

Convене Podcast Transcript

Convене Series: Driving Event Innovation in Latin America with Lucio Vaquero

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[00:04] **Lucio Vaquero:** The initial concept came from observing also the rapid changes and challenges in our industry, especially with the new technologies and the shifting of attendees expectations. And we realized that a more interactive and collaborative format could better equip professionals to navigate these changes.

[00:29] **Magdalena Atanassova:** This is the Convене Podcast.

[00:33] My name is Maggie, Digital Media Editor. Welcome to season five of the Convене Podcast, brought to you by Madrid Convention Bureau.

[00:45] Today I'm joined by Lucio Vaquero, who serves as Regional Director LATAM at PCMA.

[00:51] Since joining PCMA in 2021, Lucio has significantly driven the growth, development and strengthening of the organization in the region.

[01:02] Lucio, it's a great pleasure to have you on the podcast.

[01:06] **Lucio Vaquero:** Thank you, Maggie. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for the invitation.

[01:10] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, of course. This time we're going to speak about the labs that you led in the region. So can you share with our listeners what is a lab and what's the concept behind this format?

[01:22] **Lucio Vaquero:** Sure.

[01:23] The PCMA labs are interactive workshops designed to create a unique environment where participants can think disruptively, they can foster their creativity and at the same time develop their skills.

[01:39] So they are aim to inspire participants to seek alternative approaches for addressing challenges opportunities within the business of an industry. So in these spaces, attendees work together to identify, let's say, pain points, develop practical and innovative solutions, explore new perspectives and improve both individual and collective skills that contribute to their professional and also of course, personal growth.

[02:13] So to give you an example, we had a PCMA lab in Cartagena.

[02:19] Well, we have a couple really. In Cartagena was last year and this year and the last one. I remember the last one because the setup was great. Thanks to our partner there, the Convention center of Cartagena.

[02:35] But the topic there was event design, but from a different perspective. We cover elements such as learning styles, cultural characteristics of an audience and how the formats can adapt to those characteristics.

[02:53] And the activity was very dynamic with groups moving through different stations and each focus on a specific topic within the event design.

[03:06] This allowed participants to learn about different things and exchange at the same time, exchange practical application ideas. And the feedback was super positive with participants appreciating this hands on interactive approach.

[03:23] And I was telling you that I remember this lab because the setup was amazing and with Bernard the feedback was great. So it was a great experience.

[03:35] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, I think for a topic as event design, you have to have an amazing setup there.

[03:41] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yeah, well, that was part of the strategy and. And to be at the same. To walk the talk.

[03:51] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, exactly. But how did the idea of the labs come About?

[03:56] **Lucio Vaquero:** Well, the idea of PCMA Labs was born out of a need to provide a more hands on, engaging learning experience for professionals in our industry. So we wanted to move beyond traditional conference formats and create.

[04:15] And create a space where participants could actively engage with the content, with the materials and also with each other.

[04:24] So this approach allows for a deeper exploration of the topics and also foster a sense of community and collaboration. That is something that we.

[04:37] This is one of our objective as PCMA. Yes.

[04:41] So the initial concept came from observing also the rapid changes and challenges in our industry, especially with the new technologies and the shifting of attendees expectations. And we realized that a more interactive and collaborative format could better, let's say, equip professional to navigate these changes.

[05:05] And I feel that we were right because of the feedback we are receiving. So we are glad of having the opportunity to activate these activities.

[05:15] **Magdalena Atanassova:** This comes as an add on to having a regional event. So the labs would be smaller, practical, hands on and then you have the regional event which would be more traditional format.

[05:31] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yeah, well, it really depends.

[05:35] It depends on, you know, because sometimes there are cases where we partner with a company or a destination.

[05:46] So the topic and the size depends on that.

[05:52] But mainly when we think about the size, it may be different depending on each case, but generally we invite participants and it's the combination of invitations to BCMA members or partnership with local organizations with like CBBs, CMOs or local event professional associations.

