

Convene Podcast Transcript

Convene Series: Exploring APAC's Event Evolution with Florence Chua

**Note: the transcript is AI generated, excuse typos and inaccuracies*

[00:04] **Florence Chua:** We want to be that platform that really just connects everybody and say, hey, how do we continue keeping each other informed? Even though we all have our own sort of marketplace to think about and to worry about.

[00:19] But there is that collective intelligence sharing and the relationship building that I think is really core. Yeah. To what PCMA can bring to the table.

[00:31] **Magdalena Atanassova:** This is the Convene Podcast.

[00:35] My name is Maggie, Digital Media Editor. Welcome to season five of the Convene Podcast brought to you by Madrid Convention Bureau. Today I'm joined by Florence Chua who serves as Managing Director, APAC for PCMA.

[00:52] Flo is an accomplished business leader who believes that traveling and learning are essential for personal growth and professional success.

[01:00] What I like about Flo is her drive to deliver excellence in everything and her belief that positivity and authenticity are essential for building trust and fostering long term relationships. Flo, it is a great pleasure to have you on the podcast.

[01:17] **Florence Chua:** Thank you, Maggie. Thank you for having me. Absolutely.

[01:21] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Can you share with our listeners the concept behind the APAC labs and how did the idea of the labs come about?

[01:29] **Florence Chua:** Right. So maybe just suppose to set a context of where APEC starts and ends. Right. Geographically, we kind of pretty much have the geography from North Asia, from China, Japan, all the way down to Oceania, Australia, New Zealand.

[01:44] So that's a fairly widespread, you know, and the distance between us, the language between us, the cultures between us are many considerations we need to think about when we think about Asia Pacific, which are essentially kind of like two continents put into a region.

[02:02] Right. So when we started thinking about the labs, it evolved from pretty much the global regions. Right. And it's not just APAC. Latin America probably has the same problem and EMEA has an even bigger problem.

[02:14] You have Europe, Middle East, Africa, kind of different continents as well. So I think all the regions, the global regions, have the issue of how do we connect with the local communities across such a diverse and widespread region.

[02:28] So I think that brought us to, we need smaller activations. We can't go down the path of big conferences because it's just not realistic to bring everybody together. And bear in mind that we were looking at this coming out of COVID whereby the market was still in very much of madness of trying to recover.

[02:50] Costs were sky high, space was low, manpower was down. So people were time poor. So we knew, okay, we were dealing with the diverse issue that I just mentioned. We were also dealing with a workforce that is extremely time poor and that money is still an issue because most of the people lost way too much, both from an income or revenue standpoint during the pandemic.

[03:13] So we wanted to create something that would make and bring PCMA to them instead of having them come to us. We wanted to be more accessible to everybody. Right. So that was why we started to say, hey, let's have smaller events.

[03:29] Now the labs came about when we were saying that, but what does a smaller event look like?

[03:35] What should that look like? What kind of spirit should it embody? So I think that was when we were saying that we want it to be something that was more exploratory.

[03:43] Right. That we will always be looking at what's changing in the marketplace that is very trends driven.

[03:50] We knew that people were looking for new solutions.

[03:53] So it's something, it's a space that you want people to feel like they are safe to explore and be innovative. So that was the idea of a lab. Right. It's like just like any R and D labs that you can imagine.

[04:04] It's where you come in, you explore, you try an error. Failure is okay. Failure is part of the journey. And you know, that's kind of where we really stuck with a.

[04:13] I think lab is a great idea.

[04:15] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, I love that. And it's a very smart way to really touch on all these different elements in a big region like APAC, like you said.

[04:25] And what inspired the creation of the very first business of events meeting that you had earlier this year?

[04:33] **Florence Chua:** Yeah, actually, maybe coming back to the lab, it will help to give you the context of why the business of events. So when we started implementing the labs, right, that was when we were hearing a lot of from the ground voices.

[04:49] Right. And I think what we then realized was actually there were really quite express needs with a lot of parameters, with a lot of constraints around it. Like there is still a desire to learn because things are moving very quickly, but there is no time.

[05:06] Nobody has time to learn. But we want to learn. Okay. So that was the funny part of it. There was still a need for peer sharing. We kind of want to know what's happening.

[05:14] There was also a need for networking because bear in mind that like at least half the industry was decimated.

