

Company award nomination 2017: The 2017 UFI Marketing Award

Introducing the RAI InnovationLAB

As a convention centre our role in the industry always has been to facilitate exhibitions and as an organiser of events our role was simply to give the exhibitor the platform to exhibit. This now has changed. We fully realise that we, as an organisation, must interact with the rapidly changing world around us. For us this means that it has become more and more important to meet the increasingly hybrid, widely taken, innovation seeking, wishes of exhibitors and visitors. Within this new role, it is essential that we, as an organising party, deeply understand the objectives of our exhibitors and visitors. In order to help them achieve their goals, it is necessary as well as interesting to pay a lot of attention to the drives and ambitions of the exhibitor. Not just that, we intend to ultimately contribute towards achieving their goals. Thus where we needed to not only sell our square meters and facilities, we are now a cornerstone in facilitating conversations that aim to share knowledge and experience, with innovation as a result.

Meeting this cornerstone role, we have implemented the InnovationLAB. Through this InnovationLAB we help innovations find their way to the industry market. With this new feature we offer a podium for exhibitors and visitors to get their innovations to the fore, both physically on the exhibition floor as well as online and in the media. This is the perfect environment to explore new products and facilities which helps exhibition colleagues, including us as an organiser, to be open to new developments and trends. It is a platform where visitor can see and experience what the innovations in their market are. Visitors can either experience this physical, on the exhibition floor, or online, via the exhibitions websites. This is a platform where, among others, knowledge centres, research institutes and innovation parties bring their innovations to the market and enrich our exhibitions. This is a huge benefit in this rapidly innovative market environment and also a great opportunity for the exhibition medium to distinguish and profile themselves from other mediums. The presence of this feature increases the added value of participation in an exhibition.

“The InnovationLAB makes innovations visible and tangible to a large audience. In addition, the InnovationLAB connects people and knowledge, an important prerequisite for new innovations. We call it ‘Innovationforlife’ ”

- Esther van Zeggeren (Director of Marketing & Communications at TNO)

We are always on the search for new developments and trends with regard to exhibition visits. With the LAB at all exhibitions organised by RAI Amsterdam, we offer an inspiring, recognisable, environment for exhibitors and visitors where knowledge, news, ideas, innovations and experience can be shared. The implementation of our InnovationLAB is an excellent resource for achieving our mission, the InnovationLAB is “where innovation meets the industry”. The starting point for us is always to push it as an organiser and not leave it to the market; we stand for an active attitude rather than a reactive attitude. We give exhibitors an additional incentive to share their innovations with the industry in advance at the exhibition in the InnovationLAB. By doing so, we challenge people and ourselves to drive the industry to a greater height.

Video: InnovationLAB RAI Amsterdam >>

The InnovationLAB itself is also subject to change. We ensure that the InnovationLAB is involved in the trends and innovations.

“This year, we have chosen to not only show new products in the InnovationLAB, but also the developments we signal on the industry market and translate these to the exhibition floor. This creates a Trend lab in which we, together with partners, share the current industry landscape and how trends are developing.”

– Luuk Scholte (Domain Manager Horecava RAI Amsterdam)

The InnovationLAB contains of six components; Award show, Experience, On stage, Newsroom, Tour leader and Social hub.

The News room refers to the beating newsheart of the exhibition with, amongst others, a studio, flying reporters, webinars, hybrid broadcasts and Google Hangouts. This is the place where interviews are held and recorded by film crews. For the completion of the newsroom, there is a close cooperation with media partners who lead the industry.

The InnovationLAB has a Tour leader role in a way that it shows what innovations can be found outside of the InnovationLAB at the exhibition floor via a.o.t. innovation routes on the map and stickers on the innovative parts on the stands.

The On stage role of the LAB is the podium where innovators, trendwatchers, users and solution providers can share their innovative story. Seminars, workshops, debates and presentations take place at this podium during the exhibition. The most important aspect, again, here is to pay attention to trends and news from the industry. This is not the place for purely commercial stories.

