

UFI reviews “a year like no other” and plots the course for 2021

- UFI’s General Assembly has reviewed 12 months of activity, highlighting advocacy efforts, events, education and research
- Global Exhibitions Day spread the message “exhibitions are key to rebuilding economies” across 114 countries and regions

Paris, 10 November 2020: More than 100 member companies present from 40 countries and regions met today online to review UFI’s activities throughout 2020 and to confirm plans for the year ahead. The 2020 UFI General Assembly preceded UFI’s first digital Global Congress, which will take place online from 16-19 November.

Chaired by UFI’s 2020 President, Mary Larkin, the General Assembly highlighted an array of new initiatives to support UFI’s global membership in around 83 countries.

Mary Larkin, UFI’s 2020 President comments: “It is hard to believe that a year has passed since I accepted the role of President of UFI during the 2019 Congress in Bangkok. And what a year it has been! As we entered a new decade, yes only 11 months ago, we had no idea what was going to hit our industry not to mention our businesses and our way of life. During the CEO Summit in Rome in February, the discussion around COVID-19 was only beginning and within mere weeks, we were quickly challenged in a way that was to test our resiliency, solidarity and our ability to pivot to find ways to keep in contact with our customers, suppliers and industry colleagues.”

Larkin continues: “We took every opportunity to connect with each other as often as we could! So, as we come to the end of the most challenging year in our industry’s history, I am hopeful for our industry to be “Better Than Before”. We should not be satisfied with a new normal but work collectively to create an industry that is better than we could have ever imagined, delivers results that are better than our customers could imagine and shows governments and economies how powerful exhibitions are in fuelling economic growth. We are a strong resilient industry that will recover quickly. I do want to thank our advocates and associations who are working tirelessly, alongside UFI, to represent our industry with one voice educating governments, and driving home the role we all play in a strong economy.”

Since the start of the year, the COVID-19 outbreaks and pandemic have dominated UFI’s activities. Throughout the year, the vast majority of UFI’s resources have focused on COVID-19 related work, generating and distributing original research and advocacy messaging. At the same time, UFI has supported the work of global, regional and national institutions who are dealing with the outbreaks.

Early in 2020, a sold-out Global CEO Summit took place in Rome, Italy, that included a special session at the Vatican. There, industry leaders met with Pope Francis, who stated: “it has been shown that fairs and exhibitions not only have positive effects on regional economies and labour markets, but also offer significant opportunities for showcasing to the wider world the rich diversity and beauty of local cultures and ecosystems.”

Then, COVID-19 hit, and UFI had to postpone, then cancel, many regular face-to-face events and educational offers. As a response, in March, UFI launched “UFI connects”, a series of regular talks, sessions and panels that take place online. Every “UFI connects” session focuses on a specific theme, and time is always allocated for dialogue between the speakers, panellists and session participants. Currently, more than 40 sessions are available, on-demand – and free of charge – on the “UFI connects” area of the UFI website: www.ufi.org/uficonnects

“The content we provide and deliver at our UFI events around the world is one of our association’s biggest assets. While our regular events and educational programmes cannot take place as usual, “UFI connects” is our way to continue to deliver,” says Kai Hattendorf, UFI CEO and Managing Director.

Regarding COVID-19, as early as February, UFI launched a central online resource to share materials on the outbreaks with the industry at www.ufi.org/coronavirus – the first MICE industry association to do so, to our knowledge. This page continues to be updated with new material, once it becomes available.

UFI has also created a range of COVID-19 resources for UFI members and the industry at large:

- Global Framework for re-opening exhibitions and B2B trade events

This global framework sets out how our industry will run events in COVID-19 conditions. It includes measures and advocacy messages for dialogue with politicians and health authorities, and provides global industry guidance.

- Good Practice Guide: addressing COVID-19 requirements for re-opening business events

Building on the global framework, this guidance, jointly launched by AIPC, ICCA and UFI, highlights good industry practices and emerging standards for the implementation of the framework measures from around the world.

- Exhibition Industry Market Status Tracker

Around the world, many authorities are allowing exhibitions and business events to take place again, as long as certain pre-conditions and protective measures are in place. UFI is tracking the current state of markets in this designated document.

- Exhibition & Events Industry Advocacy

The COVID-19 pandemic puts many businesses in our industry at risk. With our partners, UFI is working to advocate globally for specific support programmes from governments tailored to the needs of our sector. Jointly, we have already achieved success in many countries, and continue to work on this.

We’ve also released a host of case studies and travel, health and company advice. Find out more at www.ufi.org/industry-resources/coronavirus

Covid-19 Global Economic Impact

UFI delivers regular research insights on global, regional and topical themes, and the association’s activities in this area continue to evolve. In line with UFI’s mission to develop and support the industry worldwide, UFI released year-long reports on how COVID-19 impacts on the industry:

- Global Assessments Damage

In March, UFI released the first global assessment of the economic impact that COVID-19 is having on trade shows and exhibitions. Then, in July, UFI released updated figures (covering the full year 2020) showing the global hit on exhibitions and trade shows due to COVID-19.

- Global Barometer

In July, UFI released the latest edition of its flagship Global Barometer research, which takes the pulse of the industry. The report highlights the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the exhibition industry worldwide.

