

LEADING ASIA

Francois Lancon, Avaya's President Asia Pacific

Francois Lancon joined Avaya in December 2009 as the President of the Asia Pacific region – encompassing India, Greater China, South East Asia, Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Francois joined as part of Avaya's acquisition of the Nortel Enterprise Solutions business – where he had been President of a combined APAC and EMEA region. Prior to this, Francois was Senior Vice President, Product Management and Marketing, for Convergys Corporation based in the US.

Francois is French but has spent most of his working career outside France, notably in Asia Pacific and in North America. His management style is very clear. He enjoys entering into a healthy debate with his senior team around the strategic direction they want to take. They agree a position. And then they execute. At that point the time for discussion is over, and Francois is very focused on a relentless rhythm of execution to achieve the goals they set out. Hope is not a strategy. *They plan, they execute, they measure, they fine tune, and they execute again.*



AVAYA

Avaya is a global provider of business collaboration and communications solutions, providing unified communications, contact centers, data solutions and related services to companies of all sizes around the world. Over 85% of all Fortune 1000 companies trust Avaya solutions every day.

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Daniel Soh: Is there anything about you that your staff may not know?

Francois Lancon: What people may not know about me? I love sailing and skiing. I am French, but I don't drink wine – unless it has bubbles and comes from the Champagne region! I spend approximately 40 weeks a year on the road. And the one thing I care the most about is my family.



Daniel Soh: What drives you on the job?

Francois Lancon: There are two things that drive me professionally: growth for Avaya in APAC, and growth for our customers. The two go hand in hand. In order to succeed in our business – and in my first year in the APAC role we grew revenues by 33% - we need to have great technology, a very disciplined and focused sales rhythm, a compelling vision of the future – and a strong services and support function to deliver what we promise to our customers and drive ongoing business. Key to that success is anticipating and in some cases driving the needs of those customers.

We are no longer in the business of selling phone systems, but rather in creating real-time collaboration and communications solutions that help drive productivity gains, reduce costs, enhance customer service and drive incremental revenue for our customers. When the relationship you have with your customer is based on those principles, the conversation happens with the CEO as much as it does the telecoms or networking teams.

Daniel Soh: Asia is poised to drive the world's economic growth in the wake of global uncertainty. Do you think this growth is still sustainable in Asia?

Francois Lancon: We have seen tremendous growth in Asia spanning many years. At the height of the Global Economic Crisis, China and India in particular continued to grow strongly. Even Australia showed great resiliency in not falling into recession. The rebound has been strong in South East Asia, and even a mature market like Japan – with its devastating disaster this year – has still maintained growth in some areas. At the moment there is an element of caution with further negative financial news – largely driven from the US and Europe. I am neither an economist nor a clairvoyant – but my view is that while there may be some further bumps along the road for some Asian economies,

the underlying business and economic structure is sound, real growth remains the trend across most of our geography, and this is still the most exciting region of the world in which to do business. This seems to be borne out by what the economists are saying.

Daniel Soh: What is Avaya's growth plan for the Asia Pacific region?

Francois Lancon: We have a focus on our top customers, and on building clear business plans with them and with our channel partners to ensure we deliver the solutions that will help their businesses grow. Asia Pacific represents the fastest growing sales

theatre for Avaya as a company. My role is to ensure that continues. In order to do so, we must constantly focus on the evolving needs of customers in this part of the world. Compared to other regions, we have a huge number of small and medium sized businesses across Asia Pacific, with a healthy appetite to grow their business, and a close scrutiny of the return on investment from any technology decision. So we focus on the areas which will help them achieve that growth with the best possible returns. We base our solutions on open standards and ensure that wherever possible our customers can reuse their existing investments as they evolve their network capabilities.

Our different businesses are focused on enhancing productivity – through providing effective collaboration tools that speed time to decision; on reducing costs, through reuse of network equipment and allowing people to interact through technology without the need to travel; on enhancing customer service through next generation contact centre tools which put the customer at the centre of the interaction and ensure first time resolution of their queries; and on managing and servicing many of those resources on behalf of our customers, either through on-going service contracts or hosted solutions.



