

Posted on: 03/18/2008

TAG National Convention Overtakes Coronado Island

Cara Sievers

Photos by Luis Garcia

If you haven't been to Coronado Island right outside of San Diego, you're definitely missing out. It's its own little microcosmic cooperative that reaps the benefits of being a small town, while still tapping its larger feeder city for advancement, growth, survival.

Much the same could be said about TAG (Technology Assurance Group), a training organization and buying consortium, which recently held its eighth annual TAG National Convention on the island. TAG's 118 members, all interconnects who are territorially protected, gather throughout the year at meetings like these and other training sessions to share best practices information and be educated on the latest business growth, management and sales techniques and tools.

TAG develops relationships with vendors that work to give TAG members the best deals for reselling their wares and services, based on the idea that these members are among the most successful and educated in the channel. And according to TAG cofounder and director of strategic planning and business development, Dale Stein, the members represent \$390 million in telecom products and services.

The formal activities of this year's convention kicked off at the Loews Coronado Bay Resort & Spa on Wednesday, March 12. There was a golf tournament at Steele Canyon Golf Course, a U.S. Navy Seals Team Training outing and a trip to Sea World. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend any of these events since I was busy finishing up at PHONE+'s Channel Partners Conference & Expo in Las Vegas, but I heard nothing but good things about the daytime activities from the members at the opening cocktail reception on Wednesday evening.

More than 40 exhibitors and roughly 400 attendees flooded the expo hall Wednesday night to meet up with old friends and business contacts and to make new ones. The exhibitors, TAG's strategic partners, were eager to educate TAG members on their leading-edge solutions and partner programs. A spokesman for Toshiba, a Platinum sponsor,



Members network at the Samsung booth.



Nido Qubein delivers an engaging keynote address.



Attendees see what's new at the Zultys booth.



CTS Technology Solutions accepts its Silver award (Dave Heuman, Kelly Ethington, Warren Heuman).



Elite sponsor ESI's Bill Hall speaks to members.



PHONET+ Online

VOIP, DATA, WIRELESS, INTERNET & CONTENT
SOLUTIONS FOR THE CHANNEL

“The range of products and services that are at the exhibition are incredible,” said Michael Joos, of David Davis Communications. “It’s valuable to get this face time with the people in our industry and to learn about new advancements in training and technology.”

said the company keeps coming back to recruit new partners. He said the TAG convention was a place to showcase quality products to quality dealers.

Dave Foxall, CEO of strategic partner Tigerpaw Software said it’s great to get feedback and say hello to everyone at the show. “It’s like going to camp once a year,” he said.

Shawn Puddester, director of channel development, U.S. for Siemens, also a Platinum sponsor, said it was the company’s first time exhibiting, but he was very impressed with TAG’s leadership and excited to see what the next few days would bring.

“Recognizing it’s a group of more accomplished resellers in our industry, we felt it was a good relationship to begin,” said Bill Hall, vice president of strategic programs for Elite sponsor ESI. “We wouldn’t be here eight years later if it wasn’t a valuable resource and partnership.” In fact, 68 percent of TAG members work with ESI already and Hall said they most often sign new dealers at the show.

Cheryl Kassner of Teleco of the Rockies has been a member of TAG for five-and-a-half years and said the education and expo hall are great. “It’s like no other as far as coming and seeing people that are going up against the same things you’re going up against on a daily basis,” she said. “It’s nice always having someone there to go to for advice and always having someone to back you up.”

“The range of products and services that are at the exhibition are incredible,” said Michael Joos, vice president of sales with Finleyville, Penn.-based David Davis Communications Inc., a new TAG member. “It’s valuable to get this face time with the people in our industry and to learn about new advancements in training and technology.”

Also on the show floor, TAG showcased and demoed two of its latest offerings, a technician productivity tool and TAG U Online. The technician productivity reports provide an objective and timely view into individual technician productivity by analyzing billable hours and call-backs. The two versions, one that works with Tigerpaw and also another standalone tool, were developed in-house by TAG and are currently available. TAG U



TAG members chat with strategic partners on the show floor.



Members enjoy the sunset at Birch Aquarium.



Rob Slee educates attendees on the conceptual age of business.

PHONET+ Online

VOIP, DATA, WIRELESS, INTERNET & CONTENT SOLUTIONS FOR THE CHANNEL

Posted on: 03/18/2008

“It’s a significant investment for an interconnect to make,” said Matt Duray of Connect Telephone & Computer Group, a TAG member. “But I can honestly say it’s the best investment I’ve made for my business.”

