

Convene Podcast Transcript

Season 3 Episode 6 with Jennifer Bishop, Strategic Director, Business Development, PCMA

**Note: the transcript is AI generated, excuse typos and inaccuracies*

[00:05] **Jennifer Bishop:** One of the most impactful changes this year was creating themes for each of the four areas and asking partners to design their experience with one of those pillars in mind.

[00:16] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Welcome to the Convene podcast. I'm your host, Magdalena Atanassova, digital media editor of Convene. It's a pleasure to bring you another episode from season three as we offer an exclusive behind the scenes glimpse into convenient leaders 2024 held in Sunny San Diego this January. This episode is brought to you by visit Kingston Jennifer Bishop and I discuss the intricacies of the district, what proved to be the heart of the event. She shares details about the concept, how to engage with sponsors, and some ideas on how this concept will change in the future. Enjoy the episode.

[01:00] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Hi Jen, and welcome to the Convene podcast. It's a pleasure to have you as part of this very special season dedicated to convening leaders. Let's start with some introductions. Can you introduce yourself to our listeners and share more about your background as well as your responsibilities during the event?

[01:18] **Jennifer Bishop:** Okay, my name is Jennifer Bishop. I'm one of the strategic directors on the business development team and I also oversee our account management team with my counterpart, Maggie Simkin. I've worked at PCMA for 19 years and I've always been involved with the partnership program, but my role has evolved. I used to be responsible for fulfillment and basically ensuring that all contract deliverables were met for our partners and sponsors, and I'm now more involved on the strategy side and I work with various team members to develop our partnership program assets and sponsorship opportunities both at our events and throughout the year and for community leaders in particular? I was very much involved with the partner activations in the district and how our partners are incorporated into the design of that. And apart from the district, our team manages fulfillment for anything our partners are involved in, and that ranges from education sessions they're sponsoring and focus groups to video interviews and main stage seating.

[02:11] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And you mentioned the district. So can you share a bit more about the concept behind the district and specifically how it's different than an exhibit hall that we're also used to and maybe how convenient leaders the version of convenient leaders this year was an evolution or a new approach from previous editions.

[02:31] **Jennifer Bishop:** The district concept began in 2020 and has continued to evolve and grow since then, but it is essentially the heart of CL since it's the central meeting place and the hub for food and beverage and partner experiences. One of the most impactful changes this year was creating themes for each of the four areas and asking partners to design their experience with one of those pillars in mind. The belong area was about community and gathering places, and it included our blazer lounge. The enjoy area was about infusing wellness into your daily routine, and it included a pickleball court. The engage area was intended to empower attendees with tools for the professional success, and that featured the tech playground and the explorer area encouraged attendees to learn more about destinations, including our global district and what it means to think bigger and braver. The sales pavilion was the ideal location for the partner experiences. We were trying to create a true 360 design in terms of access and flow through the space. No one felt like they were in the back of the room as you would in a traditional exhibit hall, since we had entry points from all four sides of the room, and having the breakout sessions flanking both sides of the pavilion was critical in terms of flow, and the terraces of natural light created a warm and welcoming ambiance in the space.

[03:43] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I like that. You know, the fact that it was so.

[03:47] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I don't know how to put it.

[03:48] **Magdalena Atanassova:** But so open, it did not feel as an enclosed space like you.

[03:53] **Jennifer Bishop:** Yeah, exactly. I think the natural light and having access to the terrace made such a big difference. We've never really been in a venue like that, so it was quite unique.

[04:02] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah.

[04:02] **Magdalena Atanassova:** And just crossing through it to get to the other side so you can attend some of the meetings like you said. And the pavilion, just for those that were not on site, that that's the area, right?

[04:14] **Jennifer Bishop:** Yeah, it is an exhibit hall, but it literally looks, it has like sails on the ceiling and there's natural light coming in through the north side and the south side with all glass windows around the whole space, so there literally weren't any walls.

