



CSIA 2019 Executive Conference

Welcome Reception

April 30, 2019

Opening Remarks: Bob Zeigenfuse, President, Avanceon

It is truly an honor that I get to welcome you to our 25th anniversary conference. I am going to share my CSIA journey over the last 25 years our four generations of growth, some fun facts and my perspectives as fast as I can.

I am also going to share what my giving – without knowing why – without expectations of a return – has given back to me. So, roam the field with me for a while. Try to reflect on what your mark has been and what it could be.

For me, it only seems like yesterday (as long as 60 is the new 40!). It was 1992 and I get a call from this guy named Pat Miller. It goes something like this:

Him: Charlie Bergman says we should get together to learn from each other.

Me: Why would I get together with my competitors and *share* anything?

Pat: Different markets and regions, we won't cross paths, etc., so forth.

I'm thinking, not sure I see the logic, but I don't have to share a thing. I will just listen and learn, so I said, yes.



Here are Pat and I with 20 of our competitors in the first meeting of integrators in 1992 at Shell Island Resort.

I have seen all the hard work it took to get to today. It all got started with Charlie and Pat who got us established and ran all of our initial conferences from 1993 to 2000. Charlie established, with his now infamous pitch, “Share one idea and get 10 in return and save \$50K of consulting.” It seemed logical at the time. Prior to that, you could have heard a pin drop as I guess we all thought we might learn without sharing. As I now see it, that moment lived out us Charlie’s disciples, established the norm of unselfishly sharing of business practices. This alone sets our organization and industry apart from all others I have seen. A quote from Winston Churchill sums it up best.



Fun facts, during the first generation of conferences we used to:

- Begin each conference by standing up one at a time and telling our name, company and give a brief company bio. Then state who we might want to meet. This went on until we got too big.
- SIs did 80% of the talks, which were mostly lessons learned the hard way, which is the basis of the Hot Stove topics today.

So here is how the BP & B all got started around 1995-ish. I saw several instances of third parties defining what a good integrator was and labeling poor integrators as good. Charlie arranged a talk from the AC-EC, a non-for-profit organization to help raise the professional bar of all A&E firms. Inspired, I pitched Jamie Jordan on the fact that the CSIA should be the voice that determines what a good integrator is, much like the AC-EC had done.

We work on our pitch to Pat for what the CSIA should do and hit him with it. Without hesitation, Pat says, “Great idea! Why don’t you form a committee and get it done?” I am dumbfounded and can only think to say, oooohkay.



Fortunately, we got a copy of the AC-EC Best Practices for free. We assembled the best minds of the CSIA at that time into a committee and sought to integratorize the AC-EC document and add value.

Fast forward a quick 3 or 4 years. We end up with the CSIA's BP&B, a **professional service firm standard developed by integrators for integrators** to help raise the bar of all integration firms.

Some fun facts:

- Everybody defended their practice as the best, which led to very heated arguments, especially since we vowed to be in agreement before making it a best practice.
- Phone progress was too slow, so punishment was 3-day weekends for missed targets. We did that a lot.
- One such weekend, Pat decides to drop in to see if we are making any progress. He sees the heated arguments and some progress. He tells me to keep up the good work...and he would like to have it while he was still young!
- There were many integrators who made contributions, but nobody contributed more **in my time** than Jamie Jordan, Dean Streck and Don Roberts.

Jeff Miller, thanks for taking the torch and making it better with every revision.

I know that thanks is not nearly enough, but thanks men, for the wild but educating ride of a lifetime.

Cheers to you!



A key fork in the road: After our executive director Richard Bradon's tragic death, I saw what had been done before and I felt Norm could do it better. So, I dragged him along to our emergency meeting in Washington, D.C., under the disguise of learning more about our industry. Then, on the way home, I pitched him. It went mostly like this:

Me: You can do this.

Him: I don't know the industry.

Me: You learned it at Avanceon.

Him: I guess I know how to do conference from my GE days.

Me: That counts.

Him: I have never run an organization.

Me: It's barely an organization yet. More like a large group.

Him: I could be a good spokesperson.

Me: Yes, indeed.

Him: How much does it pay?

Me: Ah, about \$30k-ish, but it's only part time work. And you can still do marketing for me.

Him: You want long-term commitment to end the turnover.

Me: Yes, we want a minimum of 5 years, but we can be flexible.

Him: You have no infrastructure.

Me: You can work out of my office and use my staff if needed until CSIA can afford it. (I can still see he is on the "no" side of the fence. So, I use a really hard close...shameless begging.)

Me: Could you at least help us get through the conference in four months and we can go from there?

The result: He signed a three-year contract and, as they say, the rest is history!
I still consider that one of my top 10 or 20 pitches.

