

Convene Podcast Transcript

Season 1 Episode 6 with Albert Cerezales Garcia and Stephen Rose

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

[00:02] **Stephen Rose:** Technology with purpose is the key word here. Only if you understand how you can use it and what the purpose is. It will actually be taken and applied.

[00:12] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Welcome to the Convene podcast. My name is Magdalena Atanassova, convinced digital media editor and your host today. I'm happy to welcome you to our last episode of this series where we brought together the perspectives of different generations on hot industry topics. In this season finale, we're diving into the most compelling topic of our time, AI. Join us as I sit down with Albert Garcia, strategic consultant at MCI Group, and Steven Rose, head of global communication services at Siemens. Together we explored the seamless integration of AI into professional's daily routines, the crucial balance between technology and the human touch, the importance of upskilling and the evolution of job roles in the digital age. Enjoy the episode.

[01:07] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Hello and welcome to both of you to the Convene Podcast. And I'm super excited to discuss technology with both of you. So let's start directly with some short introductions. Albert, maybe start with you if you can share a bit more about yourself. And how many years have you been in the industry?

[01:23] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** Perfect. My name is Albert. I'm from Barcelona originally, but lived in a number of places. That's why there's a bit of an accent. And I'm a strategic consultant for MCI at the moment. So looking at a lot of business intelligence, marketing insights, and we use a lot of tech, we use a lot of AI tools for that purpose and. Yeah, happy to be here.

[01:45] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Thank you, Stephen.

[01:47] **Stephen Rose:** I'm Stephen Rose, working for Siemens, proud and honored to be leading the communication service team. We're a team that manages trade shows events across all businesses of Siemens, based in Munich, Germany, but working global.

[02:00] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Thank you. How have you integrated technology and AI into your work process? And maybe if you can share a few examples of specific tools that you've used and how you have incorporated them.

[02:11] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Stephen?

[02:12] **Stephen Rose:** Well, I think we talk about technology in AI. It's a really broad field. So talking about technology is a bit like talking about mobility and bikes. Technology can be so many things. We're talking hardware, we're talking software, it could be stage technology, display technology, it can be software. In maybe twelve months before this podcast, we'd be talking about metaverse applications here. Now we're talking about AI. So if we really narrow it down to what we use in event, in the event space and in the marketing space, obviously there are the classic event platforms that we use to engage with an experience with our participants at events. There's a lot of let's say, onstage technology. We just had some really interesting introduction of holographic technology that we're using for shows. I just arrived here from Hanover, from the Emo, the biggest machine tool builders show, where we introduced digital twin of a machine. To be clear, I mean, Siemens is a tech company. We are working in the space of technology. We're selling technology to our customers in the area of mobility, industry and infrastructure. Therefore, of course, it's very close to our heart to also use technology in our realm. Talking about AI specifically, we have two use cases that I can mention here. One is that during one of our conferences, we actually produced a whole slot completely by AI. So it wrote the script, it created an avatar, it created the video, the PowerPoint slides. We even used graphic tools to create the visuals for the PowerPoint slides. So this was a no touch exercise, basically. It was more a gimmick to see how the audience reacts and to see how far the technology is already.

[03:58] **Magdalena Atanassova:** How did they react?

[04:00] **Stephen Rose:** I would say about 50% were really surprised because we actually used a metahuman avatar. So it was very close to a real human, and we called him like James or John Dew. So I basically introduced it with, well, we've got an expert here on the field of AI, and he's going to talk about the usage of AI in the event space. And we had him talk about it and present, so that was actually quite fun. And obviously, we used a combination of different AI tools. And that's kind of the thing at the moment. The minute you use a certain tool, a week later you'll find a new one on TikTok, which is better. So I wouldn't really want to name one specifically. The one that we did use now for a longer time is spark. We introduced it to the team during our team workshop in July, and we're in a pilot now since two months. And I can tell you a little bit later, also on stage, our experiences using that.

[04:54] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Nice. Howard, how about you?