- Report on the Trade Fair Industry in Asia: 16th Edition

UFI released the 16th edition of its Trade Fair Industry in Asia report, capturing an industry in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis. The report, compiled in Hong Kong by BSG, covers actual performance of the industry in 2019, as well as forecasts for the years 2020 and 2021. Overall, BSG estimates that Asia will record an unprecedented 75% drop in net space sold in 2020, compared to 2019, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This means net space sold is expected to fall from the 24.5 million m² recorded in 2019, down to just 6.8 million m² in 2020.

- Global Recovery Insights

Published on 20 October, findings from the Global Recovery Insights 2020 report, which are based on more than 9,000 responses from across 30 countries, show that exhibition visitors and exhibitors overwhelmingly prefer live events, and that there is no evidence of a major shift away from face-to-face meetings. The majority of exhibiting companies expect a fast return to pre-COVID-19 levels of investment into the marketing channel.

- Waste Management Report in the Exhibitions Industry

This report derived from several UFI actions, including the set-up of dedicated regional task forces around the world and the selection of best practices through the 2020 UFI Award competition on “Best Waste Management”. Contributions from 40 companies covering 22 countries led to this consolidated report of findings. Compiled by Greenview, a member of the UFI Sustainable Development Working Group, the report covers conclusions that emerged from the regulatory landscape, common challenges in waste management and solutions, and examples of best practices from around the world.

The size and scope of UFI’s research available to members have grown significantly in recent years and is now considered world leading.

UFI-Exhibition Management School: A New Industry Education Programme

Based on the excellent reception of UFI’s Venue Management School programme, the association launched a new industry education programme for exhibition organisers: the UFI-Exhibition Management School (UFI-EMS). The UFI-EMS replaces the UFI-Exhibition Management Degree.

The sold-out premiere of the UFI-EMS was organised online and ran over a period of four weeks. The programme offered its international group of participants an unmatched learning environment and networking opportunities. The curriculum was delivered by experienced senior-level managers from leading organisers, with a special focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

Following this success, and the strong demand from our members, UFI announced dates for the next UFI-EMS edition, which will take place from 24 January to 18 February 2021. It will combine both global insights and regional expertise for the Middle East and Africa region.

A New Member Benefit: Exhibition Think Tank Club

One of the challenges of the pandemic is that many industry professionals find themselves furloughed or in between jobs. True to UFI’s mission to empower networking and industry connections, the association has joined forces with the Exhibition Think Tank Club platform, originally launched by MBB-Consulting Group. Together, UFI and MBB will widen the reach of the platform to enable more industry professionals to network, debate and participate in ETTC projects. As part of this collaboration, UFI member companies can register colleagues as ETTC Gold Members, as an additional member benefit.

The Exhibition Think Tank Club is a global exhibition industry e-platform, to network, discuss and continue to help the industry to move forward. It brings together industry peers from different sectors and countries to share their expertise, vision and insights.

Global Exhibitions Day 2020

In the midst of the pandemic, the 5th edition of Global Exhibitions Day (GED) still managed to become the most successful day of advocacy for our industry ever, promoting the central message “exhibitions are key to rebuilding economies” across the globe. From videos to meetings with policy makers, webinars to hybrid events, webcasts to social campaigns, bingo, cakes, virtual running parties and more, people and organisations from at least 114 countries/regions got involved in GED2020. UFI was able to track posts and messages that had a potential reach of 715 million people.

Summarising UFI's activities for 2020, Kai Hattendorf, CEO and Managing Director of UFI says:

“It’s been a year like no other – challenging everyone in the global exhibitions and business events industry like never before. In the past 12 months, the whole UFI team has been working relentlessly to produce tangible data, to provide practical guidance and share best practices, to speak on behalf of our industry in the media, to advocate, and – last, but by no means least – to offer the spaces for our industry to connect and stay in touch, both on-site and online.”

Sonia Thomas, UFI Director of Operations/COO comments: “It’s been a tough year for everyone, including the UFI staff, but we are glad that we have been able to provide valuable information and resources to all our members over the past months, and will strive to continue to do so in the months ahead. We are all here for you, our members: you are at the heart of everything we do.”

UFI's outlook for the year ahead

The months ahead will see UFI maintaining a focus on COVID-19 related developments, while continuing to drive industry advocacy efforts, provide regular research and expand its educational offerings, including the recently launched Exhibition Management School, both online and on-site.

There will be two focal points to keep the industry connected and updated. The “UFI connects” series of digital sessions and events will continue to evolve, and, in parallel, the Exhibition Think Tank Club, which UFI member companies can access as a new member benefit, will grow as an international platform for exhibition industry professionals.

The Global CEO Summit is planned to take place on-site in Hamburg (Germany) from 3-5 February.

Anbu Varathan (Indian Machine Tool Manufacturers’ Association - IMTMA, India) is UFI 2021 President. He is joined in UFI's new presidential leadership trio by **Monica Lee-Müller** (Managing Director of Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (Management) Limited (HML), Hong Kong) as Incoming President, and **Mary Larkin** (Diversified Communications, Portland, USA) as Outgoing President.

UFI is grateful to all its members, partners and sponsors, notably the Diamond Sponsors Freeman, Qatar Tourism Authority, Shenzhen World and TCEB.

Attachments:

- [Anbu Varathan's biography](#)
- [Anbu Varathan's photo](#)
- [Photo of UFI's Presidential Trio for 2020/21](#)

About UFI – The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry: UFI is the global trade 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 more than 50,000 exhibition industry employees globally, and also works closely with its 60 national and regional association members. More than 800 member organisations in 83 countries around the world are presently signed up as members. Around 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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