

UFI counts down to 91st Global Congress in Cologne

- Global line-up of speakers to investigate future of the exhibition industry
- Programme to centre on “Changes to Chances” theme
- UFI to introduce “UFI Medal of Honour” appreciation scheme
- Diverse networking and social activities to highlight host city

Paris—22 October 2024: UFI, The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, has unveiled the programme for the 91st Global Congress, which will take place from 20 to 23 November 2024 at Koelnmesse in Cologne, Germany. Centred on the theme “Changes to Chances,” this year’s programme will explore global trends reshaping the exhibition industry and uncover strategies to transform these shifts into opportunities for growth.

“We are delighted to be hosting this year’s Congress,” emphasizes **Gerald Böse, CEO of Koelnmesse**. “The theme ‘Changes to Chances’ gets straight to the heart of our times. Koelnmesse is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and we are aware of the challenges and changes in the markets. This makes the exchange with industry professionals in Cologne all the more important: We are not resting on our laurels, but are constantly developing trade fairs to maintain their innovative strength as well as our own.”

UFI President Geoff Dickinson adds, “This year’s Congress comes at a pivotal time for our industry, offering a unique opportunity for us to unite, strategise, and reimagine how we can turn today’s changes into tomorrow’s chances. We are excited to welcome everyone to Cologne and look forward to the conversations that will shape the future of our sector worldwide.”

Keynote speaker and main stage sessions

UFI will welcome Anna Rosling Rönnlund, co-founder of Gapminder, as this year’s Keynote Speaker. One of the most influential voices shaping how we perceive the world today, Anna is renowned for her commitment to dispelling misconceptions about global development and challenging stereotypes. In a time of challenge and disruption, Anna will inspire delegates and give them a deeper understanding of societal progress and global trends.

This year’s Power Hour session is set to offer a comprehensive view of the key forces shaping the global landscape. Zoë Williams of The Guardian will offer insights into societal trends, examining how social shifts and challenges are influencing communities, while Tom Rafferty and Matthew Sherwood from the Economist Intelligence Unit will discuss the geopolitical forces impacting global trade and security as well as the economic trends affecting businesses worldwide. Together, they will provide a thought-provoking discussion on the broader forces driving change and their implications for the exhibition industry.

Additional highlights include insights from Gary Shapiro on adapting and thriving in a rapidly evolving industry, perspectives from the Global Exhibition Industry Board Meeting, where senior executives will discuss growth and opportunity, and much more. Delegates can look forward to learning, networking, and exchanging ideas with top voices from within and outside the industry.

Spotlight sessions and focus on Germany

Returning by popular demand, parallel Spotlight Sessions will offer a deep dive into topics that matter most to the industry. From advocacy and digital innovation to venue management and beyond, these sessions offer delegates operational insights from experts who are leading the way, including this year’s six UFI Award winners.

Friday afternoon brings this year's Country Focus sessions, spotlighting Germany. Led by AUMA - Association of the German Trade Fair Industry, these sessions will provide an in-depth look into the forces shaping one of the world's top exhibition markets.

Return of UFI Medal of Honour

On the eve of the association's centennial in 2025, UFI is tapping into its rich history and will celebrate the return of a legacy award scheme. For the first time, UFI will award the "UFI Medal of Honour", building on the historic medal awards that were last celebrated in 2001.

This highest UFI recognition will be granted to up to three individuals annually for their exceptional services to the global exhibition industry at large and the UFI community in particular.

The UFI President will select recipients in consultation with the respective members of the UFI trio, and those chosen will be awarded during a special ceremony at the Congress.

AI-powered matchmaking and networking

Speed Matchmaking will take place just before the Congress sessions officially kick off, offering participants a head start on building valuable business connections. Using AI-driven technology, each participant will be matched for six one-on-one meetings, creating a tailored networking experience for all.

Xchange sessions

Delegates can look forward to the return of Xchange sessions on Wednesday afternoon, where destinations and event tech leaders present their latest developments. These sessions offer a unique glimpse into the innovations shaping the landscape of the global exhibition industry.

Experience Cologne's rich history and culture

Beyond the sessions, delegates will have the opportunity to experience Cologne's rich history and culture. From an exclusive organ concert at the renowned Cologne Cathedral to dinner at Flora Köln, the city's Botanical Garden, each outing is designed to showcase Cologne's distinctive charm.

For those looking to explore further, three curated post-Congress tours provide even more chances to delve into Cologne's heritage. Whether it's wandering through the Old Town to see famed landmarks, diving into the centuries-old story of cocoa at the Chocolate Museum, or discovering Cologne's ancient Roman foundations, there's something to captivate every curiosity.

Other meetings aligned with the Congress

As always, the Congress also provides the backdrop for a multitude of meetings for UFI's leadership, regional chapters, and working groups. The association's General Assembly will take place, as will many side meetings among associations attending, all underlining the role of the UFI Global Congress as the annual meeting place for the leaders of the exhibition industry.

Upcoming changes in UFI Leadership and Management

The Global Congress in Cologne will see the annual handover of the UFI Presidency. Towards the end of the Congress, Geoff Dickinson, CEO of dmg events, will pass the baton and the presidency to Hugh Jones, CEO of RX.

Cologne will also be the last major UFI event under the leadership of outgoing CEO Kai Hattendorf. On January 1, 2025, Chris Skeith will take over as the association's new Chief Executive Officer.

Register now

Registration for the UFI Global Congress remains open for UFI members as well as members of SISO and UFI's G3 partner associations AIPC and ICCA.

For more information, including the full programme and delegate list, please visit www.uficongress.org.

Media passes are available upon request. Please contact media@ufi.org for more details.

For sponsor inquiries, please contact events@ufi.org.

Attachments

- ["Changes to Chances" theme visual](#)
- [91st UFI Global Congress key visual – 1920 x 1080](#)
- [91st UFI Global Congress key visual – 1024 x 1024](#)

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 more than 72 national and regional association members. More than 880 member organisations in 90 countries and regions worldwide are presently signed up as members. Over 900 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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