[04:56] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** Yeah, I agree with Stephen that technology is a very broad topic, and you can talk about a number of different things. And right now, the buzzword or the word of the moment is AI. Like it could be metaverse, like it could be anything else. And when it comes to AI, I think it has grown very rapidly. It has grown exponentially, if you ask me this question. Twelve months ago, maybe I used half the AI tools, or even less of the tools that I'm using right now. But in my case, because I'm not specifically organizing events, I'm not on site, I'm not in operations, I do more of the business intelligence, the market research, the insights. So we use tools for things like social listening, for segmentation of data diversification and grouping people, Persona analysis, and we have used it to create avatars like you have, but for a different purpose. And it's really interesting. I think it's very new. So I think everyone is using different tools, trying to see which one works, which one doesn't, and no one knows what the right one is or what it actually does. I think we've got maybe 2030 tools that we have, and I maybe know how to use two or three properly because it's such a new field and it's so broad that you never get into the specifics of it. But for example, for social listening, we use different tools for either industry analysis or company based analysis, let's say. And one that we use is audience, which tracks the industry. So let's say MedTech, to say something, and it tracks the influences, the different groups. And AI helps with that. It creates values, it creates personalities, and it's very interesting. And I think we'll, as he said, new tools come out every day, and maybe tomorrow I won't be using audience, I'll be using something else. I don't think what the tool is matters. I think is what the purpose of it is that matters.

[06:53] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Clearly, you both use AI in your day to day tasks. Did you have any challenges integrating some of those tools? How are you going about it? Because I see that that's kind of a struggle for a lot of event professionals or a lot of people in the industry. No matter their role, they see the buzz they tried, but they don't really integrate it into their work process because, you know, it takes time to learn. So how did you go about that? And if you faced any other challenges.

[07:19] **Stephen Rose:** I think there's also a multifold of challenges here. One of the key challenges for us is definitely just the culture change. So it's basically the people that need to kind of understand what it can be used for. You already said it's a tool and it needs to have a purpose. And I think technology with purpose is the key word here. Only if you understand how you can use it and what the purpose is, it will actually be taken and applied and you can use technology in different ways. Right. So let's make the example of a knife. If you know how to operate a knife, cut and stab, you can cut bread, but you also can kill people. So I think it's really important to understand how to apply this technology in the process. So it actually is for a better and greater purpose. So culture is the one thing really taking the people on board, making them understand what the technology is capable to do, and also especially what is it not able to do? Because if you look at large language models, if you look at jet, GPT and other tools, they all seem to be doing magic, right? But you need to understand that a lot of this has to do with mathematics in the background, and you cannot use it for classic research work because it's not going to come up with anything new. It's just going to reuse combinations of words that it has learned over years and time. It knows all the books, all the Internet, which is great, but it only, at the end of the day, combines words. So if you ask the large language model, what is the capital city of Germany? It might not say Berlin, because in a few Internet forums, it found that there's often a combination between capital city of Germany and Munich, and it might come up with Munich. So you cannot rely on the results. You need to put a quality check into those results. And that kind of is the second challenge is you cannot just copy paste output out of AI and use it in a professional environment. You need to have a sanity and quality check that at the end of the day, what you're saying is not harming your reputation as a company.

[09:17] **Magdalina Atanassova:** For example, Aubrey, did you face any challenges reading AI?

[09:22] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** Yes, similar to Steven, I think because it's so new, people don't understand it or don't have a full understanding of what it is capable of doing and what different tools are capable of doing. And as he said, for example, chat GPT, it's an algorithm. At the end of the day, it's just numbers. So if I put that Albert is working for Nike online, and then I ask chat GPT, what is Albert doing? It's going to come up with Nike, and although it's wrong for chat GPT is right, because it says it on the Internet, the algorithm says that that is the answer. So I think we need to be careful with that, and we need to make sure that everyone understands that and we use the right tools for the right purposes. Obviously, culturally, it's also a big shock. For example, for project managers, we've been doing the same thing for the past 30, 50 years, the same way, and now you integrated an AI tool, an automation tool that maybe makes things easier and flows better, and it's hard for them to pick it up because they've done it the same way for so long. So I think it's that cultural shift as well. That may take some time, but yeah, I think it's that cultural shift that needs to happen and it's going to.

