

Michael Payne interview: Summit mood upbeat as visitor numbers stabilize



From left: IAADFS President & CEO Michael Payne and ASUTIL Secretary General Jose Luis Donagaray

Preliminary visitor numbers for the Summit of the Americas 2019 indicate that as of yesterday (March 27), registered delegates totaled 1,830. Last year there were 1,900, so the growth is flat.

Approximately 420 buyers registered for the event which was down slightly from last year.

Speaking to *Americas Duty Free* magazine in an exclusive interview on Wednesday morning (March 27), IAADFS President & CEO Michael Payne was upbeat about the show.

“[Overall feedback] has been very positive, upbeat, high-energy. People like the changes, and I’ve hardly heard anything negative so far. I’d say it’s a hit from everyone I talked to,” he enthused.

He continued: “They like the facility more, they like the fact we continue to upgrade the Executive Learning Sessions. It’s a more intimate environment with an exhibition hall, private meeting rooms, the foyer... It hangs together better for people.

“They like the social activities - the event last night (Summit Celebration on Tuesday) and the club [Cuba Libre Fun Night on Monday]. There’s more of a positive feeling to the show this year.”

Payne wasn't keen on a suggestion made to *Americas Duty Free* that new exhibitors be grouped in the foyer next year for greater visibility.

"Some of our older exhibitors wouldn't necessarily be in favor of that – they want to be in foyer as they like the open feeling," said Payne. "I think it's better to have it mixed. But we could do a better job of featuring new exhibitors and we could do more to make sure we are drawing attention to them."

Payne also answered some critics who have aired their doubts about the viability of the show in two or three years time.

"It's a fair question. If we don't adapt and change to what's going on with the industry and try to make the show track with what the industry wants, it won't last. Should it be a huge trade show or more of a conference, a networking activity? Should we have more speakers, another format? Is there another location? All of that is up for discussion all the time," he said.

He noted that this year's changes had been based on feedback from both suppliers and buyers.

Answering a question about the possibility of the Americas not having a show at all in the future, following the merger of the IAADFS and ASUTIL events, he acknowledged that industry consolidation would lead to changes. "Industry consolidation is more pronounced in this part of the world. This will require us to consolidate our activities. But there will always be something for the Americas, whether it's a show or a conference or a summit – it's critical."

He continued: "The mood is much more upbeat this year. We need to take advantage of that and fulfill it. It doesn't have to be done the same way. If we don't examine it for the future, we're not doing our job."

Turning to several key buyers and suppliers – notably perfume houses – who were absent from this year's show, Payne said the organizers had reached out to all the people concerned before the event and added that they would all be contacted afterwards.

"Estee Lauder and L'Oreal are here but some other perfume houses are not. That's an issue for us. We got very close with some of them. Some pulled because of the economy of the region. We've got to work on that. It's an investment on their part so they must make sure they get something out of it. It's an important sector for us and we'll have a serious look at it. We'll make sure we do the right thing going forward."

The organizers are scheduled to discuss the Summit at the annual IAADFS board meeting, scheduled for June in Miami, where they will examine the data and feedback from show surveys.

"We will expand the meeting to include a more deep-dive look at the show. Do we change it now? We will probably have similar plans for next year, I think, based on the feedback here so far, but we will talk about that," he said.

Payne noted that the show pattern would be different next year. Instead of the Summit starting on Sunday, it will start on Monday and run through Thursday (March 30-April 2, 2020).

Below are snapshots from this week's trade floor.