[05:21] Most of the friends that you know, would have left the industry, unfortunately. All right, whether is it early retirement or is it people who had been let go, they found new job, they're never coming back.

[05:32] So I think the need was there. So which is why we created the lab to fulfill this, but in a very compact manner. Right. So it's kind of, I call it a three in one solution.

[05:41] You get the learning you get the peer sharing, you get the networking in three hours, right? That it's not going to kill your day, but you get everything. So when we were in there, I think that was pretty much throughout 2023, we were having those discussion.

[05:56] We realized that while we thought that the best way to connect was to do this local stuff, the local activations, the labs and the local committee started telling us, I don't know, maybe this is human nature.

[06:08] They say, hey, we love that we are talking among ourselves. But I would like to know what's happening in Sydney, I would like to know what's happening in Singapore, I would like to know what's happening in Japan.

[06:20] So then that whole desire for think we still need something regional bubble up again. So that was when we started that discussion to say that should we have an APEC conference Now?

[06:32] The other thing that I think is important for our listeners to know is that PCMA has always had an Asia PAC conference, even before the pandemic. And I think that is not always known.

[06:44] The first APEC conference for PCMA was actually back in 2017.

[06:49] So it started with Shanghai, it went to Macau, it went to Bangkok. The last one was actually in Sydney in 2020. But again, it wasn't widely known because it was Covid year, right?

[07:00] So nobody really got in and out.

[07:02] So I think when we came back and say, hey, maybe we should revisit if an APEC conference should be on the table, I think the question that we all started asking is, number one, is there a real market need for an APEC conference?

[07:18] What gap are we trying to fill and what are we trying to solve for, right? So I think we ask a lot of those questions as people give us those comments, right?

[07:27] And what we realized was there were actually many.

[07:32] Almost every single country in the region have a national sort of event or conference driven by the national body. There were several trade shows, right? There are several trade shows in the region, but there isn't one regional conference.

[07:48] And people who know PCMA say CL is amazing. It's a once in a lifetime, you have to be there. But more often than not, you hear people saying, I can't afford it.

[07:59] The time is not the right time, the cost is too high, the distance is too far. And just so our listeners understand, when we talk about distance, meaning from Singapore as an example, getting to CL is usually door to door, 24 hours, if not more one way.

[08:17] So with the plus the time zone, you're looking at three days loss on the road, excluding the three days that you will spend at CL or even more. So you're talking about at least one week away from the office with significant travel accommodation costs.

[08:34] So it is a cost that unfortunately APEC really can't invest in, so to speak. Right. So I think that sort of also continue to build the demand for we want something like cl, we want that quality of education that PCMA is known for, but we need it to be more accessible within the region.

[08:54] So, you know, it's a very long story, Maggie, to your question on why BOE. But I think what was important for us was really relearning or asking the questions on why are we even doing this?

[09:10] Is that the right thing for us to do? So I think once we started doing that and said, hey, there is some feasibility, right? There is demand for it, there's a space that we can fill, we started to look at the name of the conference and I can tell you there's been several names for this APAC conference in the past, but none of them stuck.

[09:32] So when I ask people, hey, have you been to this conference back in Bangkok? And they're like, I remember going to something but it wasn't clear, you know what I mean?

[09:41] Right. And that was one. And then secondly, there was a lot more other people who actually did not even know about PCMA. So PCMA, in honesty, in many part of the regions, we are still a very nascent brand.

[09:55] Many people don't know us and that's a fact. So when I look at it, I'm saying, why don't we take this opportunity to reposition to rename ourselves and be very explicit about what we do as PCMA and who we are.

[10:14] Right. So we used to call it the PCMA whatever. Whatever. Right. It's about. It's on the pretext that you know who PCMA is and what we represent. But when you don't know PCMA, it doesn't mean anything.

[10:25] So which is why I thought, but what does PCMA do we advocate? Right? We want to drive socio economic progress through Business of Events.

[10:37] So that is that very explicit motivation and rationale why we decided to rename the APAC conference the Business of Events. Just to be very clear about what is it that we're trying to achieve and what we want to talk about.

[10:51] **Magdalena Atanassova:** That's a very nice context and thank you for the details because I think it's important also to share with our listeners the process of getting there. It's not like just a fixed idea, okay.

[11:02] We just need to create an event for the sake of it. But there's a very deep thought process and a lot is analyzed before putting these events on the map, just before you even start planning for them.