[10:32] **Stephen Rose:** Take time and I'm not even going to go down the route of topics like data privacy, legal implications, cybersecurity. Obviously that's a whole new field that needs to be explored. It takes a while to onboard a tool like this into a corporate environment. Obviously we're talking about maybe personal data, we're talking about cyber security issues. Do we really want to share our classified content on the Internet? So where's the firewall? Is it happening behind firewalls in public space? So these are conversations that are happening. If you use tools like, let's say picture generating tools, who is the license owner of this graphical content? Can you actually just use it on your corporate websites or do you need to check if there might be some fees that are behind that? Could you come into a legal situation.

[11:26] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Here that I think is the perfect segue to ask you, do you think having all these things that the event industry has to consider, would it become crucial to AiH?

[11:39] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** I think it will and it won't. At the same time, I think the event industry is a very people centric or touch base industry where I have to meet with Steven to talk to get things done. That's why we come to conferences, that's why we're here in person. If not, everything would be virtual. If not, I'd be on my computer in Barcelona on Zoom, and he'll be in Munich or Berlin, wherever he is, and we'll just chat like that. But it's not the same. So I think we will integrate it and there's a process to that. And as I said, I think we will use it for automation, for things that are time consuming, things that we can not as creative. Maybe the more automated part and the creative side will be left for that project manager or that operations person that is on site.

[12:27] **Stephen Rose:** Well, I think we really have to think about where it really adds value. It can help you on the efficiency side, definitely. So maybe to look at where do you spend your time in the most efficient way where AI can help you to make an example, where you're already using it to do sentiment analysis or extraction of key messages and contents out of two or three hour videos within like ten minutes. And it gives you a base to work on post report, post event report, for example, especially in virtual conferences. Yes, for that efficiency. But where are the value adding tools? Because if you just create efficiency that at the end of the day has an impact on how we work as an industry. To make an example, many of the agencies in this world are based on time and material models. If time is not the crucial factor anymore, how are you going to charge in the future? You're going to have to charge around products, around value add, around performance. This will be a radical change in the way how we operate in this industry. A second one is event industry per se, has many different touch points to the marketing, to sales, to communication processes. And this will become more and more integrated, because if I now have event content, I can reuse that on social in no time, I can integrate it into campaigns in no time. So suddenly this opens up the whole industry not being just the event industry, but actually being a crucial part of the overall marketing and sales process. And I think that's where we need to see where the interfaces are to us, other tools for marketing automation and others. So definitely it will become a part of our job, but we really have to understand how it fits into the overall value chain.

[14:13] **Magdalina Atanassova:** That's interesting, because I agree it can help us a lot in streamlining communications. But do you think that it will become just way too noisy online? You know, where's the human touching all that? If we're just taking AI and just.

[14:29] **Stephen Rose:** Copy pasting, the discussion I want to have today on stage, actually with the audience, is AI the end of the social and social media? Because if you can create content via AI, and I'm sure we're only very short time away from a plugin for LinkedIn, that will help you to also comment and like certain articles, then it's just a system that revolves itself all the time. So the content is created by a machine, the comments are created by my machine. I'd be a lot faster. I could comment like 500 posts this morning before I go to breakfast, because I have an AI tool to do that. But that means that the relevance of the content will decline and the social and the personal and human touch will also be gone. And that kind of also could kill the relevance, at least of pure written social media. That's maybe the resurgence of the TikTok's and the Instagram's, because at least there you have the feeling there's more human touch, there's realistic. I see a real person behind one of the discussions I'm really happy to have today.

[15:38] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Albert, what do you think? What do you advise also your clients in your role?

[15:43] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** Yes, it's a very interesting topic, because you can argue it both ways. Obviously, as he said, I can make 500 posts a day with AI like that, and just straight up, I can post them online or wherever you need to post them, but it loses that human touch. And I think it goes back to that human psychology where if I see a post on LinkedIn, at least right now with AI, I can tell somewhat if it's very robotic, if the words are very, you know, very glamorous, it's not that human touch to it. So I think right now it doesn't go all the way where I can just click a button and I'm gonna send 500 posts to all my clients and they can post it online. But I do think it helps in generating

content for me to then be creative. I can ask ChadGPT to say something. Hey, can you give me some pointers on what to say at the PCMA conference on technology? And it gives you five pointers, and then I will expand on that. So I think it helps with the base at the moment. I don't think it gives me creative value yet, but who knows, maybe in a year's time we'll be talking, and it will. So you never know.