Some fun facts:



- Conferences were run on a \$100K budget, which included a 10% bonus for Norm. Norm would sweat it out each year to make the minimum booking because 50% would sign up in the last couple of weeks before the conference.
- CSIA management budget was under \$100K for a long time and made up of:
 - Lou Simmer, a part-time, really fun, full-time marketing consultant (for \$15k).
 - Joan O'Leary (free)
 - Paul Barnard insurance program and member recruiter, free but we had to let Paul be Paul.
- After about six years, we bumped Norm up to \$60k and got him a part-time secretary for \$30k.

As most of you know, Norm, Joan and Lou grew to love the CSIA and our industry. They poured their heart and souls into our cause every day from 2000 to 2009 to get us real and relevant and by establishing the core of membership value that still exists today.

Norm also became a father figure to many, including me. Join me in toasting to Norm, Joan, Lou and Paul...that they will be forever in our hearts and minds.

Cheers, Norm.

Now, Norm wouldn't talk about it, but at 68, his health was beginning to fail, and we were getting too big, so we go on the hunt for an AMC firm we couldn't afford.

Fun facts:

- As we thought, we couldn't afford an AMC. They wanted \$200k to \$300k. We had \$150k at best. I thought our goose was cooked.
- Then, Lynda Patterson approached us on the side to inform us she was going to be leaving her firm and that she would be willing to be our AMC for \$100k as we would need to take a leap of faith as her first client.



- Some due diligence revealed that Lynda had licensed all of AMC collateral/technology she would need and had a staff-sharing arrangement until she had enough work to establish hers. So, we make a courageous decision and again, as they say, the rest is history. As Amped and Rob Lowe got us organized and significantly grew our members and got us going internationally.

Join me again to toast Rob Lowe and Amped.

Cheers.

Now I am really excited for the CSIA's future, more so than I have ever been in some time. As 2019 and this conference starts our 4th generation with Jose, who should be done with his training by now, and powerful AMC Kellen. It was nice to be able to afford what we think is the best AMC for the CSIA going forward.

After living all those milestones, I believe **the best is yet to come**. No toast, yet. You have to earn it! So just a little more about my journey.

I tell people that I am prouder of my work in the CSIA than my work building Avanceon. Most are somewhat taken aback by that, but the logic is simple.

First, it was way harder to *herd cats to get results* than it was to *hire and fire people* to get results.

Second, I gave and got satisfaction with Avanceon. I gave and received an enriched life with CSIA. Avanceon has profitably grown in ways I never would have envisioned had I not been highly involved with the CSIA.

Have you ever asked yourself, **why would I do that? Now you know.**



Meeting with 22 of my competitors 25 years ago ended up being **the best business decision of my life bar none**. The process of creating and then executing the BP& B ended up being **my second-best business decision of my life!**

I am not alone in this journey.

- Andrew Downs of Sage, what was your revenue your first year and now?
- Eduardo Acosta of Omnicon, what was your revenue your first year and now?
- Rick Pierro of Superior Controls, what was your revenue your first year and now?

I could go on, but I think you get the point.

So, I did learn, **why do it?** It's best stated by St. Francis of Assisi



And the receiving for me has been, and still is, invaluable, even priceless. With global “go-to” peers/friends that I can run anything by. More importantly, cry on their shoulders.

- I try not to go South without stopping to see Jamie Jordan, my CSIA wingman, Remember Me Award winner and human element expert. Ironically, he is now



married to Cindy Grosso, whose company is the Charleston School of Protocol and Etiquette, go figure?

- I try not to go West without stopping to see Dean Streck, my other CSIA wingman, Remember Me Award winner, business strategist and the best speaker the CSIA ever had.
- I was enriched by a second father and mother who always gave me strength when I needed it most.

In conclusion, life gives you structured paths to follow until you graduate. Then some companies give you their paths to follow, otherwise we are left as individuals to figure it all out. Learning from each of our mistakes **or not**, wondering if you should make a courageous decision, **or not**.

I, for one, am deeply and profoundly grateful and proud of the opportunities CSIA gave me through the people, experiences and advice, the shoulders I cried on, the platform that was laid down 25 years ago, to allow us **all to lift together** to make us and this industry better...**and we have**...and now **I see it only getting better**.

Now, I challenge those less involved until now – and the younger generation – to invest in yourself by helping others and by giving even when you don't know why, by sharing, by opening up and taking that risk. Make a courageous decision, for now I know you will be absolutely amazed at the opportunities to learn, to grow, and to make lifelong friends and enhance the quality of your life. All while helping make the world and our industry a better place. It is an opportunity not to ignore.

Or else, you may just make your mark on the North wall of Snake River Canyon, like so many integrators I have seen come and go over the last 25 years!

May God continue to bless us all.