[11:16] And when we speak about planning for them, this event had two very distinct days. So POE took was over two days and the first day was unlearned and then it was relearn.

[11:29] So how did the theme inform your choice for session formats?

[11:35] **Florence Chua:** Yeah, that's a good one. No, so first and foremost, we have an overarching theme that's called, Right. And when I first say, hey, I think the team needs to be unbound, like everybody took a minute and go, like, love it.

[11:52] I said, why? It's so confrontational, right? And so the reason why we went for unbound was when I, you know, went around the region, when we met, when we talk at all these events, it was very clear after the pandemic, Even back into 2023, where some markets were stabilizing with the reopening.

[12:14] So bear in mind the APAC was sort of the last to open in the region to the world post pandemic, right? People were still struggling because there were different implications post pandemic that were creating a lot of pent up demand, but there was also manpower issue, there was changes in technological advancements that nothing was quite the same.

[12:35] So everybody was kind of like spinning the wheel, right? If you know what I mean. And there was actually this really deep desire for people who are feeling really tired, very tired.

[12:46] Because all through the pandemic, our industry were really tired. We were really stressed coming out of the pandemic.

[12:53] Well, there was a moment of euphoria, but the workload was killing us too. So we continue to be very tired. So when I speak to everybody, it was like, we really need to break out of this hamster wheel situation.

[13:06] So I think that kind of really what was unbound, that desire that want to break free and to create something new, to chart that new frontier, right? So I think that was unbound.

[13:17] But unbound itself is such a large concept, right? It's very conceptual in a manner. So when we started working on the actually the programming, we need to break it down further to help our community understand what does that mean?

[13:31] Like in more actionable terms, what do you do? And we realize that unlearn and relearn is that process to reopening your minds and looking at new possibilities or challenging the norms.

[13:46] So hence unlearn and relearn, which I think pretty much like knock it out of the park for us. Everybody just found it so easy to remember it's like day one, okay, unlearn.

[13:58] Day two, relearn. And it is so.

[14:02] I think in a way it is so simple. It gave so much clarity to what people are expected to do on every day. So now with that, from a programming standpoint, we were really looking at, okay, here we go, unlearn.

[14:16] What do we do differently? So we started out with really strange timings. So instead of saying, okay, program starts at 9:00, we started a program at 8:57.

[14:27] And so when we tell people, right? So the night before I told the people at the reception, I'm like, guys, don't forget, registration starts at 7:38 tomorrow. And the room kind of just went up in a roar.

[14:38] Like, what are you talking about? Why 7:38? I'm like, no, just listen carefully. 7:38. So all through the day we went at them with different permutations. Honestly, it wasn't because it was an auspicious thing, even though we were in Asia.

[14:56] It's not because it was an auspicious timing. It was just we needed something to make sure people were listening. And they were. Because then throughout the whole day they kept saying, what did you say it was again?

[15:07] 837, 847, 857. What was that? Permutation. But people were talking about it and I think that was the whole idea of it, just to wake up the senses.

[15:16] So there was one thing that we did that was really good and fun in a way because people laugh about it throughout the conference. Now the other thing that we did was really, you know, when we look at wellness, most of the wellness programming happens as a breakout session, right?

[15:33] Meaning things like sound bath, yoga and whatever that you can think of, they always happen as an option.

[15:41] And what we thought was, why is it optional, right? If you want to make it different and we want to sort of be. To reawaken the senses or we want to give people a moment to just absorb and let things settle down.

[15:56] Why don't we build it within the program so that it's not optional? So we introduce soundbarf on day one, you know, so. And we don't have a very long one hour session in there.

[16:07] We just have, we do like a 10, 15 minute session and everyone is part of it. And because of that, it's all the way, all the more powerful because everybody's kind of in it together.

[16:18] And you have the whole room of like 330 people all doing the sound bath together. So I think that was another thing that people really like. We Also did a couple of other things, but maybe I'll just share one more, that it's actually something that people still talk to me about it today.

[16:35] Like, so, like recently at another event, one of the participants like, hey, you know what? Like, I still remember this moment that happened at Unbound. And I'm like, what was it?

[16:46] She was like, remember when the keynote was up there? And then you guys did a blackout.

[16:52] So we did a complete blackout. The keynote was on there. The keynote was prepped, right. That we're going to go blackout. And she's like, now we're going to go blackout.

