

CONVERSATION

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With AWEA’s WINDPOWER 2018 scheduled to hit Chicago May 7-10, AWEA’s senior vice president for member value and experience talked with *Wind Systems* on what to expect from the year’s biggest wind energy trade show.

Remind our readers what you do with AWEA.

Our team creates products and services for the industry through our events and different publications. And ideally, we make sure that they are what the industry needs, and make sure people get access to them efficiently through our membership programs and delivery systems and onsite event management.

What went into planning this year’s WINDPOWER?

We have a great group of industry leaders that form our WINDPOWER marketing taskforce. It is the marketing and communication folks from some of the biggest players in the industry. And we get together a couple of times each year, so right after each event, to reflect on what worked and where we can keep improving. Then we meet again over the summer to refine our plans based on that input and feedback from the previous year, and we put together our theme, on what kind of constructs we can have in terms of delivery of edu-



cational content, and what we want the fun parties to look like. We really try to get as much member feedback as possible and incorporate that anywhere we can. We want it to reflect what our members need and what they want to do when they’re onsite making the business of wind happen.

What did you learn from last year’s show that helped you plan this one?

We ended up having an opportunity with our show decorator to do a thorough and intense study of the traffic of the trade show. Because we do everything on the show floor now — all of the education is on the show floor and the general sessions were on the show floor for the first time this past year — we wanted to see how people were using it: Where are the hotspots

on the show floor that really attract people. We had a theory going into the decision to move the education that it would help anchor people there and that it would help to expand the footprint so there aren’t any cold corners where the poor, lonely exhibitor never gets any traffic. The study really reinforced that we were successful on that.

The study helped us understand how people are making use of the entire show floor and seeing all the exhibitors. We were able to use that in our marketing this year to say that there’s not any bad spots on the floor. But what it also showed us was that we need to make sure that people are consistently coming to the show each day. We have an opportunity to really retain our audience on Thursday, which is our half day. We added a lot of components to the Thursday program to make sure people are having just as many business meetings. We wanted to anchor some events that will both add value to folks’ participation in the Thursday programs as well as make it a little more fun.

Last year, you did live online streaming. Are you planning on doing that again? Is any of how that’s done changing?

We try to always build on what worked the previous year and try something new every year, so we have

two new cool things. We are streaming our general sessions again, so we're excited to bring that back. We had a really good showing for the first year with hundreds of people logging in to watch it remotely, and we hope we can make it thousands this time. So, we're definitely going to focus on ramping that up. And one of the new initiatives this year is really revitalizing the content of our general sessions.

We've had a really great formula over the past several years that I think has worked, and we just want to take the good and refine it and make it even better. During each of the main general session days, we're going to have five to seven individual speakers who are going to give their vision on the future of wind, such as the perspective of the offshore side of the industry, talking about floating turbines being the next big thing or energy storage and the implications it has on the electricity grid, our CEO Tom Kiernan talking about AWEA and how we're continuously trying to improve ourselves to help drive good outcomes in the future. So, attendees will hear all of those different perspectives, including the OEMs, will be talking about the technology and digitalization that's going on and revolutionizing the industry.

We're going to have these individual presentations, and all of the audience is going to have an opportunity to vote on who they want to hear more from. And that person will be added to our Thursday program, which is an industry town hall. It's going to be a much differently styled session. Everybody will have an opportunity to ask Tom Kiernan and Tristan Grimbert of EDF, our current board chairman, and Steve Lockhart of TPI Composites, our incoming board chairman, and our poll winner what's going on, what are they seeing, and what individuals can do to help drive the future of wind. It's going to be a very interactive town-hall style session to close it out.

Another aspect of the show you did last year was integrate ways to do business right on the show floor. How did that turn out, and can attendees expect that same convenience in Chicago?

It was a huge hit last year, and we're continuing it. We're expanding it. We have even more meeting rooms on the show floor. It's just an evolution of the trade show model. The one-size-fits-all model of "here's your 10x10 booth, put up a pop-up frame, and get to work." That doesn't meet the needs of every attendee or every company that really wants to leverage WINDPOWER to advance their business. And so, we've got the meeting spaces on the show floor. One thing we're adding this year is

the opportunity for people to access hourly or two-hour meeting room rentals. Some of them don't need a space for two and a half days, so we've got this flexible functional space right in the AWEA booth that we're going to allow members to access to carry out those very targeted, on-the-spot needs to talk to clients.

Are you doing any unique tie-ins with Chicago? It is the Windy City, after all.

What we decided was that — and this was really good feedback from our members and other folks that we talked to — when you think of Chicago, a lot of people think of Navy Pier, and they think of the Ferris wheel. We're delighted to host our opening reception at the Crystal Gardens, which is a beautiful room that overlooks the Ferris wheel. And everyone that is registered is invited. It's a great fun way to start your week in Chicago. And we're also excited that our AWEA WindPAC members, which is our political action committee, will have special access to the Ferris wheel after the opening reception. It will be when the sun is setting over Lake Michigan, so it will be a really fun experience for people who are interested in supporting the PAC.

We're closing things down with some really cool Chicago things. We are ending the show with a plan-your-own ending. Attendees are able to reserve space on one of three tours: We've got a tour of White Sox Stadium. We've got a gangster tour of Chicago covering some of the interesting history of the city. And the final option is an architectural boat tour, where you go down the river and get a cool lesson on the different architectural styles that Chicago is known for. So that's a great way to start it and end it with the unique Chicago experiences.

What are you personally looking forward to at this year's show?

I am really excited about the general sessions. I think that there is just so much amazing innovation happening in the industry right now. To be able to hear from these different leaders of the industry from their fields and their perspective of what they see we need to focus on and what they see that's really driving the future of our industry. It's going to be such a unifying way to start off each day, that we're all hearing from the same folks; we're all hearing the same message, and then we go out and do our business and carry on the business of wind. I think that's going to be a very positive way to start each day. So, I'm excited to see that. ✨

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