The seminars are composed of qualitative content programs. As a result, you get targeted industry specialists who are interested in the seminars message. Participants of a seminar are invited by the RAI and the partners of the InnovationLAB. By looking for participants it is interesting to invite industry specialists who are not traditional visitors of that particular exhibition. By doing so, the exhibition can take advantage of this special addition to the current industry specialists at the exhibition. This is not only interesting for the exhibition itself, but also for exhibitors. They get to meet new buyers where they have not come into contact before. For participants it is interesting because they can extend their network and, with the emphasis on cooperation, get the opportunity to tell their story in co creation with other industry specialists.

The physical encounter at the LAB between industry specialists is very important. Therefore we created the Social hub aspect of the LAB. This is the place where exhibitors, participants and visitors can network with each other and deepen their knowledge and content in an inspiring environment. This is also the environment where exhibitors and participants have the opportunity to field research where you can directly converse and discuss with the visitors of the exhibition.

The Award show is where we showcase the nominated products of the Innovation Awards. Additional information about the products can be found on tablets which are accessible to all exhibitors and visitors. The Award show is a continuous process before, during and after the exhibition.

For new companies that are not ready for a stand on the exhibition yet we offer the enriching Experience component where additional innovative content can be presented and integrated. This is where exhibitors and visitors can feel, taste and experience the evocative innovation in an interactive manner (simulations, demonstrations, tastings, etc.).

Of course, as with any new initiative, there were challenges in implementing this new feature at all our exhibitions, organised by RAI Amsterdam.

We were aware of the risk of focussing too much on one market segment alone. However, we have our own InnovationLAB team that works exhibitions transcending. With this team we guarantee that knowledge and best practice sharing is possible and that there will be interesting cross-overs in different market segments, and not just one market segment alone. The content that will be discussed in this innovative environment is composed in a collaboration of the InnovationLAB team, the content board and the exhibition team. The content board is an exhibition specific team which is responsible for the quality and innovative content of the InnovationLAB. This advisory body has in depth knowledge about the trends and developments in the concerned sector and market. In addition, we also work closely together with three other valuable organisations to ensure the quality of the InnovationLAB. These organisations help us to find surprising innovations and bring them under attention. Furthermore, they make sure that we focus on scientific innovations which are suitable for valorisation.

Collaboration is a valuable aspect of the InnovationLAB. Working together with partners ensures an enhanced network because with every new partner there is a new network. By participating in this collaboration you can suddenly access many new contacts that also participate in the exhibition. This is experience as very valuable.

“We see the collaboration with RAI Amsterdam as the ultimate way to bring scientific developments in technology closer to the public. The government expects us to, in addition to education and research, valorize our shared knowledge. Which means that the knowledge we develop is suitable to actually use. That is what we show in the InnovationLAB”

– IJsbrand Haagsma (Secretary General of 3TU Federation)

Innovation is, for most of our own exhibitions, an essential theme. It is also named as the number one reason why people visit the exhibition. A deep focus on innovation attracts visitors to an exhibition. The presence of our innovation platform, the InnovationLAB, is therefore a perfect feature to attract current and new visitors to the exhibition.

“For the exhibition it is interesting and of added value that, through the InspirationLAB, it binds interesting speakers and content to the exhibition. In this way, the exhibition becomes more of a knowledge platform than just a meeting place.”

– Joost Ringeling (former Domain Manager HISWA RAI Amsterdam)

There are so many impressions in an exhibition, that innovation may not stand out. The InnovationLAB brings these innovations all together in one place which make them easier to find and to market. At the LAB we show the relationships and synergies of these innovative products with each other.

With every event, thousands of visitors visit the InnovationLAB. We, our exhibitors and visitors are all very excited about this new concept. Our surveys show that the concept added a lot of value to many different exhibitions and is highly appreciated. 70% of the respondents (exhibition visitors) rated the Innovation lab with a “good” or “very good”.

In addition, the surveys provided qualitative results in the form of quotes. We took a sample of these quotes from the surveys of the Horecava, HISWA and METSTRADE.