[17:02] And it was blackout for a couple of minutes, maybe five minutes.

[17:06] And it was very intentional that the topic that she was talking about was about how media managers felt unseen and underappreciated in their organization.

[17:19] So when it was blackout, we wanted to kind of deliver a message of this is how they were feeling. And then we were giving people permission to say, if you agree, say, ah.

[17:30] And you could hear the room, right? Because they don't have to feel being seen, but their voices were being heard. So I think, you know, it was. I think there's a lot of moments like that that we really curate the programming to work with.

[17:45] You know, whether is it the audio, visual, lighting, so really get a message across. And, you know, that I think really worked for us.

[17:53] And then on Relearn, okay, we have to give credits to our community and the people who attended. So Day Unlearn was really tough because every single speaker on Day Unlearn were from outside the industry.

[18:06] So when that happens, you know, there's a lot of assimilations that you have to do. There's a lot more thinking that you have to think about, like, what does this mean for me in my world?

[18:15] So we wanted to give them back a day of normalization. Right. Go back to relearning what we know best in our business. But how would we do it differently? So on day two, when we went back to Relearn, we went back to proper timing.

[18:28] 9:00am, 10:00am, you know, doing things that they are familiar with. So I think that contrast made it uncomfortable enough, but not put them into a space whereby they felt like they were completely out of their death.

[18:43] Right. Because on day two, they could then get back into the swing of what they know and they feel really safe about. Yeah. So hopefully, I mean, like, if you have any other question, but I think these are just some of the things that we try and introduce.

[18:55] But we did do quite a lot of different things which really work for us.

[19:00] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And it sounds like this whole. I can call it an experiment with the unlearned, they. It required you to create this safe space for all the attendees, right?

[19:12] **Florence Chua:** Yeah.

[19:13] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Is there any connection to the labs in terms of creating a safe space? Because I think in general, event professionals have this tendency of being perfectionist and fearing failure, so they need a safe space to feel okay, to fail.

[19:28] So is there any connection between the two in terms of creating a safer space?

[19:32] **Florence Chua:** Actually, that's a really good question. Thanks for pointing it out. Now, the labs, like I mentioned, because we ran about eight labs in 20, 23 across the region, so some of the people in the room already knew about labs and what was expected of them when they come to a lab. [19:49] Right? It's not something that you are passive about. So when we went into designing the day relearn, actually day relearn is all about the labs. It's basically, you know, I would call it like the festival of our labs.

[20:04] Right? Yeah. So what was really interesting, though, it's initially when we started the programming and we were talking to the speakers. I'm like, you get 90 minutes.

[20:14] And the speakers were freaking out. They're like, what do we do in 90 minutes? What do I have to do for 90 minutes? That's a long time.

[20:22] And we're like, well, first of all, do not speak for 90 minutes, please.

[20:27] Right?

[20:28] Focus on peer sharing and peer learning, because that's what the labs are meant to be.

[20:34] So because it's peer learning and sharing, I think that created that safe space, that it's okay to ask questions. And I think what happened was with day one, which is our day unlearned, people came in with that ability to say, I don't know, and I'm here to learn.

[20:54] So I think that the whole theme of unbound, unlearn, relearn, actually created a safe space for people to be very blatant and say, I don't know, that's why I'm here.

[21:06] Or there are some people who say, I've been in the industry for 30 years.

[21:10] I think I need to stop and completely unlearn myself. Right? And I want people to challenge me. So there were all this very honest opening that people could then feel like, say that, hey, this is a very comfortable and safe space for me to ask questions.

[21:26] And there are no silly questions. There are no stupid questions. They're just questions. So I think during the day relearn, we told everybody, just keep asking questions, keep having conversations, because that's how new ideas are generated.

[21:39] You know, relationships are sparked. But what was really interesting is our facilitators and speakers who first, you know, kind of went a bit crazy when I say 90 minutes, they came back and said, oh, my Lord, we needed three hours.

[21:55] Right. Because.

[21:56] And this is very interesting, I think that format of 90 minutes, if done right, gives you so much richness and depth and layer that you don't get when it's 20 or 30 minutes.

[22:09] That's something that's maybe more informational. Right. And I think we just need to be very cognizant when we're dealing with different periods of duration. What is it that you're trying to achieve and that, you know, our facilitator, our trainer, our participants know how they need to contribute.

