

UFI Regional Conference in Dubai showcases a vibrant industry, connects leaders

- Around one hundred exhibition industry leaders from the Middle East, Africa, and beyond gathered in Dubai
- Biggest MEA gathering in the history of UFI shows the vibrant development of the exhibition industry in the region
- Key data shared, showing the economic impact of exhibitions in the MEA region

Paris/Dubai – 10 April 2019: Around 100 delegates from 16 countries attended the UFI Conference for the Middle East and Africa in Dubai (UAE), held at the Dubai World Trade Centre on 8-9 April, making this the biggest conference so far that UFI has organised in and for the region.

With the theme “Embracing change and looking forward to the future”, a mix of speakers from both inside and outside the business events industry discussed the role of smart technologies, economic outlooks and market expectations affecting our industry.

“I am very happy that we could welcome this great cross section of the movers and shakers of our industry in the region”, says UFI MEA Chapter Chair, Albert Aoun. “This speaks to the reputation UFI has built here over the years, remaining committed to the region through times good and bad. As honorary chapter leader, I want to explicitly thank all the industry leaders supporting our work here – their support makes all the difference.”

On the UFI stage, Enrico **Gallorini**, Co-Founder of GRS Research & Strategy, a company specialized in Business Intelligence, opened the conference with a strong talk about the use of SMART technologies such as the impact of artificial intelligence, virtual reality and other emerging mainstream technologies that are already in use in the exhibition environment.

Leading industry players of the region shared their strategic outlooks in markets like the UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa, focussing on the potential of collaboration to expand and grow the exhibition market throughout the region.

Diana **Salman**, Senior Consultant at Human Capital Advisory - PwC UAE (UAE) discussed the ongoing economic change, which has a substantial impact on both talent management and staff retention. She explained how to identify critical talent pools for those individuals that will effect positive change and support institutional growth, and strategies on how to retain them.

Paul **Woodward**, Chairman, Paul Woodward Advisory, and Anna **Holzner**, Managing Director, Formentor, underlined the necessity for exhibition organisers to reflect changes in exhibitor needs. Woodward named complacency as a major threat, while Holzner stressed the need for organisers to expand their business model, stating that “we are not real estate people, we have to deliver value to our customers.”

Eliano **Marques**, Vice President Enterprise Analytics – Head of Data Science Emirates Group, presented how analytics can help to improve the customer experience, advancing an Emirates Airline Case Study on the matter.

Sophie **Holt**, Global Strategy Director at UFI research partner Explori wrapped up the two days of sessions, breaking down the global findings of the UFI/Explori Global Visitor Insights Study for the Middle East/Africa region. She shared the drivers that make exhibitions more successful for a changing (and younger) audience, with show visitors in the region especially looking for new technology experiences, and notably more informal/street food style catering, with distinctive themes and decoration.

In addition to the conference programme, there were multiple networking opportunities to catch up with friends and colleagues and meet new people, including a UFI Gala dinner, and the early morning UFI Running Club.

UFI members will – as always – be able to listen to the talks and watch the presentations online - all will be available in the members’ area of the UFI website (www.ufi.org).

Once the sessions programme closed, conference participants got to experience first-hand the World Expo site that will host more than 20 million visitors in 2020 and 2021.

For the first time ever, key figures for the Middle East and Africa region from UFI's groundbreaking new research on the economic impact of exhibitions were shared during the UFI chapter meeting that took place before the start of the conference. These figures were an advance preview of UFI's comprehensive global "Economic Impact Study", conducted by Oxford Economics that will be released later this month. The Middle East region currently sells 3 million square meters of exhibition space and hosts 125,000 exhibiting companies. Africa hosts more than 40,000 exhibiting companies whilst welcoming 2.15 million trade show visitors.

With around 100 corporate members in the region, UFI President Craig Newman cited this data, as well as the Regional Conference, as key initiatives from UFI to support the continued growth of the exhibition industry: "As UFI, we are the global industry association for the exhibitions industry, and we are focussed on working for our members around the world. Here in the Middle East, as in Africa, there is huge potential for everyone in the industry to grow – and UFI will help you."

UFI first opened an office in the region back in 2006, and has maintained a strong presence since then. Nick Savage currently manages the office that is now based in Dubai.

This year's conference was supported by UFI's Diamond Sponsors: The Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), Global Experience Specialists (GES), Qatar National Tourism Council (Qatar) and Shenzhen World. A wide range of sponsors also backed the event. Full details of the UFI MEA Conference 2019 can be found on the event website: <http://ufievent.org/dubai2019/>.

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 60 national and regional association members. More than 780 member organisations in 86 countries around the world are presently signed up as members. Over 1,000 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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