[06:17] The ideal site depends on the topic and objectives and we normally adapt to different situations. Typically we have between 40 and 60, 70 participants, but we had.

[06:32] There were some instances with more than 100 participants and it worked perfectly too.

[06:38] We normally adapt to that. Sometimes we have more diverse groups of attendees and this diversity in perspectives and experiences enriches the discussion and may help to generate more innovative solutions.

[06:54] But also when the audience is more, let's say homogeneous, we focus on the specific needs of that segment and we go deeper into those particular areas. So. So it depends but.

[07:08] But yes, mainly it. It focuses on the. On a market and a country is. Because I don't know, perhaps we can have a lab in, in Bogota to say an example and probably there will be some participants from other cities in Colombia, but we can say that it focus on the country.

[07:37] But again it depends if we have a partner that may be a company or the destination or a DMO at the national level. So it may vary.

[07:49] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah. And how do you select these topics when you are in such collaboration with your partners?

[07:57] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yeah, we select topics based on current trends and the specific needs of the industry at that time.

[08:05] And we also take into consideration feedback from previous labs and suggestions from our community.

[08:13] So far we've cover a range of topics such as neurosales, neuromanagement experience, architecture, event design, as I told you, customer experience. But we've also had some where we talk about business models, new technologies, organizational structures.

[08:34] And as I told you, it also depends on the composition of the audience and sometimes the goals of the partners when we have one. So often we partner with a destination or company that has particular interests in strengthen certain aspects and we work together to develop the topics.

[08:53] For example, in one instance, a destination wanted to boost their sales performance.

[09:00] So we develop a neurosales lab and participants in this lab learn how to apply principles of neuroscience to improve their sales techniques. So this include understanding, I don't know how the brain makes purchasing decisions and using this knowledge to better connect with potential clients.

[09:22] And we also used to evaluate practical cases so that participants could have concrete examples of how to apply what they've learned. So this is normally the way we, we build the, the agenda of the, of a, of a ladder.

[09:43] **Magdalena Atanassova:** In this instance, for example, with the sales neuroscience, sorry, topic I was focused on sales. How did that help the partner? I mean what, what do they gain?

[09:56] Yeah, are, are there outcomes from the program that the partner also gains for themselves or are they having different objectives?

[10:04] **Lucio Vaquero:** Well, again, it depends. But in that particular case, the objective was that it was in partnership with the destination. Yes, with the CVB.

[10:16] So in that particular case, that destination wants to improve sales at a destination level. So they thought that it would be useful for them to give practical tools on how to communicate.

[10:34] And it was for the whole value chain. Because you know that when a destination is trying to get an event, an international event, many times there are many participants, different participants in that journey.

[10:49] So it was mainly for agency, but also we have participation from hotels and other members of the value chain so they can be better prepared to connect with potential or international clients and be more effective in that connection.

[11:10] So the benefit for the destination is that they normally receive a certain number of leads prospects. So being more effective is good for destination because it improves their return or the conversion rate, let's say, of those meeting or those leads.

[11:31] So that was the objective in that particular case.

[11:35] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, that's a very smart move, I have to say.

[11:37] **Lucio Vaquero:** Absolutely, absolutely. And now I think it's one of the most important one of the topics that is not totally explored. When we talk about neuro, whatever, marketing, sales connections, management.

[11:56] There are many Things there where we can learn. Yes. And for this one in particular, we have a facilitator that is doctor, is a medical doctor with expertise in marketing.

[12:14] He worked for pharmaceutical companies so well, his experience is fantastic for our audience.

[12:23] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Oh, that's great. And can you maybe lift the veil for the future and share some future topics that you're thinking about?

[12:32] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yes. Well, you know, when we think about the topics, perhaps it may be.

[12:42] The reality is that every lab provides learning opportunities for us.

[12:47] So if, when I think about what we can incorporate, I am thinking about perhaps more diverse formats, especially including technologies to enhance the learning experience.