[22:26] Right. To make the time meaningful for themselves.

[22:30] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I agree with you with time, duration of different sessions. What I've seen is, especially when I facilitated such sessions, is that we're thinking, okay, 10, 15 minutes for, you know, people to discuss.

[22:43] That's never enough. Because in this time it's about, I don't need five, six minutes to just start a conversation. And once people start, you're asking them to stop, which is kind of, ah, we just cued a very good moment here.

[22:56] **Florence Chua:** Correct. Because you need that timing. You need some time to build on it. And bear in mind, these people are maybe just meeting each other for the first time. They need a bit of time to suss out each other.

[23:07] Okay, what are you thinking? What am I thinking? Is it okay for me to say this? Is it okay for me to say that? And then slowly, that layering that, adding on top that cumulative impact will come in.

[23:18] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, exactly. A word from our sponsor.

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[23:44] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Now back to the program. And I know that in terms of lab topics that you had in the region, you had quite a bit on AI, correct?

[23:55] **Florence Chua:** Yeah, yeah.

[23:56] **Magdalena Atanassova:** So how did you piggyback on all that knowledge you generated with the labs and how did you utilize AI at BOE?

[24:05] **Florence Chua:** Yeah, it's a, it's again an interesting one, right, because we went kind of crazy and big. We went big on AI in 2023. So as we were planning in 2023 for BOE in 2024, I was like, can I not talk about AI anymore?

[24:21] I'm like, I'm done. I'm so done with this.

[24:25] But of course we say, hey, let's ask the people. Right? Let's ask the people. And the community came back with like AI being a number one topic. And I'm like, really guys?

[24:35] You mean you haven't seen enough? But obviously they have not seen enough. So we did that.

[24:41] But we kind of also look at it slightly differently, right? Because every time we have a lab run, the people are different, right?

[24:53] And then I think that's the problem of organizer. You think you have done it 10 times. It's like a marketer or communicator. You're like, I've said this so many times, why have you not figured this out now?

[25:03] No, but the person who's receiving this, this is probably the first time they are receiving it. So I think what we then did was, you know, we went with the same formula that worked for the labs, which is something that, you know, for APAC, we always keep it to.

[25:19] And I think that's, you know, gaining momentum and people understand why we do it. It's the labs are always delivered first by an external speaker, not from our industry.

[25:29] Because it's about outside looking in, right? About what the world out there is doing.

[25:35] Then it's probably another hour of learning, okay, from certain people in the industry how they are implementing this to some extent. And then the third hour is always going into that, okay, then kind of what would you do, what have you done and what would you do?

[25:49] So it's a bit, a lot more of that peer learning, peer exploration. So that we took the same concept and we put it back into AI again because we found that it really worked with AI, the hands on application was key.

[26:01] People want to know what's evolved and with how AI is changing on a weekly, if not daily basis. Every time you bring in a speaker, the content is different, they will talk about something different.

[26:13] And AI, it's a very broad school and even every expert that you bring in will tackle AI from a different angle. So there's actually a fresh angle every time around.

[26:24] So I would just say that I think that interest is very strong. What we're seeing there is a growing awareness of what AI is. It is not a question of should I be using it anymore, it is a question of how should I be using this?

[26:43] What's the real world application that's really going to help me. So I think that's where we are and I think the labs really helped us in a way that has given us a lot of learning and clarity into how our Community has viewed this over the last 18 months.

[26:58] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I just want to bring it back to the physical space a little bit because we started the discussion with the fact that APAC is such a wide region.

[27:09] So what was the reasoning behind selecting Marina Bay Sands as the venue and Singapore as the host destination for the event?

[27:17] And maybe also what about participants outside the region?

[27:21] Was there anything for them specifically by selecting the destination?

[27:26] Yeah.

[27:27] **Florence Chua:** Okay, so this is a very big question now if you, if you just rewind a bit to what I mentioned right at the start. Like, the APAC conference has been rotating in the region before the pandemic, but it's never been to Singapore.

[27:40] Yeah, and this is one of the misperceptions that I had to correct because a lot of people went like, oh, you're doing it in Singapore again? I'm like, what if I.

[27:49] Again, we've never been there. That's number one, the interesting, isn't it? So I think maybe, you know, our audience will remember during the pandemic 2021, PCMA did convening leaders, the hybrid version in Singapore.

