

UFI European Conference 2018 in Verona debates how to future-proof exhibitions

- Over 220 delegates from 35 countries in attendance
- UFI announces Mary Larkin as 2019/20 President
- European Conference 2019 to be held in Birmingham (UK) and hosted by the NEC

Paris/Verona, 9 May 2018: This year, the UFI European Conference once again lived up to its reputation as the most international gathering of European exhibition industry leaders. The event recorded double-digit growth for the second year in a row, bringing together over 220 participants from 35 different countries and regions.

“I am happy to see this event growing in size and relevance,” comments UFI President Corrado Peraboni, Chair of the Board of Directors of CIPA Fiera Milano Publicações e Eventos Ltda. “Especially for me as an Italian, it is wonderful that we could bring this event to Verona – to Italy – during my presidency. Thank you to the management team at Veronafiere, and congratulations on their 120 year anniversary.”

At the conference, speakers and delegates debated over the key changes that must occur to create future-proof exhibitions that are in line with new patterns of consumer behaviour. They also enjoyed numerous networking opportunities, and two unique evenings hosted by Veronafiere and UFI, showcasing the best the city of Verona and the surrounding region has to offer.

This year, Veronafiere hosted the European Conference, at the same time as celebrating its 120th anniversary. At the opening night at the Palazzo Della Gran Guardia in the heart of the city, the Mayor of Verona Gabriele Sboarina addressed participants by highlighting the continuous impact that exhibition companies have on cities and regions: “Fairs need to evolve constantly if they are to stay relevant. And as the industry’s association, UFI has to promote and support these changes. We are happy to support this by hosting you.”

Tackling the future from various angles

On the main conference stage and in breakout sessions, speakers and delegates discussed these challenges and changes over the course of two days. The opening session with keynote speaker Sophie Hackford, Futurist and Researcher, offered a thorough overview of Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and other emerging mainstream technologies. She captured her audience with various examples demonstrating the extent to which new technologies will impact our everyday lives in the very near future. During her deep-dive session, followed by her presentation, she challenged participants to imagine how tomorrow’s technology will affect industry products and services in the future.

Terri Toennies, Executive Vice President & General Manager, LA Auto Show; Richard West, Director of Security, Ascential; and Chris Skeith, Chief Executive Officer, AEO; conducted a session on safety followed by a discussion on contingency planning. Drawing on their own experiences, they explained that to create a successful event, safety must be considered as one of the most vital points on any organiser’s business plan. They shared practical tips and guidance for organisers as well as strategic advice on how best to plan around security.

The UFI Digital Innovation Committee, featuring Tesi Baur, Consulting Partner, MBB Media; Stephan Forseilles, Chief Technology Officer, Artexis Easyfairs; and Gunnar Heinrich, CEO & Managing Partner, Adventics; opened their interactive session on Digital Disruption by stating that humanity will change more in the next twenty years than in the past 300. Their presentation focused on customer experience in today's exhibition industry versus the future. By engaging with the audience, they created a real-time group discussion on matters such as registration, digital customer centricity, and other hot topics for both organisers and venues.

Eddie Choi, Founding Partner of Frontiers Digital and Executive Director of Milton Exhibits Group, gave a presentation on how to future-proof your company and your company culture. He explained that modern marketing is heading towards a combination of technology and communication in the future. He offered some interesting roadmaps with captivating ideas based on his research, work experience and data collection.

The closing session 'Is your event ready for the future?' led by Francis Friedman, President of Time & Place Strategies, looked ahead to how best to future-proof events. Francis Friedman, presented ideas about what trade show and congress owners can do to prepare and remain relevant, competitive and financially successful in their transition to the digital future.

"A key takeaway following these sessions is that new technologies, especially around Artificial Intelligence, will allow exhibition organisers to address their audience much more precisely. But also, at the same time, we've seen a very open discussion about those areas of our business where we are clearly lagging behind what customers experience elsewhere, and what we need to do about that," sums up Kai Hattendorf, UFI Managing Director/CEO.

Participants were able to download the speakers' presentations on-site using Poken technology. And all UFI members will be able to watch the talks again, as video sessions will be made available in the member section of the ufi.org website over the coming weeks.

UFI governing bodies in session

At the same time as the European Conference was taking place, UFI's governing bodies were also in session, electing Mary Larkin from Diversified Communications as the UFI President 2019/20. This is the first time UFI will be led by a President from the USA, and also the first female President of the association. Mrs Mary Larkin comments: "I am delighted to be part of UFI's leadership in the coming years and to continue with the development and support that UFI has provided the industry for so long. I am particularly looking forward to representing and working with women to help increase the level of female representation in leadership positions within the industry."

Other meetings included the European Chapter, led by UFI's European Chapter Chair, Gerald Böse, CEO, Kölnmesse. At the heart of this meeting was an exchange on the ongoing implementation of the new European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). There, Barbara Weizsäcker, the EEIA Secretary General, provided a valuable overview of the history and implementation of the rules. She highlighted that even though the regulations take effect on May 25, implementation will be an ongoing task. "It is essential to show that you did check and adapt to processes." Most importantly, she shared a practical to-do list for companies, with seven recommended steps to follow.

The European Conference also hosted numerous UFI Committee meetings, among them the inaugural session of the newly established "Industry Partners" Committee. Committee Chair Ravinder Sethi, MD RE Rogers India, says: "The initial objectives of this committee are two-fold: first, to enhance our contributions to UFI, not just as individual members but also as a committee, and second, to be recognised as equal partners in the exhibition industry."

Next year, the UFI European Conference will take place in Birmingham (UK) from 15-17 May 2019, and be hosted by the [NEC](#). Kathryn James, Managing Director, Conventions and Exhibitions, NEC

Group comments: “The UK’s position in the global events industry and its evolving role in the European political and economic landscape have made the mutual desire to bring Europe’s largest meeting of international event industry professionals to our shores even stronger. It’s brilliant to now confirm that the NEC Birmingham will be hosting the UFI European Conference 2019. There’s no doubt that the state-of-the-art venue facilities at our new VOX conference centre, our personalised service and unrivalled international connectivity helped us lock down the deal. This is a great opportunity and reinforces our role, at the heart of the UK events industry, as one of Europe’s busiest exhibition centers.”

This year’s UFI European Conference was hosted by [Veronafiere](#) convention centre in Verona (Italy). It was also supported by UFI’s Diamond Sponsors: The Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau ([TCEB](#)) and Global Experience Specialists ([GES](#)). A wide range of sponsors also backed the event. Full details of the UFI European Conference 2018 can be found on the event website: www.ufi.org/verona2018

Attachments: Photos: Maurizio Danese, President of Veronafiere, receiving the UFI Silver Plate awarded to the conference host. It was presented by Kai Hattendorf, MD/CEO of UFI. Sophie Hackford, Futurist and Researcher at Deep Dive session called Changing Event Formats. Gala networking dinner at the Palazzo Giardino Giusti, Verona, Italy.

About UFI - The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry: UFI is the leading global association of the world’s tradeshow organisers and exhibition centre operators, as well as the major national and international exhibition associations, and selected partners of the exhibition industry. UFI’s main goal is to represent, promote and support the business interests of its members and the exhibition industry. UFI directly represents around 50,000 exhibition industry employees globally, and also works closely with its 58 national and regional association members. More than 750 member organisations in 87 countries around the world are presently signed up as members. Over 950 international trade fairs proudly bear the UFI approved label, a quality guarantee for visitors and exhibitors alike. UFI members continue to provide the international business community with a unique marketing media aimed at developing outstanding face-to-face business opportunities.

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