[13:06] For example, I would like to incorporate virtual reality or augmented reality. That could add a new dimension for the activities. And we are also exploring the possibilities of hybrid labs.

[13:18] Maybe it's something disruptive.

[13:22] It perhaps will change the current format, but it may help also that would combine in person virtual elements and it would allow us to reach a wider audience and provide more flexible learning options for our participants.

[13:40] Of course, that would mean adding some additional complexities and the need for additional resources and more time to prepare, but that would be great. And given that technology, especially advancements in AI, is transforming the way we work and live, we are likely to incorporate some of these technological components and topics.

[14:07] Yes. Into the future, where we as PCMA are really very active with AI and also all the workshops we are developing on Spark. So I think that AI is the topic of the future, the near future.

[14:30] But AI is getting more and more diverse and complex and have many applications. So I think that for sure it will be one of the main topics of the present and near future.

[14:44] **Magdalena Atanassova:** That sounds very interesting. I want to be there for the first hybrid labs, for sure.

[14:48] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yeah, you're invited for sure.

[14:51] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Thank you. A word from our sponsor.

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[15:16] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Now back to the program.

[15:19] And how do you make it a safe space for participants to open up and really share and, you know, not be boxed in their heads, but collaborate.

[15:30] **Lucio Vaquero:** Now that's important. You know that creating a safe space starts by setting the right tone from the beginning. So we emphasize the importance of sometimes confidentiality and mutual respect.

[15:47] And we also use various facilitation techniques to encourage open dialogue and ensure everyone feels welcome and valued.

[15:59] Additionally, the interactive and collaborative nature of the labs helps also to build the trust among participants, we put special attention to create a friendly and trusting atmosphere in every lab where they can feel relaxed and welcoming enough to share their ideas, concerns, opinions, because the objective is to encourage to have real, honest and productive conversations.

[16:31] And so far we have successfully achieved this in every city we have conducted in alum. Of course, a crucial part of this success is the role of our facilitators that are really carefully selected not only from their expertise, but also from their ability to connect with the audience.

[16:55] Their role is really essential to create that open atmosphere we aim for.

[17:01] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And do you have to consider the different.

[17:05] I don't know if there can be called cultural differences, but you operate in a very big region, so we have to consider what's common in that location.

[17:16] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yes, we have those considerations and not only from a cultural perspective, but also from the segment we are attending. Because it's not the same when we conduct a lab for

association executives or leaders to corporate ones, the way they talk to each other and the way they connect, the experiences they have are really different.

[17:40] So culture is one thing and is very important.

[17:44] And also the expertise and the segment characteristics is also something that we consider when we select the facilitators and when we sell the topics. So this is very, very, very important.

[18:03] The cultural part, we try to.

[18:07] To have and to include. Invite facilitators that have that international experience. Yes. That we understand that can fit. Yes. With that market.

[18:20] We have sometimes, for example, we have two main languages in Latin America, it's a Portuguese and Spanish.

[18:29] So sometimes that also means that can be a slightly different or a greater difference. Yes, when we select.

[18:44] But you know, there is also something interesting that. And it happens many times in every aspect. I think that when you bring someone from outside the market or the region or the country, it is taken more seriously.

[19:03] You know, I think that's. That's something. A human characteristic.

[19:09] But yes, we consider all those components when we develop one lab. Yeah, for sure.

[19:14] **Magdalena Atanassova:** But you make them in English, right? They're not. You're not selecting the local language.

[19:20] **Lucio Vaquero:** No, we normally conduct them in local languages. And why.

[19:25] That's because of these interactive characteristics. So we don't. What we don't want is to limit the participation because of the language.

[19:37] So when we try. When we can, we try to have them in local language. And I think I remember perhaps there was one that was in English, but they are mainly.

[19:50] Or in Spanish or in Portuguese in the case of Brazil.

[19:54] **Magdalena Atanassova:** So you have extra planning for those.