[28:04] So the face to face was in Singapore with the hybrid around the world. So I think that's kind of where people had this impression that you're in Singapore. Again, like, no, I'm like, guys, this different.

[28:13] This is a different thing. CL is not coming back anytime soon based on what I know, right? So why Singapore?

[28:21] I think number one, accessibility.

[28:24] You know, like I said, if you, if you always look at Asia Pac all the way, like I say, from North Asia all the way down to Oceania.

[28:31] Keep in mind that when we were planning for this, it was North Asia just started opening North Asia, which means Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong, they only open, I would say, in quarter one, two last year.

[28:49] We were already looking at this before then. Right. So because they were just opening, you will not go to a destination there. Right there. That's too much uncertainty. There's too many uncertainty.

[29:01] You don't know what you're dealing with. Whereas the more established markets like Australia, Singapore are already open for a while. And it's very clear from a government's standpoint, like no matter what Covid permutations or variations come, we're going to keep the market open.

[29:19] So I think that was important.

[29:21] But seeing that we were just in Australia during COVID we, you know, that wasn't something that we were looking at. So I think accessibility, stability, certainty that I knew that I could do this if another way for COVID pandemic come along, because that was the Singapore government Sort of promised that we will keep the market open.

[29:41] I think that was why Singapore now. Obviously Singapore and Marina Bay Sands has been a great partner for PCMA for many years now and in particular Marina Bay Sands. So when we started looking at venues it was almost natural, right, that you would look to your partner first.

[29:59] But more than anything else, I think we also look at things that are critical around sustainability and I would say that Marina Basins is probably one, if not the top player in this part of the world.

[30:14] Right. They are way ahead of their game. Everything from food supply to clean energy, everything has been thought of. So if you want to partner with somebody who's going to help you ensure that you're on the right path, who has already thought of all these things for you and has put in place the right measures, I think it was a bit of no brainer from that perspective now, not to say that it wasn't and it was a cost thing.

[30:40] Right. I think the costing thing wasn't that. I think it was more of us being very cognizant of where we want to be. Needs to speak to what we're trying to do.

[30:48] Right. And the business of events. We knew that we wanted to be sustainable from day one. So when the team started converging together, the number one thing that we all agreed to in everything we do, sustainability will be part of the journey.

[31:05] It's not something that we're going to decide later. So the venue was the number one. In fact, I would say probably two years back, I'm trying to recall, make sure I get my time right.

[31:14] We did a study on sustainability with Singapore tourism Bond. In the study, what we really looked at was actually what can an event organizer truly influence? You know, sometimes we talk about things like flight emissions, right.

[31:33] Carbon emissions from flight travel, but we don't really influence that, if you know what I mean. Right. It's with the participants. So I think what we look at was if we want to influence that and based on the study is your venue is your number one thing that you need to look at.

[31:50] Right. And then the rest of the on site stuff will come with it. So that's. That was really why Arena Basin but that, you know, the sustainability was a component them really understanding what we're trying to do us knowing that, you know, they will work with us to co create an experience that will be unique.

[32:11] Right. I think and I think we had that camaraderie, that understanding and trusted. We want to create a new, you know, sort of a new benchmark of what the Conference should look like in the region.

[32:23] So I think there was a lot of co creation and not just Marina Bay Sands, I mean like Encore, which is a great partner for PCMA as well. Encore, APAC was part of this.

[32:32] MCI was part of this. So the few players came together and we were very clear we wanted to create something that truly resonates and is relevant for our industry in Asia Pacific.

[32:44] So I think that was that power that brought everybody together. Now, talking about participants outside of Asia PAC, I think the business of events, I think the goal of business events would be that it is the place that folks outside of Asia PAC should be at if you want to do business in Asia PAC.

[33:03] The reality is if the culture element and the market development, sophistication, maturity, whatever you want to call that, is very different here and you're not going to learn about it at cl.

[33:15] That's a fact. Right. And it makes no sense to learn about this in Latin America as well or whatever. The thing is. So if you want to do business here, this is the platform where you should come in with the players here and understand what it takes to do business here.

[33:28] Right. And really understand that. So whereas for the regions, it's about, like I said, a lot of the markets here are national markets, very insular.