[04:30] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Can you share how you work with the different companies on their sponsor activations? They were quite different this year. And how much control did you have on overdose?

[04:40] **Jennifer Bishop:** So in addition to asking partners to align with one of the district themes, we also requested that they design their activations with the 360 degree viewing. So they had to get creative and not bring a traditional booth to the conference. And we really wanted partners to think outside of the box and create activations that encouraged attendees to interact with them. Our events team requested that all activation designs were sent to them for approval before anything was put into production and to design the space with activating and engaging experiences in mind. It was more about ensuring that the activations had a true 360 design and weren't blocking sight lines.

[05:13] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And I just want to stop you.

[05:15] **Magdalina Atanassova:** For that pickleball, because for me, as a person from Europe. I had so many questions, what the heck is pickleball and why is it there and what's going on?

[05:26] **Jennifer Bishop:** Right? Yeah, it's kind of the new fad that's really growing really quickly here in North America. And I think that was just a way to bring in the activity and the wellness aspect to that area of the district. You know, people just kind of want to break and they want to move because at a conference you're usually sitting down and you're, you know, just still. And this was just about taking a little break, having a quick moment of exercise and just opening up your mind. And of course, we had some fun competitions, as you probably saw with sheriff and the chair, the incoming chair. So it was a lot of fun.

[05:59] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And pickup always like tennis, but it's like in a small field, I don't know even how to.

[06:04] **Jennifer Bishop:** Yeah, I've never played, to be honest. I know it is similar to tennis, but there are some differences, but it can be contained. And the interesting is, thing is Seattle sponsored it and apparently is the home of Pickleball, where it all began. So they want to do that again during business defense industry week. So it might be a growing thing you see at our events.

[06:24] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I love that we can popularize an actual sport at our events, but that would be quite fun.

[06:36] **Magdalina Atanassova:** A word from our sponsor. Why plan a business event in Kingston, Ontario? Because it's easy to get to and walkable and for all there is to see, do and taste. So you save more, connect more and experience more while you're there. Report meetings, sales retreats and team building. Plan your business event in Kingston. Learn more at VisitKingston.CA/MeetInKingston. Now back to the program.

[07:13] **Magdalina Atanassova:** How did you manage to run the district before and during the event? You already mentioned that all designs needed to be approved, but what else did it entail?

[07:24] **Jennifer Bishop:** So our department worked closely with the events and education team for months leading up to CL on the design and how to incorporate our partners, as well as logistics involved in bringing that to life. We also plan a site visit with our partners in the spring so they can walk the space with us and get a first look at the design and themes for the conference. Our account team does an amazing job leading with our partners and vendors and there's a lot of detail and tension that goes into that, from sharing guidelines to requesting preferred placements and trying to ensure that everyone is happy with their location and during the event. Our team was actively checking in on partners during setup to ensure everything was going smoothly. They also made a point of walking through the space throughout the conference, particularly during planned activity times.

[08:05] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And how did you balance giving sponsoring organizations the chance to unleash their creativity with what can reasonably be accommodated in the space? Did you have a chance where they wanted to go much more wild than, you know, you could actually have them do on site?

[08:21] **Jennifer Bishop:** There were certain restrictions, like keeping the height of their activations to 14ft and anything over that would have to be placed around the periphery of the pavilion so they didn't block other activations. We didn't allow for any rigging because we didn't want it to look like a trade show, so the only other restriction was not having amplified sound if they were planning on music in their space. So we learned from past years that attendees found allowed music to be disruptive, especially if education sessions or meetings were taking place around them.

[08:47] **Magdalina Atanassova:** So many examples come to mind. Right, and how did you work on ensuring there is a good mix of variety of sponsors and activations?

[08:57] **Jennifer Bishop:** So since we work so closely with our partners on what they're planning and designing, we're able to share what else is happening in the adjacent spaces so there isn't too much duplication. The partners like to be original and they all did something unique, which was great. And

the partners actually really set up this year in terms of creating engaging experiences, and it was evident with the lines and the traffic that the attendees also enjoyed the activations. We saw everything from pop up shops and markets to cooking demonstrations and oxygen bars, personalized shirts and bags, tarot card readings, the list goes on and on.