[19:57] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yeah, well, yeah, yeah. It's another challenge because you need to have facilitators that can speak in that language and are fluent in language and that can connect. But also when you think about connection, I think that it's important to talk the same language because of the characteristics and what we are trying to achieve in each of these labs.

[20:23] I think that talking the same language is one important part to not to feel limited when you're trying to express yourself.

[20:35] So always that we can we try to have those labs in local languages.

[20:41] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yes, yeah. And also we have different terminology sometimes.

[20:46] **Lucio Vaquero:** Sometimes. Yes, sometimes that's true. It's not the same. You have some. I know, slang. Yes, for.

[20:52] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, exactly.

[20:53] **Lucio Vaquero:** That can be different. The meaning of war in Mexico than in Colombia or in Argentina or so.

[21:01] Yes, that may happen. We try to avoid those types of war. But sometimes it's funny also to learn some concepts or the meaning of those concepts in other countries.

[21:15] But that can happen also. Yes, for sure.

[21:18] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And having in mind all the labs that you've led so far, if you had a chance, what would you do differently?

[21:25] **Lucio Vaquero:** Well, I told you something about that incorporation of technological elements.

[21:33] I think that there are many innovations now that happens like every moment to. At a super fast speed.

[21:48] And I think that I would like to have more of those opportunities to experience with the labs.

[21:56] As I told you, the advancements in AI are transforming the way we work and the way we do everything.

[22:06] So I would like to incorporate more of that in the.

[22:12] In the future labs. I think that we have a great opportunity and everyone is fascinated around that. I think that especially our industry needs to incorporate more of the technological advancements that we are having.

[22:34] Sometimes we take a little more time than recommended to incorporate some of these improvements. So I think that we need to move quickly now.

[22:47] There is a great opportunity for us ahead. So we will push this to incorporate this kind of things into the next labs that we are planning for. Sure.

[23:02] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Can you give me a for instance on how you're planning to incorporate AI in the future?

[23:08] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yes. Well, we have. There are many collaborators that are involved in AI and local from Argentina. For example, I don't know if you remember we had a couple of years ago in our Convenient Leaders events, Mateo Salvato.

[23:30] Matthew Salvato is a super young entrepreneur from Argentina that developed an application for deaf people.

[23:37] But he's really involved in groups of, I don't know, entrepreneurs that technological entrepreneurs. So I remember that he was the one that. From where I've heard about chapter 20 and it was, yeah, I don't know, a year and a half More or less.

[24:04] So he, he and many others are helping us to develop some elements to incorporate in our sessions. Yes. And even we can. We are using and we are having some workshops on AI, not labs, but sessions, inviting experts.

[24:30] So I think that we need to do more activities around that. I don't know, to understand more about the needs of our audience, how they behave, where are their interests, to have additional tools for their day to day spark is a good example of this.

[24:51] But. But there are many developments outside. So I would like to have more practical workshops where they can learn more about the application of this in our industry. So yes, we are working on that.

[25:08] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, that sounds exciting.

[25:10] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yeah.

[25:11] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And I have saved the best for last. So what events can our listeners expect from the team in Latin America in the near future? And especially we have to highlight the 2025 event coming up, share a bit more.

[25:32] **Lucio Vaquero:** So we have several initiatives. Yes, including more PCMA labs across various cities in Latin America.

[25:42] Do you know that one our industry is currently facing a talent crisis not only in LATAM, but everywhere.

[25:52] And there is a need to attract and engage young professionals. So to address this we have many initiatives in the region aimed at engaging the next generations of industry professionals.

[26:07] So such as? One of the most successful programs that we've launched is a mentoring program with regional experts. And these programs provide guidance and support to young professionals, helping them navigate their careers and develop their skills that are necessary to succeed in independent industry.

[26:29] But it's great because not only beneficial for the young professionals, but also for the mentors and these experienced professionals that wants to contribute to the industry. So it's amazing the feedback that we are receiving and the level of engagement that we have in that particular program.