[16:54] **Stephen Rose:** At the end of the day, it's about control. And I think humanity has to stay in control of what technology does. We have that also in areas that we work with our customers at Siemens. I mean, if we were talking about automation and robotics in factories, the humans are still the ones and have to stay the ones that stay on top of what is done in this factory.

[17:15] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Do you think that job roles will change as a result of the integration of AI in the industry?

[17:21] **Stephen Rose:** To be very clear, job roles are changing constantly anyhow. I mean, if you look back 2030 years, let's say 40 years, no computers, 20 years, no Internet. So I think thinking about the idea of job roles being constant is the wrong approach. We have to learn every day. We have to re question if we're still doing the right things every day, and we have to adopt to new challenges and technologies every day. This is a constant change, is the new normal.

[17:53] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** I agree with you. I think job roles will change and they should change, because that's what happens with the time. Obviously, we didn't have computers. We did everything on paper. Now we have computers, now we have Wi Fi, now we have the Internet, and now we have AI. So I do think they will change. I think it will take some time because some people in their roles might be scared of what AI can do to their role. They might become redundant because AI can do it better than them, and faster and cheaper and I think people will take longer to adopt those tools because they are scared of that. But I think eventually, yes, it will change roles. Yeah, and I think it should.

[18:35] **Stephen Rose:** And AI is not going to kill the jobs, but people not using AI, they will have an issue.

[18:42] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Do you have in both of your companies any kind of support for people to learn the new tools, let's say any certificates to help them obtain or any upskilling? Pretty much.

[18:55] **Stephen Rose:** It's obviously a key initiative within our process and daily work. So we have a so called learning world and we have regular growth talks with employees. And what happens is we have of a digital platform where you can select the roles that you are actually fulfilling in the company. So if you're an event planner, you'd have your event planner role and then there's a skill matrix to that role and then you can do a self assessment and say, okay, these are the skills that I would see myself being more professional or I'm at a starter level, and then your boss and your peers can do also an assessment and say, I see this person being here, here, here. And then you basically have a strength scope gap analysis and you have a conversation with your leader and talk about, okay, which of those, let's say, learning snippets seminars. This could be online courses, offline courses. This could be internal created content or external content. We have, let's say two colleagues on my team that 50% of the time are dedicated to just look for new courses that can be used to add to the role and to the skill. And then we even have a goal in our team that we want to at least have 23 to 25 learning hours per year, which is tracked. So every morning you get to the office, you open the intranet, you see, you have 16 hours of learning hours and this is 4 hours below the average on the team. So you are kind of motivated to think about what can I maybe do next week? And if it's just watching one or two learning videos on YouTube, because you can count them into the learning hours.

[20:39] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** We've also got a similar platform, I think we call it learning and development. And there's obviously a lot of seminars, a lot of tools, research programs, and that comes out weekly. It's very fresh. We got seminars every week where you get an email, hey, there's the AI talk this week, Tuesday at 08:00 p.m. and that's weekly. So I think that's really good for employers in our company to get into and start normalizing topics like that and start understanding them because I think that's the problem. I think people don't fully understand them. And for the team I'm in personally, we do have a lot of AI tools and what we do is we teach each other what we know and we also let everyone play with them. We give them the tool and we say, okay, have a day or two to play around, get into the tool, and then let me know what you need and then I'll teach you what it can do and what it is capable of doing. But I first need you to get that first touch and click buttons and see, oh, okay, that graph does that. And that AI tool is created values and personalities, etcetera. So I think we use a very hands on approach in our team specifically, and then as a company wide, we have a lot of tools and a lot of programs and a lot of seminars to cover not just AI or technology, but a broad range of topics.

