

Cologne — 20/11/2024

UFI General Assembly reviews, approves a year's progress across the board

- Global UFI membership numbers reach a historic high, closing in on close to 900 member companies in 90 countries
- New educational programme “UFI Exhibition Essentials” for new industry hires ready for global rollout
- Growing focus on industry advocacy as UFI takes leading role across the wider events sector

Representatives from UFI member companies from around the world met in Cologne, Germany, today to review UFI's activities throughout 2024 and to confirm plans for the year ahead.

The 2024 UFI General Assembly took place before the UFI Global Congress, which is welcoming 550 industry leaders from more than 55 countries and regions this week. Against a backdrop of successful work in 2024, the meeting reflected as well on a decade of leadership under outgoing CEO Kai Hattendorf and looked ahead into 2025, UFI's Centennial.

Chaired by UFI's current President, Geoff Dickinson, the General Assembly reviewed and previewed the association's initiatives to support UFI's members worldwide. Membership has reached a new all-time high of close to 900 member organisations, representing 90 countries and regions.

Geoff Dickinson summarised the year by saying: “UFI constantly works for you to make sure this is a progressive and forward-thinking industry, adapting to and moving with the times.”

Reflecting on the growth of UFI's education pillar, **Geoff** said: “It's important to train and develop talent for the future of this wonderful industry. For me it has been so good to see the huge strides UFI has made in education. An incredible 14 editions of the Exhibition Management School have occurred since 2020. The Venue Management School in Macau this year was a great success. I thank Informa and their Tahaluf Academy for introducing the excellent UFI Exhibition Essentials course in Riyadh this year.”

Dickinson continued: “Developing talent with new thinking and fresh ideas for a better future are truly essential in driving constant evolution for this incredible and resilient industry. That is why initiatives like the UFI Event Directors Summit are just great events to inspire and connect tomorrow's leaders.”

Summing up the association's focus now and in the year ahead, **Dickinson** said: "UFI covers research, education, events, technology, sustainability, diversity and all the major topics we need to focus on – and beyond all of that UFI relentlessly and passionately advocates for our industry."

Commenting on UFI's activities in 2024, **Kai Hattendorf, CEO**, says: "Among so many UFI activities in 2024, growing work around advocacy and education stand out. As our industry's trusted global voice, UFI is engaging ever more with selected global bodies and institutions on behalf of your sector. And as our industry brings in a lot of new talent globally, UFI's educational programmes continue to expand to serve the growing needs for training on all career levels."

UFI's main activities in the past year included:

UFI Events & Communities

In 2024, UFI ran a full schedule of in-person events, supported by UFI Connects and other digital formats as complementary, region-specific engagements. Key events included the Global CEO Summit (GCS) in Amsterdam, the Asia-Pacific Conference in Macau, and the Middle East & Africa Conference in Kigali, Rwanda. This year, the "Event Director Summit" was also added to the Asia-Pacific Conference for the first time.

In Zurich, the European Conference took place. For the first time, the UFI Americas Conference brought together members from North, Central, and South America in Monterrey, Mexico. UFI also co-organised the Asia CEO Summit with AEO, SACEOS, and SISO, marking the third and final year of Singapore as the host city for this event.

The 2025 UFI event schedule is available at www.ufi.org/events.

Research

UFI delivers regular research insights on global, regional, and topical themes. Most of these are widely considered global industry benchmarks.

Besides the regular editions of the flagship "**Global Exhibition Barometer**", this year saw the release of the "**Euro Fair Statistics**," identifying the status of the European exhibition market. In partnership with JWC, UFI released a new edition of the "**World Map of Exhibition Venues**," which now covers 21 markets with venue space of more than 300,000 sqm.

UFI facilitated the production of additional **Economic Impact Reports** – based on the model developed with Oxford Economics: Greece (1st edition, in February) and the UK (3rd edition, in June). Spain and Thailand already benefited from such reports, and several other countries are about to order their first ones.

All of UFI's research is accessible at www.ufi.org/research.

Advocacy

UFI's engagement around industry advocacy continues to expand in line with the strategy – as UFI is being seen and recognised as the global representative of our segment of the events industry.

Besides the active work supporting UFI co-funded advocacy institutions like EEIA (Brussels) and ECA (Washington DC), UFI organised a members-only delegation visit to India in August 2024 in collaboration with IEIA, reviewing venue developments in Delhi and Mumbai.

UFI and SACEOS (Singapore) organised an “Asia Associations & Advocacy Day” in Singapore ahead of the Asia CEO Summit. Nine national exhibition/events industry associations across the region attended the session and discussed critical advocacy topics such as sustainability, data, talent and government engagement.

Another delegation will visit Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in December 2024 for strategic dialogue with senior government representatives.

UFI's advocacy portal is available at www.ufi.org/advocacy.

Education

Fourteen editions of the “**Exhibition Management School**” have taken place since the launch in September 2020 (live online and in-person), with an average of around 15-20 participants. The EMS continues to take place online 3 times a year.

The **UFI-VMA Venue Management School (VMS)** returned with an edition in Shenyang at the end of May 2024 in Mandarin and one in Macau in June 2024 in English. The course will be returning to Macau in June 2025.

This year, UFI introduced a new “**UFI Exhibition Essentials Course**,” specifically designed to equip aspiring exhibition professionals with key foundational skills. A pilot session of the course was conducted in Riyadh in partnership with Tahaluf Academy and Informa. This course provides a comprehensive grounding in exhibition organisation, preparing participants to excel in the industry.

The “**Next Generation Leadership Grant**” has been awarded again, with the support of Clarion Events, dmg events, Informa markets, and RX. Five winners were selected. This year, the focus of the NGL project was “AI's impact on exhibitions”. The winners will present their findings at the UFI Global Congress in Cologne.

UFI's educational programmes can be found at www.ufi.org/education.

UFI's outlook for the year ahead

While 2024 will end with the industry's highest revenues globally, 2025 will see the industry face a challenging environment. After the CEO change to Chris Skeith in January, UFI will continue to focus on serving its global membership base to drive its ongoing success.

UFI's Global CEO Summit will kick off the 2025 events roster, taking place in Milan, Italy, from 5-7 February 2025. The 92nd UFI Global Congress will take place in Hong Kong, China, from 19-22 November, hosted by AsiaWorld-Expo. For 2026, UFI's Board of Directors has selected Bahrain as the destination for the 93rd UFI Global Congress, which will be hosted by Exhibition World Bahrain.

Hugh Jones (CEO, RX Global) is UFI's next President, taking up office at the end of the Global Congress in Cologne. He is joined in UFI's new presidential leadership trio by **Panittha Buri** (Vice Chairperson, Bhiraj Buri Group) as Incoming President and **Geoff Dickinson** (CEO, dmg events) as Outgoing President.

Chris Skeith will join UFI in January as the association's new CEO, taking over from departing **Kai Hattendorf**, who has led UFI as CEO since 2015.

UFI is grateful to all its members, partners and sponsors, notably the Diamond Sponsors: Art of Fiber, AsiaWorld-Expo, IT-EX, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), and Visit Qatar.

Attachments:

- [Photo of stage at UFI General Assembly in Cologne, Germany](#)
- [Photo of UFI President Geoff Dickinson at UFI General Assembly in Cologne, Germany](#)
- [Photo of UFI CEO Kai Hattendorf at UFI General Assembly in Cologne, Germany](#)
- [Photo of UFI Treasurer Wolfram Diener at UFI General Assembly in Cologne, Germany](#)

***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. Close to 900 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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