[26:50] But something also another kind of activity that we are developing are what we call the Customer Advisory Summits. In some destinations, the Customer Advisory Summits are a collaboration platform where international advisors, business leaders and members in general of the events industry gather to discuss critical topics specific to a destination.

[27:22] These summits include different types of activities and they normally last between two to three days.

[27:30] And they are designed to foster the dialogue and maximize the exchange of ideas. For example, the topics addressed at these summits might include the destination perception, the enhancing the infrastructure for events, how to improve attendee experiences, strategies for attracting international events and each of these Customer Advisory Summit PCMA provides a detailed report analyzing insights, improving areas and opportunities for the destination, helping them to guide future actions.

[28:11] And this is another example and just finally what you just mentioned, that very important super highlights is our anticipate the first regional event for PCMA in Latin America, convening LATAM that will take place in Bogota, Colombia in May 2025 next year.

[28:37] Everybody's super excited about that.

[28:40] We as a team and all the, and all the members from our region and Camille LATAM will be a mix of PCMA, say global view and expertise with the characteristics and creativity and passion of Latin America.

[29:01] So the objective is to create a unique and inspiring environment with real high level content, top class speakers in a very dynamic atmosphere.

[29:16] So we want to drive transformation and growth in Latin America. So participants will have the chance to connect with people from both established sectors and new sectors also. That's one of our objectives.

[29:31] There are many professionals, not only in Latin America but everywhere, many event professionals, many of the corporate side that do not know that they belong, that there is an industry, that there is a space for them.

[29:49] So this is one of the objectives, is to expand the network across different fields.

[29:59] So for sure it will be an opportunity to go beyond traditional connections and explore a wide range of business relationships. So we are really, really excited about this upcoming event and you're already doing.

[30:15] **Magdalena Atanassova:** So much for the region, really.

[30:19] And I really want to just comment on the mentoring initiative that you have. I think it's super important, really. We're in a big crisis with talent.

[30:29] **Lucio Vaquero:** Yeah, absolutely. We need to attract young professionals. It's a must for us. It's a need, it's a real need of our industry.

[30:40] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, yeah. And I can say really, with all the initiatives, the labs, the mentoring initiative, the customer advisory summits and convenient LATAM, I think you're just closing the circle of touching on everything that our industry currently needs and just kudos to you and the team for that.

[31:00] **Lucio Vaquero:** Well, thank you, thank you very much. Yeah, the team is doing a great job and we are seeing the results. Also we are excited about the growth we are experiencing in Latin America and it's crucial for the development of the region that professionals engage and participate.

[31:23] So the more we come together and collaborate, the better it will be for everyone. So we are building, I feel, a strong, supportive community that is driving the innovation in our industry across Latin America.

[31:39] So yes, we are really excited about that.

[31:44] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Very well. And was there anything we didn't address and should mention before we finish?

[31:49] **Lucio Vaquero:** Well, I think that we covered the essentials. I could just add that again, PCMA Labs, incredible opportunity for the personal and professional growth and I encourage everyone in our space, in our business vent industry to participate and experience the benefits attending if you have a chance, of course you need to have one in your city or nearby.

[32:20] But again, it's not only a PCMA lab, it's any initiative.

[32:26] It's important to be part and to get involved. I think that is something that we need as professionals to develop at a personal, professional and community level.

[32:44] And of course we are always open to feedback, suggestions for everyone that is hearing. Feel free to reach out to us with new ideas, suggestions that we can incorporate. We are really open to that kind of connection and conversations.

[33:06] So this is something very important for us, our members and our community.

[33:12] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah. Well, I'll leave your details in the show notes everyone that wants to reach out.

[33:19] And I just want to thank you very much for your time and everything you shared.

[33:23] **Lucio Vaquero:** Thank you Maggie for having me. It was great to share you about the labs and our initiatives in Latin America. Thank you very much for the invitation.

[33:33] **Magdalena Atanassova:** My pleasure. Thank you.

[33:35] **Lucio Vaquero:** Thank you.

[33:40] **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.