[09:29] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Did you offer any innovative sponsorship packages to those companies that took part?

[09:35] **Jennifer Bishop:** Yeah. So all partners with inactivation in the district received a landing page in the swap card app and the digital platform to promote what they were planning. So they were able to manage the design of the page, add videos, banners, resources, and a list of staff members who would be attending. And the app also included a lead retrieval feature this year so they could scan attendee badges and it generated a report in real time.

[09:58] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Do you have numbers from those reports that maybe you can speak on?

[10:02] **Jennifer Bishop:** Not specific. I know partners did say though, like a lot of them, about their overall experience, that they had like triple the amount of traffic in their space. And they, in the past they were able to rent like an actual batch scanner, like a device. But this was great because everyone in the activation was able to just use their phone in the app and it could scan people as they came in. So I think it just gave them multiple opportunities to make sure that everybody was captured versus having one person hold a scanner.

[10:28] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah, that's great. And if you had a chance, what would you do differently?

[10:33] **Jennifer Bishop:** I think the most common area for improvement we heard from partners was to add more seating for meal functions. It's an interesting balance to set enough space for the partner activations and what we're designing, but also accommodate seating and food stations. We wanted to get away from traditional sit down lunches, so we need to get more creative in terms of seating.

[10:53] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And if you think of how would you do it differently, you have to imagine yourself in the same space. Right. So if you're in a different conference center.

[11:02] **Jennifer Bishop:** Exactly.

[11:03] **Magdalina Atanassova:** And next, plans for an iteration of the district, do you know already how.

[11:09] **Magdalina Atanassova:** It would look like?

[11:10] **Jennifer Bishop:** So our events team is actually on a site visit to our future host city this week, and they're looking at how we can replicate the experience and the design to some degree, but also find a way to keep evolving to ensure the overall experience is meaningful and adds value for the conference attendee. Things are never boring here at PCMA's. I like to say it's challenging to work in different venues every year, but in a good way. We're really excited to see what our experience in Houston will look like next year.

[11:35] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah, I'm sure everybody that experienced the district would like to see the next version and the new activations because they were quite fun. Was there anything we didn't address and we should mention before we wrap up?

[11:50] **Jennifer Bishop:** No, I don't think so. I think it was covered. I mean, I think it's just like I said, we're really trying to keep improving and enhancing this experience, and we just. We've heard so much more positive feedback this year than past years. I think that had a lot to do with the space we're in. So we just. We learned a lot of lessons, and even if we have to go back to being in a more traditional looking exhibit hall, I think what we do in the space and what's around it is really going to influence what that experience feels like for the attendees. So we learned a lot of lessons. We just have to keep evolving.

[12:24] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Keep evolving.

[12:25] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I think that's a. That's the word for every event manager, everybody in the event industry.

[12:30] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Keep evolving.

[12:31] **Jennifer Bishop:** Yeah, I know. You just reminded me of your background, like dory. Keep swimming, keep swimming. You know, you have to always just keep. Keep moving forward. And it's interesting, though, it's a challenge, so things truly are never satisfied, especially.

[12:49] **Magdalina Atanassova:** When you work with so many different companies and sponsors.

[12:53] **Jennifer Bishop:** Yeah.

[12:53] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Thank you for this conversation. And I hope these answered a few questions to those of our listeners who attended or who just wanted to imagine what it was like.

[13:05] **Jennifer Bishop:** Thank you for having the opportunity. It was great to be a part of it.

[13:11] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Remember to subscribe to the Convene podcast on your favorite listening platform to stay updated with our latest episodes. We want to thank our sponsor. Visit Kingston. Learn more about why you should hold your business event in Kingston, Ontario at VisitKingston.CA/MeetinKingston For further industry insights from the convene team, head over to pcma.org/convene. Until next time.