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IPAF summit

Cranes & Access editor Mark Darwin reflects on the recent IPAF Summit 2011 in Amsterdam having missed the previous two events.

The 'globalisation' of the International Powered Access Federation has meant that in recent years its annual summit has strayed away from the UK and its base for several years, Whittlebury Hall in Northamptonshire. Two years ago it went 'overseas' for the first time choosing Dublin, the home city of the president at the John Ball and last year ventured into the heart of London in what was to be an alternating programme between the UK and overseas.

This year it decamped to the Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky in Amsterdam and in a change to the previous plan, Rome has been chosen as the venue for 2012.

If you attended the whole 2011 event - the Summit, the networking evening the day before and the Awards dinner - it consumed the best part of three days 'out the office' - a sizeable chunk of time (and money) for anyone to justify, even more so for the management of the many smaller companies that make up the bulk of the membership.

Is it worth attending?

So is it worth going? Well a growing attendance each year suggests that it is. The addition of the 'networking event' means that there is time to meet and chat with old and new acquaintances which can be difficult at the Summit and the Awards dinner. This year the Hard Rock Café was the venue for the 'networking' evening. Around 250 attended and it was a good chance to catch up and forge new connections. A shuttle

bus was laid on from the hotel although many chose to walk which also meant seeing some of the sights of Amsterdam on a very pleasant spring evening. Drink flowed, although many will have been hungry with the amount of food served. Entertainment - an Elvis impersonator - was brief and loud giving many the chance to grab some fresh air outside, while still listening at a reasonable volume. The event wound up at about 11-11.30, although many continued to sample the delights of the city well into the early hours.... perhaps knowing that the IPAF AGM was not until midday, with the Summit commencing after lunch at 1.30.

Selling Safety

The theme for the five speakers - Gerard Deprez of Loxam, Steve Shaughnessy who had just completed his term as IPAF president, at the earlier IPAF AGM, Jennifer Mathis of Ducker Worldwide, Chris Wraith of Lavendon Access Services and Andrew Fishburn of Spirit Network and Bravi UK - was how 'Selling Safety' is vital for your business.



Gerard Deprez

Tim Whiteman of IPAF started the proceedings, welcoming the substantial number of delegates and setting the scene for the summit:



Pre dinner cocktails in the hotel's Grand atrium



The network event was held at the Hard Rock Cafe

"we should not forget that we are selling a safe and effective way of working at height. This industry provides solutions for work at height tasks and can prevent unnecessary deaths. We are still carrying out missionary work because people don't understand the safe and more efficient way of working at height or the right equipment for the job."

First speaker Gerard Deprez started by saying that access rental has been the major driver of the equipment rental industry for the past 20 years and will continue to be so for at least another decade. When Loxam started in 1967, powered access equipment did not exist. It entered the market in 1995 and it has driven the growth of the company ever since, now accounting for 25 percent of its business with a fleet of around 10,000 machines. Statistics in the IPAF surveys highlight the cyclical nature of the business and its dependence on the construction industry. Deprez said that better planning in the timing of investment by rental companies (which own 80 percent of all access equipment) is needed to stop the peaks in demand which manufacturers struggle to cope with - particularly as growth in developing markets begins to take off. He finished on a positive note: "I am anticipating a new growth phase in the access sector, it has a bright future for at least the next decade."

Promoting the industry

Having concluded his term as IPAF president a few hours earlier, Steve Shaughnessy possibly indicating what might occupy him over the next year or so, talked about the need for an innovative approach to expand the access market. This stemmed from the fact that two years ago Facelift chairman Gordon Leicester suggested a campaign

named 'Think Access' and last year AFI chairman David Shipman put up £25,000 for a campaign to promote powered access to new markets.



Steve Shaughnessy

Shaughnessy suggested that IPAF is in the best position to coordinate such a move, and showed a possible route that he had developed over the last months of his presidency. He illustrated the potential market still to be tapped by comparing the USA where one platform is available for every 727 people to the 11 most developed EU countries where it is one machine for every 1,587 people - twice that of North America. Assuming market penetration in the US is as high as 70 percent suggests that the core European market has only reached 35-40 percent of its potential.