[33:37] Japan have no idea what Australia is doing. Australia has no idea what China is doing kind of situation. So you know, we want to be that platform that really just connects everybody and say, hey, how do we continue keeping each other informed?

[33:51] Even though we all have our own sort of marketplace to think about and to worry about. But there is that collective intelligence sharing and the relationship building that I think is really core.

[34:03] Yeah. To what PCMA can bring to the table.

[34:07] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah. There's so many cultural differences and just ways you approach business in the different countries of the region in APAC. So that's great that you are making this connection for them.

[34:20] And what did you personally have to unlearn or relearn in this process of creating the event?

[34:29] **Florence Chua:** Yeah, this is actually again one of those tough question. Right. I think like the. Over the last 30 minutes, if not more, I have spoken a lot about the process of learning that we had to go into to create the business of events.

[34:45] You know. So I think the unlearning part was really like we did not assume that we needed an APAC conference. In fact, the question was why would we even want to have one?

[34:55] What would we serve? And so we started unlearning by asking all the questions of why, why are we Doing this.

[35:02] And we learn in that process of, okay, where the gaps are and how we can serve it to be very different. Because, and you know, we always say this when you're trying to run an event for a group of event professionals.

[35:14] Good luck.

[35:15] Right. So that's what we did, you know, And I think what is also critical for us is that when we look at what we are doing, different part of the journey was what insights and what data are we collecting from the event on site that will inform us as we go into the next business of events?

[35:35] Right. So I think in terms of what you're saying, what are we relearning or unlearning? In fact, there was one very interesting data point that I saw. So we actually use an AI sentiment tracker during the conference itself.

[35:50] And like I mentioned, a lot of times people would say that, oh, long durations are really bad for engagement and really bad for experience.

[35:59] The short ones are more snappy and it's always good and great. But that's not what the data show us.

[36:05] Right. The data actually show us that Your session of 10 minutes can be just as impactful as a session of 90 minutes. It wasn't the duration.

[36:15] Right. So I think that itself give us a lot more data points to go back to our trainers, our speakers, our facilitators next year to say that, guys, it's not about whether Your session is 10 minutes, 30 minutes, or 90 minutes.

[36:28] The question is, what value are we creating for the people who's in the room? Right. So I think that is probably one of the good things that we learning from and that we will continue to validate some of the things that we would do.

[36:43] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, that's interesting. So what's on the horizon for PCMA, APAC, and what are you excited about?

[36:51] **Florence Chua:** We. Well, I mean, like, you know, we. We firmly believe in our labs. You know, we really now have a community who kind of know what to expect from the lab.

[37:00] So we do have a number of labs for the year lineup. We are beginning to go into the planning process for BOE25. And I think what's very interesting for us is if you think about how we build our lab content and even the BOE content, maybe from a Europe or a US timeframe, you would think that, my God, you guys haven't even started.

[37:22] And here we are in August and your conference is in April. I think, let's just say that we're adopting a very agile format. This allows us to keep the topics very fresh in that sense.

[37:36] Right. So we are Continuing to look at actually what's bubbling up from the ground. And all I can say is, you know, what excites us is the fact that we will always bring the most cutting edge topic, as cutting edge as you can imagine.

[37:52] And you know what, our people keep us on edge too, because they don't register until two weeks out from the event. And they keep me up at night or all the weeks up till the show.

[38:01] Right. So the other thing that we're doing a lot more is other than events. I think one of the things that is very critical for us in APAC, like I mentioned, because of the diversity in cultures, in market maturity, in distance, it's, I want us to be more than events.

[38:18] I want us to be more than, you know, just events, big and small. So we are rolling out more trainings, which is really aimed at targeting to help more of the new people coming into the industry.

[38:32] Bear in mind that we have a lot of new people. So how are the new people really getting the basics, the structured training? They need to. Right, because there's a real gap.

[38:41] Right. But there's a real skills gap. So how are we helping the skills gap?

[38:45] The events are much tougher and conferences are much tougher in filling that gap. You need more structured training. So we're doing more structured training in the region to try and address, to also try and start to address that part of it.

[38:58] We're going to bring back some of our webinars. We stopped for a while when people got tired of it and they stopped showing up. And when I'm. And I went like, okay, then I'm not going to run it.

[39:07] And then now people are like, where are the webinars? So, you know, so we, I think we constantly listen to what our community, our members are telling us. Well, I'm always happy to say we'll do it if you want it.