Daniel Soh: What will be the biggest challenge for Avaya to achieve that growth in Asia?

Francois Lancon: The pace of technology change means that some of our customers – and many more of our potential customers – don't yet realize the full scale of how the right technology solutions can help transform their business. This is a great challenge to have. In many cases, once we have the opportunity to have an in-depth discussion with the senior decision makers around where their business is going and what some of their pain points are, the solutions we can propose open their eyes to opportunity – especially when we can show them the results of how it works in companies like theirs all around the world.

The challenge is, of course, to be able to get in front of so many people and have those discussions – which is where our channel partners help to extend our reach much further than our own dedicated teams are able to. And in Asia Pacific we have a very well established, dynamic set of channel partners and distributors, fully versed in our solutions and how they meet our customers' needs, who do just that.

Daniel Soh: What keeps you awake?

Francois Lancon: Mainly being on too many overnight flights! But that is the nature of our business – I need to be where our customers are, and in a huge geography like Asia Pacific that means a lot of travel. In any growing business, we also set ourselves very aggressive quarterly sales targets, so there is a lot I must do to ensure we meet those numbers with the regularity and predictability I referred to earlier. And of course, working for a North American organisation in Asia Pacific means I have a regular set of late night sessions with the rest of the management team.

Daniel Soh: Are there areas that your global HQ should understand about the region (Asia Pacific)?

Francois Lancon: The message we have successfully passed through to the team at HQ is that there is no single market called Asia Pacific. With the myriad languages, cultures and requirements, differences in economic maturity and cycles, and specific ways in which certain countries use technology, we cannot have a one-size-fits-all solution for Asia Pacific.

I'm fortunate in that our management team fully understands that, and is also focused on supporting me in driving our business growth. Of course I don't get everything I ask for! But a well-performing and growing business, which delivers its commitments to the bottom line in a predictable and sustainable way, has more credibility with the HQ teams. The main message I have for them right now is that Asia Pacific continues to grow as a market, so we need to focus on supporting our customers here more than ever, as other parts of the world continue to experience uncertainty.

Daniel Soh: The need to tap emerging market talent is perceived to be more acute now, as global firms focus their hopes for growth in these markets. How do you retain and develop your leadership talent?

Francois Lancon: Having the right people to deliver against our growth potential is always a challenge. We have a fantastic set of employees across the Asia Pacific region. We carry out much of our global innovation in India, leveraging the creativity and expertise of a large group of very skilled R&D people. We have a large organisation dedicated to our services business, whose role is to help our customers and partners get the most from the technology solutions they deploy. And we have a sales organisation for which I set some very demanding goals, in what is a pretty complex sales environment. So one of the main priorities I have given the team is on nurturing and evolving our talent.



We have some exciting development programs in place to help us do that. And we have a very well established education program to ensure both our own people, and those in our network of channel partners, are constantly at the forefront of technology change.

Daniel Soh: Increasingly, global firms are also working to ensure continuity in senior

leadership talents. This includes how they handle leadership succession and renewal. How do you identify and develop potential leaders at Avaya?

Francois Lancon: Succession planning is a fundamental metric we have in all of our senior people's review programs. We review these plans regularly, and discuss as a leadership team the emerging talent pool we have, to ensure succession plans include the best individuals, regardless of where they currently sit in the organisation. Of course in some cases we decide that we need to bring in expertise or experience from outside the team. But skills development, mapping out likely career paths for our top talent, having the entire employee base engaged in career development planning and aspiration, and maintaining that data regularly, all help ensure we have the right emerging talent pool to draw from.

In my view, it is critical to step back from the business from time to time and ask: what should the business look like in 3 years from now, and do we have the right leadership team for 2015?

Daniel Soh is Managing Partner for Leadership Advisory Inc.
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