Patricia pulled it off, with 215 attendees, gathering once again in the Marriott Marquis Queen's Park in the Sukhumvit district of Bangkok, for three days of intense meetings.

Patricia opened the conference on day one by thanking her team and the delegates who made the trip to Bangkok once again. She said that she had started IMA because she wanted to make a difference in Asia and stressed that the conference was for the delegates. "I want to showcase you," she said. "Don't be shy. Network. Make it happen."

Benny Tan, Altair Global

The first formal speaker, in what was just a short opening business session, was Benny Tan, Senior Vice President APAC for Altair Global in Singapore who shared some thoughts on management. He said that it is difficult for moving companies to be different but, to do so, they need to transform 'customer service' that deals

with actions into 'customer experience' that is about emotion.

Benny said that movers are not moving furniture: "You are moving people's lives." He said that movers have a unique opportunity to interact with customers in their own homes in a very intimate way. This provides opportunities to influence the customer experience, to talk to people, listen to them, find out about the things that really matter to them and deliver a better experience. "80% of CEOs believe that their companies provide superior service," he said, "but only 8% of their customers agree with them. What you feel you are giving to your customers might not be what they think they are receiving." Benny said that movers need to be proactive and anticipate what

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● Jennifer Sloan, General Manager of European Relocation Services in Marseille hosted an impromptu party while Thailand recognised the religious festival of Makha Bucha.



● Phil Stewart of Clarke & Rose in Scotland.



● The house band provided background music for diners.



customers want from them to be able to give a better customer experience.

Jose Pose, K2

Speaker number two was Jose Pose, Group Commercial Manager from K2 Corporate Mobility. K2 is a new Relocation Management Company founded just 12 months ago. Jose said that his company's motto was 'Delivering the extraordinary every day'. To achieve this K2 has started working more closely with its customers so they can influence their mobility programmes.

Its moving partners are very important to K2. "We rely on you as our faces on the ground," he said. "You are representing K2 and if we don't have the right relationship with you, if we don't trust you and you don't understand what we are asking you to deliver, it's never going to work." He said that they and their partners need to decide how they add value to their customer relationships and make sure customers understand the value they provide. "You all do things in a slightly different way so you must tell your customers what makes you different. Just getting 90% satisfaction on a feedback form is not enough nowadays."

Jose said that there is still pressure on cost, but quality is important too. He believes there is a change in the way that companies handle their mobility programmes with more companies looking to separate the way they handle

their top executives, providing them with a higher level of personal service. He suggested that although prices might be tight on some moves, there might be more flexibility on moves for high net worth individuals. "You might have to be more competitive on some moves but stick with us and the opportunities are there," he said. "It's about taking a long-term view. I am not here to tell you to reduce your rates, it's about looking at the overall picture. If we do that effectively we become true partners."

Operation Smile

The IMA conference supported Operation Smile Thailand presenting the charity with a cheque for the equivalent of US\$5,400. The charity provides free surgery for Thai children to correct the facial deformity caused by cleft lip and pallet which can be life threatening. Operation Smile has been in Thailand for over 20 years and, during that time, has performed around 13,000 operations on children to allow them to smile, feed properly and face the world with confidence. In addition to the levy from the delegate fees, some delegate companies donated items for an auction to provide further support to the charity.

The presentations over and the networking began with a welcome cocktail reception. The opening coincided with the religious festival of Makha Bucha which bans the sale of alcohol anywhere

in Thailand for one day. Refreshments were legally served within the confines of the private party and some delegates continued after by inviting guests to their suites to ensure the festivities continued unabated.

Day two saw the start of the booked 30-minute Partner4Partner meeting schedule in which delegates wasted not a minute of their precious meeting time with pre-arranged one-to-one meetings from dawn to dusk. For those who filled their diaries, the pace was intense. Those who were a little more relaxed had time to breathe and reflect. Whatever their tactics, I heard nothing but praise for the organisation and the efficiency of the process.

The celebration dinner after the first day's meetings was a grand affair. Not that it's formal, it's not, but it's the only evening function at which everyone joined together to enjoy the food, drink, company and entertainment. The house band provided background music during the dinner, swiftly followed by a series of performances from delegates including: Bollywood dancing, singing, a 'striptease' from M T Rajah (yes really) and wonderful bagpipe music from Phil Stewart of Clarke & Rose in Scotland – breathtaking!

The business meetings occupied 2½ days but IMA takes longer. Some gathered for a warm-up round of golf before the welcome day, and some stayed on after for a half-day city tour which gave the opportunity for a little sightseeing. But the WhatsApp group continued to post messages, many exchanging business, some arranging rendezvous, lots offering congratulations to Pat and her team, for days after. It seemed as if people just didn't want to let go.

In her opening address, Patricia promised something bigger, better and completely different next year. She's not saying yet what she has planned ... but if you can go, I think you should.

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Benny Tan