[21:52] **Stephen Rose:** That actually reminds me of our team internal initiative that we're running now for two and a half years, which is what we call the learning hour. It just Wissenshunger. It happens once a week. So every Thursday morning between ten and eleven, there is 1 hour of learning. And this is completely free. So someone just can come in on Monday and say, I want to give an update on our event platform, new features. Or someone comes in and said, I had a real **** up last week with one of my events, I want to report back what happened there so others don't run into the same mess. That's a really fun format. I'm basically just bystanding, although I'm the leader of the team, I sometimes even don't join because I really want to have the dynamic in the team that they learn from each other. And this is not curated content, but this is content that is free floating.

[22:40] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** And I think with AI, because it's such a fresh and new topic, there's a lot of trial and error and we need that. We need that informal education of, okay, I'm going to try something and it might not work, but then I know it doesn't work. And because it's so new and it's very hard for people to grasp what a tool can do, I think we need that trial and error and that informal education to it as well.

[23:03] **Magdalena Atanassova:** A fun question for you, do you still organize hybrid or virtual events?

[23:08] **Stephen Rose:** I would say let's separate virtual and hybrid events. If we're looking at hybrid events in parallel happening at the same time, physical as well as virtual, I think that concept actually failed. If you would have asked me two years in the middle of the pandemic, I would have said the future is hybrid. Now I would say hybrid is dead. At least if we look at it from the perspective that it's happening at the same time. The problem is that you cannot really fulfill the expectations of a virtual audience and a physical audience at the same time. There are different expectations, different time slots, so it's really hard. You would need two separate events happening at the same time, which means double the effort, double the planning, double the content. So I would say classic hybrid. No talking about virtual or hybrid, which happens maybe at a later point in time. Or is a separate stream, basically a communication stream, which is not an event, doesn't have to be an event, but it's the possibility to access content of the event in a virtual way? Definitely, yes. We're talking about accessibility, we're talking about sustainability, we're talking about travel restrictions. We need to have people that want. Want to be part of this content, want to learn about this content. We need to make this accessible. So we need to have a virtual component. As team Siemens, we run five video studios across Germany and Switzerland. And why do we do that? Why do we maintain that? Because we still see a lot of virtual events happening if we want to reach out to 100,000 employees. Ideally, you set this up as a virtual event where you have some nice interactive tools, where you can collect questions, where you can collect comments. This is a very fast and efficient way to get out communication. It's obviously not going to replace events. It's not going to be the same level of experience as a physical and on site event, but it does the trick in some of the use cases.

[25:12] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** So, from my job role, I look at the trends, I look at the market insight, and I do agree that hybrid events are maybe not dead, but yes, there's very few compared to what it was during COVID which was maybe most of them. And I do think that virtual events and physical events are completely different and they serve different purposes. As Stephen said, online events or virtual events, you can get 100,000 people. So it offers scale, it offers. It might be cheaper, so it's more affordable and it might be more convenient, but the form of content and what you put into that event is completely different. I think I've seen from trends and from insights that in person events have gone up after the pandemic. And I think it's because we need that physical touch, we need that human touch. And although we can talk about AI on a screen, I think it's different. If I see Stephen this afternoon on stage and we're asking questions to each other, and the guy next to me is think a different thing, and that's really interesting. And you don't get that online because there's a chat room and you might not see it, or it's not as engaging. So I think there's a place where both can coexist, but I do think that they're completely different in their own ways.

[26:28] **Stephen Rose:** Maybe just taking the thought of, I mean, again, I started off with twelve months earlier, we might be talking about metaverse. I think metaverse is still not gone. I think there are still some really interesting developments in that area. And if you look about co creation and collaboration in, I'd say, smaller groups, I think 3d environments, metaverse environments are still really interesting options, especially in terms of global collaboration and technology development. For example, if you can work on something virtual, in a virtual space together, without having to be in the same room, perfect. But then you need to know each other in person before. Ideally, you need to be on the same level and understand what you want to achieve together, then metaverse can be an amazing tool. And I would put that into the virtual space.

[27:18] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Interesting. Do you think that when Apple vision Pro becomes mainstream, if it becomes mainstream, it would change things for events? Would it bring a new component like what you're saying about the metaverse?