The suggested campaign would aim to add around £10-12 million of extra revenue a year and must be for the whole industry focusing on the rental sector to bring in new users with a knock-on benefit to manufacturers, trainers and IPAF through increased demand. The focus would be on the potential savings related to greater efficiency, fewer accidents and lower insurance premiums etc...These cost savings would be publicised through a new website and use of the latest technology. The UK was suggested as the test market with emphasis on the trade and technical press which covers sectors generally untouched by IPAF members. He showed graphics of a

new cartoon character, the 'Power Up' logo and 'Gain the upper hand' tag line which he suggested should link all the campaign material. The campaign would cost at least £250,000 to 300,000 a year and could be funded through a small increase in PAL card registration fee or a manufacturing equipment levy.

The last presentation before the coffee break was given by Jennifer Mathis who revealed the results of IPAF's annual market report from fresh research carried out by Ducker Worldwide on the state of the US and European access markets. New for this year are fleet sizes with utilisation, rental rates and retention periods. Fleet equipment breakdowns are also included.

Best for last?

From a delegates point of view, the final two topics were both more directly relevant to day to day operations. Both the final speakers - Chris Wraith on the issues surrounding outriggers and ground conditions and Andrew Fishburn on professional selling - also kept their presentations snappy and to the point - invaluable for the 'dozing off' end of an afternoon summit!

Wraith provoked interest and discussion at the start his presentation by asking delegates 'do you offer advice to your customers on the safe use of access equipment?' At least 50 percent indicated that they did give advice - he therefore concluded that they were obviously experts in the use of platforms.

He then made the point that aerial lifts themselves are not unstable, it is only when they are incorrectly set up or misused that there is a problem.

He observed that there are insufficient statistics on machine accidents and overturning in

particular (one for a later date) but from his own research he found that around 50 percent of accidents with platforms and cranes are due to overturning, caused by poor ground assessment, poor or no spreader plate selection and incorrect positioning of the outriggers.

With the much stiffer 'corporate manslaughter' rules coming into force, getting it wrong can carry serious consequences. He pointed out how manufacturers and rental companies' frequently use publicity material showing machines without outrigger spreader plates and urged the industry to change this. Wraith then quoted www.vertikal.net's survey as to whether outrigger mats should be mandatory with outriggers. Over 80 percent said Yes - but in a later survey only 50 percent of rental companies said they even offered mats. "I think we should educate rather than mandate" said Wraith, "lead with a carrot rather than beating with a stick and change behaviours."

He then highlighted phrases such as 'a typical MEWP outrigger' and asked is there such a thing? And how difficult it is to find good information - particularly as manufacturer's use a variety of measurement units such as N/sq mm, kN, lbs/sq inch, kg/sq cm, LCP and KPAs "Can't manufacturers standardise formats and units so that these important figures are easier to understand and compare?" he asked.

But how much pressure can the ground hold? This is usually left to the operator to decide - but they often get it wrong with dire consequences.

Wraith then referred back to his earlier question and asked those that indicated they were experts if they could really work out the ground pressure exerted by their machines? He reflected how such



Jennifer Mathis

information assumed mega importance when authorities ask questions after a machine tips over. A sub-committee has issued the policy statement that 'spreader plates should always be used when using a boom type platform fully supported by outriggers'. However this raises issues such as who provides the plates and what size etc etc. A walk-through website set up to answer these questions and many more with examples of types of activities and various ground conditions has been proposed. Overall it was an excellent and thought-provoking presentation.

Getting more from your sales staff

The final speaker of the day was Andrew Fishburn who questioned if the industry was getting the best from its sales people. Over the past 10-15 years there has been a virus spreading that may be part of the reason for some of the industry's problems - the virus of mediocre selling.

He maintains that the underselling of products and services causes price erosion and slower growth. Access products can be used in every aspect of life yet how many areas has the industry sold into? "The failure to sell the features and benefits is costing the industry millions," he said.

Sales people are historically highly costly to employ and difficult to control, but is this the way it needs to be? Fishburn outlined the basics

of managing sales staff and what motivates them. Motivation, he said, accounts for about 30 percent of overall performance. Knowledge, experience and general expertise accounts for 40 percent and can be improved through training.

Companies measure return on investment for products, but should they also be doing so for people within the company. Everything a company does begins with a sale - sales people like operators should therefore be trained.

Later in the evening the drinks reception preceded the awards dinner and provided a brief opportunity to network before the more formal structure of the excellent dinner and perhaps slightly too long awards ceremony.

Summing up, the IPAF summit provided several opportunities to network, learn more about the major issues affecting the industry and sample the delights of Amsterdam. Overall, well worth going to, if you can afford the time and cost of the event, hotels and entertainment!



Chris Wraith



Andrew Fishburn