Online is an on-demand learning solution that enhances the student retention of the TAG curriculum by using pre-assessments to create customized coursework and then monitoring the student’s progress. Members utilizing a TAG training package will be able to participate for \$250 per month with a one-year commitment. Members not participating in a training package will be able to use TAG U Online and the technician productivity reports for \$500 per month with a one-year commitment.

Complete TAG membership, including unlimited training both live and remote and TAG U Online is less than \$2,000 per month. In special circumstances, a lower-cost membership with a la carte live training at \$795 per seat is available. Stein also pointed out that TAG members usually incur savings generated from the partnership agreements that TAG has negotiated with its vendors.

“It’s a significant investment for an interconnect to make,” said Matt Duray of Connect Telephone & Computer Group, a TAG member. “But I can honestly say it’s the best investment I’ve made for my business.”

Thursday kicked off with energetic opening remarks from TAG president and CEO, Dale Johnson. “We must learn if we are to lead ... We must cooperate and collaborate,” Johnson said, speaking to the convention’s theme, “Advancing Your Business Through Education & Cooperative Effort.”

“As we migrate from 2007 to 2008, we hope to provide some insights and some capacity to change what we do going forward,” he said. “Let’s make change our companion.”

Johnson then introduced keynote speaker, Dr. Nido R. Qubein, which I have to say is by far one of the best keynote speakers I’ve ever witnessed. Qubein kept the audience members on the edges of their seats for three entire hours with inspiring and comical anecdotes from his rise to success. Qubein, who came to the United States from Lebanon in his teens, is now chairman of three companies, president of High Point University, a celebrated author and speaker, and winner of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor and the Horatio Alger Award for Distinguished Americans, among many other feats and honors.



TAG members chat with strategic partners on the show floor.



Brian Wakefield accepts the TAG Special Achievement Award for unsurpassed excellence in sales for BTS Technologies.



Members grab a cocktail before Friday evening’s awards ceremony.



Dale Johnson and Dale Stein take a moment to smile for the camera during a busy convention week.



Dale Johnson presents the TAG achievement awards.

PHONE+ Online

VOIP, DATA, WIRELESS, INTERNET & CONTENT
SOLUTIONS FOR THE CHANNEL

He spoke to attendees about change as it relates to management and reculturing an organization - all information completely off the cuff, highly relevant and educational.

“The name of the game is mindset,” said Qubein, explaining that how you behave gets you where you are. He encouraged members to make a “To Be” list instead of just a “To Do” list – a bird’s eye view of where you’re going will tell you what you need to do to get there. Qubein advised that continuous improvement and change is necessary for success. “What I like about TAG is that it reminds its members constantly ... that they really need to be doing what works,” he said.

The afternoon address from author Rob Slee on the conceptual age of business echoed this sentiment. “In the conceptual age, intellectual capital is king,” said Slee, explaining that intellectual capital now trumps financial capital. He further discussed how innovation comes from knowing a particular skillset and applying it to something new and different, urging TAG members to share ideas and collaborate on developing best practices for their businesses.

Thursday evening rounded out with a cocktail reception and dinner at the Birch Aquarium in La Jolla. Members and Elite and Platinum sponsors made it to the aquarium just in time to share their fellowship hour with a colorful Pacific sunset. It was beautiful!

Friday’s education continued with addresses from N-able Technologies’ Gavin Garbutt, Achievement Tec’s LD Moran, and TAG’s Stein. Stein talked about what’s new for 2008, including a revamping of the organization’s live financial training and a new live sales curriculum, in addition to the developments of TAG U Online and the technician productivity reports. He mentioned that 2008 will also see the organization and its members further developing and understanding the transition to the data side of the transaction.

Friday evening, the event culminated in the annual awards banquet, where the crowd gasped at impressive numbers with one sales award after another.

The convention, reported to be the largest TAG meeting yet, rewarded its members for record-breaking achievements from the past year, and the education, tools and encouragement to break more records in the year to come.

Companies interested in TAG membership, please contact:

Ric Trapani • (858) 673-5800 ext. 103 • ric@tagnational.com

Companies interested in a strategic partnership, please contact:

Larry Chupp • (858) 673-5800 ext. 110 • larry@tagnational.com

17150 Via Del Campo
Suite #307
San Diego, CA 92127
tagnational.com