[27:31] **Stephen Rose:** We have to separate metaverse and VR. VR is another piece of technology. I can access a metaverse also from my laptop. I can access a metaverse for a holographic display. So I think this is just the device. The device can be phone, the device can be a VR goggle. VR is interesting. It gives you this more immersive feeling, obviously, but it's not everyone's favorite, so people get bit dizzy with it. And so you need a certain onboarding time. You know, we tried some events where we sent people VR goggles home and then asked them to join the event. I would say 50% never managed to switch it on the way that we needed them to do. So let's not even go there. As long as people are not really familiar with VR, I think it's not going to work.

[28:19] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** I agree. I think as of right now, there's a very big and a hard challenge for people to get them to work, to understand them, to be comfortable with them. Because at the end of the day, it is a weird tool, because we've never had something like this. And when you put it on, it does feel weird. I don't get dizzy, personally. But I understand people that get dizzy and maybe that we need that next generation to bring it in. So maybe in 20 years that is the norm. But right now, I think it is very hard, specifically with the attendees that we have at the events, the type of people that come here. So as of right now, I don't think it is possible. But maybe in 1020 years, with new generation, new people, and a new understanding also with what technology is. If you ask someone if you would bring your phone to a conference 30, 40 years ago, they'd be like, what, my big phone? No. And now you do everything. You can scan my QR code on my PCMA card and I can connect with you on LinkedIn. So I think it takes a process, and in the future it might, because I can see a lot of uses for it, but it will take time, I think.

[29:27] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Imagine if next year we were talking about only that and AI is out of the picture.

[29:32] **Magdalina Atanassova:** That would be.

[29:33] **Stephen Rose:** Who knows what we're going to talk about next year. Maybe it's the resurgence of AR.

[29:39] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Exactly.

[29:40] **Stephen Rose:** Augmented reality, which I think is still really exciting. If this would come to a level that it's less invasive and the technology gets smaller, I think to have additional information that you would normally carry on your phone or your Apple Watch and you suddenly have it in your reading glasses could be interesting.

[29:59] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah.

[30:00] **Stephen Rose:** Yes.

[30:00] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** I think with technology, we have to be careful with buzzwords. When it comes to AI, AR, VR, or whatever. There's always that new thing, that new trend, that artificial intelligence is a new big thing. But maybe now, let's say Denmark government brings a new regulation, you can't use ChatGPT, and so on and so on. Okay, and now the next word is AI, and then the next word is VR. So I think we need to be careful in what we think will be successful in the future and what the new trend or the new big thing is, because everyone is talking about it. And that's the new word that we want to use.

[30:35] **Stephen Rose:** And we've always fallen into the trap. There is a new technology and everybody starts to think, oh, this is gonna solve all my problems. But actually it doesn't. I think, first of all, we need to find out which problem it really solves. Or does it actually create new problems that we haven't even thought of? Right? So that's a typical human, let's say, reaction to technology, to say, oh, this is going to save the world. In most cases, it actually created new issues. The introduction of the computer was amazing for everyone, right? But now we have email inboxes with 1000 unread emails. That's a different problem. So we need AI to solve that problem to help us through the emails. So what's next? So it's kind of not an easy world, I would say. No. Black or white?

[31:18] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Yeah. Rich technology creates a whole new world we need to get accustomed to. Was there anything that we didn't address and you think we should have addressed as we're coming to the end?

[31:32] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** I don't think so.

[31:32] **Stephen Rose:** From my side, no, not really. I think so.

[31:35] **Magdalina Atanassova:** We could have stayed the whole day here and talked to technology pretty much. Well, thank you so much, both of you.

[31:42] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** Thank you.

[31:43] **Magdalina Atanassova:** I'll see you for next episode.

[31:45] **Stephen Rose:** I'm sure it was a pleasure.

[31:46] **Albert Cerezales Garcia:** Thank you very much. Thank you.

[31:51] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Thank you all for being a part of our season one journey recorded during convening EMEA in Copenhagen, Denmark. If you enjoyed this podcast and would like to hear

more, please subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. And if you would like additional perspectives on the industry, check out pcma.org/convene. Until next time.