

Exclusive interview with Eric Rozenberg, CMP, CMM Chairman of MPI Board of Directors

We cannot say it enough, Belgium may be a small country, but it has definitely produced many great men and women. In the year when Belgium has produced the first European President, July 1st was the date that the country took on the Presidency of the European Union and.....the start of the Chairman of the MPI Board of Directors year by a Belgian: Eric Rozenberg! We met with the brand new Chairman in his offices to discuss his coming year as Chairman and what it means to him.

It is not as if Eric is a man of leisure, together with his business partner Georges Yana he – successfully – runs Swantegy, a leading company in our industry, so it begs the question, why take on such a demanding role? “I learn all the time”, is the simple answer to a question he has been asked more than once in the past. “MPI is of course great for learning, networking and the best way to have business contacts and interact with people in over 80 countries. My colleagues inspire me to improve the service I give to my clients, and that I want to do to the best of my abilities”. A simple statement, but it covers a number of messages and opportunities.

The MPI Chairman position is in fact a mandate for 3 years. First one becomes Chairman Elect for 1 year, a year of working closely with the previous incumbent. This is then followed by the actual year as Chairman, in tandem with Bruce MacMillan, President and CEO of MPI, and afterwards there is one more year as Immediate Past Chairman. It is also an achievement for Eric to be the first Chairman of MPI not to be based in North America. MPI has become a force to reckon with over the years with over 23,000 members worldwide belonging to 71 chapters, and 80 full time employees. In 4 offices (Dallas – HQ, Toronto, Luxembourg and Doha) and the way the Chair rotation has been organized yields a much needed commodity that enables every Chairman to continue the development of the MPI network and its services: continuity!

Eric immediately comes to the heart of the matter: he feels – and the majority of his colleagues with him – that the whole meeting planners industry is still totally underestimated in Europe. “Do you realize that the combined buying power of all MPI members represents a staggering 16.9 billion USD? If MPI were a global company it would be up there with international biggies such as Whirlpool, JC Penney or United Airlines!!” He continues: “If I had one wish it would be to help our members to better utilize meetings. The perception, especially in Europe, of meetings is still very low, we need to become more professional and help executives understand that meetings should be part of their strategy as meetings help to execute the strategy of a company. The importance of education cannot be stressed enough. Meetings do not stop when the last word is said, they need to be evaluated and measured and follow-up needs to be organized.”

For this purpose MPI has launched this July a new website www.mpiweb.org which in the next 12 months will contain 2,000 educational elements; focus will be put on content and delivering educational learning tools for members to be successful. This is another example of how MPI focuses on its members and their needs.

Eric does not believe in 'buzz words of the year' and sees his role for the coming year as a helping hand in order to further execute the MPI business plan – "I'm an element of the chain" – and hopes to deliver an association that is in an even better place in 12 months than it is today.

What does a new chairman talk about on trips around chapters in all parts of the world? "First I remind our members of all the resources MPI has available for its members. Not all our members know exactly what MPI has to offer, what their membership entitles them to. For example, they have access to a database of over 700 job offerings in our industry via our website! The largest industry specific job bank in the world. MPI has the means and the will to make it all real for its members, the entire Board is focused on the needs of the members, but the touchstone is of course at chapter level. We cannot stress enough the importance of all the volunteers at chapter level who donate their time and energy to give their vital support."

The MPI website not only offers a variety of Industry leading content topics that can be accessed and used worldwide, but it also lists seminars, webinars and presentations that have been delivered locally at chapter level. One of the great tools that too few members use is the Culture Active Tool: it takes 30 minutes to fill out a questionnaire about yourself, the result will position the member on the cultural triangle. Every time one needs to interact with a different region, this can be looked up and cultural differences and common points will be identified so the member interacts appropriately within different cultures. A most useful tool that is always available but not used enough!

MPI is also investing a lot of resources in research and produces a number of surveys such as the Future Watch survey or the bi-monthly Business Barometer (in partnership with American Express), all available on the website and at no cost to members.

Let's also not forget the MPI Foundation which at the end of the last fiscal year had managed to raise 2.3 million USD and will help launch this July a very performing sustainable Event Measurement Tool available to all members on the web. This standardized and comprehensive system has been designed to create a common global disclosure platform for the collection, benchmarking and reporting of sustainability data as well as increase CSR reporting and carbon disclosure.

At the end of his year as Chairman, Eric Rozenberg will continue to work with his excellent team in his own company whilst still remaining on as Immediate Past Chairman and hopes to be able to look back and say "I did what I had to do". His only

wish is to see to it that all members are being helped to implement the excellent tools that are available to them at MPI. And after these 3 hectic years...? "I'll remain active as an MPI Member but will not sit on committees or such...I will of course attend congresses and chapter meetings and continue to learn and thus improve the service to my clients!". Wise words by a Chairman who will make sure that the MPI message is heard and understood worldwide with the help of all his MPI colleagues.

Good luck Mr Chairman!

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