[39:19] If you are not showing interest, you know, I'm happy to sunset it as well, you know, So I think there are a few things, but I think what more important for me is I want to be sure that we are serving the community in a diverse manner, meaning different kind of formats for different levels of our community.

[39:38] And I think that's critical to advancing our industry and community as a whole.

[39:42] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, we'll keep an eye out because again, you have this challenge of the diversity of the region. So I hope we can report soon on how you're making this also more strategic to address all the needs across.

[39:57] **Florence Chua:** The region itself, I would add, is that I think technology really does work for us in the region. Right. And, you know, I think with more of technological advancements, AI or not, I think the region benefit from the fact that, you know, we have a lot more affordable technology to help us with the languages.

[40:21] So, like at BOE, I was, you know, it's affordable to provide simultaneous interpretation, captioning, and all of that at a fraction of the cost of what it would used to be if I have to set up, like, booth at the end of the room with a lot of people in there.

[40:37] So I think technology has really helped us to. In that instance, we were able to extract content real time and sort of summarize them in multiple language.

[40:48] So much as I think we have that challenge, I think there are solutions. Not perfect, but I think we will get better every time around. So now my latest challenge to our tech partner is, guys, I need a tool that allows us to communicate in different languages real time during networking.

[41:10] And they are like, okay, wait on it. It's coming, it's coming. Just hang on.

[41:16] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Well, they have time until April, right? So.

[41:19] **Florence Chua:** Yeah, yeah, I know. Yeah. So, but that's the challenge. I think that's. That's what I really get excited about. You know, our partners who's working with us in the region, we are all about how do we push the envelope a bit more, Right.

[41:33] That we want the very best and they are always welcome and they know it. To use BOE as a lab, I'm happy to test whatever. It's okay. Like, that's why we want to show the industry, the community, what innovation looks like.

[41:48] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah. Awesome. And wrapping the conversation, was there anything we didn't address and we should mention before we finish?

[41:59] **Florence Chua:** No, I think we talk about a lot of stuff. I think one of the things that you will continue to hear is how people are using AI, you know, and I think I dropped in some of these things throughout our conversation.

[42:12] We actually use a lot of AI, but I think sometimes the thing is, it doesn't need to be explicit. I think eventually the way AI is going to evolve is that it's just going to be that technology that is powering how you run your events.

[42:26] So I feel like sometimes. I was just talking to another group, in fact, last night, and I'm like, AI will become the Siri in your phone that you don't have to say that I have to learn AI.

[42:37] It's just going to be there and work for you if you know how to use it right. So I think for us as an industry, it's just continue to explore what that looks like, whether is it real time capture is real time, camera tracking is real time sentiment tracking.

[42:52] That's everything that AI can do for us. I think the exploration bit is critical and I think that we just need to keep trying this. And I would only say that we all need to share as much as possible because I think that's the one big thing that we're hearing now is how should we be using AI.

[43:09] And everybody's kind of looking for use case. Right. So I think from a PCMA standpoint, we continue to explore what that looked like, but we're happy to continue those conversations on what other organizers are using it for and how they're using it.

[43:24] Yeah. But I would say that I think we've captured pretty good grounds, I think. But you know, anything else, Maggie, that you think that our audience will be interested in, let me know.

[43:33] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, I would agree. I think we covered a lot in a single episode and this conversation is going to be continued for sure.

[43:41] So I'm looking forward to it.

[43:43] **Florence Chua:** Thank you.

[43:44] Thank you. Well, thank you for having me again and thank you to everyone who's listening. If you guys have any questions, feel free to always send Maggie and myself a message.

[43:55] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, I'll definitely put some links in the show, notes of some things that you mentioned, like that research with Singapore Tourism Board and some other things. So I can put your contacts as well for members of the region.

[44:08] If they have questions, suggestions, anything, they're welcome. Thank you again.

[44:12] **Florence Chua:** Absolutely. Thank you, Maggie.

[44:18] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Remember to subscribe to the Convening podcast on your favorite listening platform to stay updated with our latest episodes. We want to thank our sponsor, Madrid Convention Bureau. Learn more about how to make your next meeting Madrileño at esmadrid.com/mcb. For further industry insights from the convene team, head over to pcma.org/convene. Stay inspired. Keep inspiring. And until next time.