

Paris/Cologne — 26/11/2024

91st UFI Global Congress turns changes to chances

- 91st edition welcomes 600 delegates from 55+ countries and regions, as well as 50 speakers from within and outside the industry
- Diverse content and programming centres on “Changes to Chances” theme
- Hugh Jones takes over as UFI President for the 2024-25 year
- First “UFI Medals of Honour” awarded to three recipients

UFI, The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, welcomed 600 delegates from 55+ countries and regions to its 91st Global Congress in Cologne, Germany, from 20-23 November.

Hosted by Koelnmesse, UFI members from around the world, including members of AIPC, ICCA, and SISO Associations, reunited for four days of networking and knowledge sharing.

“The strength of our industry lies in its ability to bring people together. The past few days in Cologne have impressively demonstrated what we can achieve when we unite our ideas, knowledge, and passion. We are returning to our companies with renewed energy and innovative ideas, ready to set new benchmarks and shape the future sustainably,” says **Gerald Böse, CEO of Koelnmesse**. “It was an honour to host the congress in our state-of-the-art conference and exhibition centre, Confex. I want to thank UFI for their trust.”

Kai Hattendorf, CEO of UFI, adds, “This year’s Congress in Cologne will find a place among the biggest and best ones that this organisation has ever produced. Participants’ numbers match Shanghai 2016, which had been the best attended Congress to date. Beyond the numbers, and in great collaboration, we have been able to deliver value to each and every participant, empowering them to turn changes into chances in reflection of this year’s theme.”

Speakers & Content Programme

Centred on the theme “Changes to Chances,” the diverse programme defined and described the global changes underway and forthcoming, as well as tackled the question of which opportunities they will provide for the sector.

The Congress opened with an inspiring keynote by Anna Rosling Rönnlund, Co-Founder of Gapminder, titled “Gaining Clarity in a Changing World.”

Rönnlund challenged attendees to rethink human biases and misconceptions, emphasising the importance of a fact-based approach over opinion-driven narratives to better understand the world.

Gary Shapiro, President and CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, shared powerful insights on embracing change as an opportunity rather than a challenge. Shapiro urged the global exhibition industry to pivot towards agility in today's dynamic market, embrace failure as part of growth, and cultivate curiosity to innovate and thrive.

The Power Hour session brought together analysts from The Economist Intelligence Unit and The Guardian for an in-depth look at forces shaping the industry. Topics ranged from the fragmented political landscape and generational divides to global economic growth and the transition to a greener, more sustainable future.

The "How I See It" sessions featured thought leaders James Latham (Founder, The Iceberg), Sonia Prashar (Managing Director, NürnbergMesse India), and Enrico Gallorini (CEO, GRS Research and Strategy), each spotlighting the global exhibition industry's strengths. Their messages emphasised the critical role of collaboration, connection, and inclusion in ensuring industry success.

Returning for a second year, specific Spotlight Sessions showcased this year's UFI Award winners and their innovative projects. These sessions also explored essential industry topics, including energy, advocacy, and the pathway to achieving net zero carbon by 2050.

This year's Next Generation Leaders (NGL) delivered an engaging presentation on leveraging artificial intelligence to elevate the exhibition industry. Their insights demonstrated AI's transformative potential in driving efficiency, innovation, and growth.

Lastly, the Country Focus Session, led by AUMA – the Association of the German Trade Fair Industry and Koelnmesse, highlighted the role of trade fairs as critical international business hubs, underscoring Germany's leadership in fostering global connections and commerce.

UFI Medal of Honour

For the first time, the UFI Medal of Honour was presented by President Geoff Dickinson. Selected in consultation with members of the UFI Trio, three honorees were recognised for their exceptional contributions to the global exhibition industry at large and the UFI community in particular.

Recipients are Sandy Angus (UFI President 2001–2003), Mary Larkin (UFI President 2020–2021), and Kai Hattendorf (UFI CEO since 2015).

Welcome to the 2024-25 UFI President

UFI welcomed Hugh Jones, CEO of RX, as the association's new President for the 2024-25 year. Addressing the global UFI community, **Jones** said: "The exhibition industry is just one part of the global events industry. We are the "E" in the term "MICE" - Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions. In 2025, we need to push ahead with initiatives focused on our exhibitions business, and we must continue to lead by example and take the wider event industry with us on this."

Jones succeeds Geoff Dickinson, CEO of dmg events. In 2025, both will serve as part of UFI's Trio, which includes the association's incoming, present, and outgoing Presidents. They will be joined by incoming President Panittha Buri, Vice Chairperson of the Bhiraj Buri Group.

Business of the Association

The Congress was also an opportunity for UFI's governing bodies to convene for their annual meetings, sharing updates and plans for the year ahead. This included UFI's Executive Committee, Board of Directors, Associations Committee, Working Groups (Sustainable Development, Industry Partners, Marketing, Digital Innovation, HR, and Ops & Services), and Regional Chapters (Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East & Africa, North America, and Central & South America).

Memorable Moments in Cologne

Alongside the sessions, delegates were able to experience the charm of Cologne while connecting with industry peers through evening outings. Highlights included the Welcome Reception that immersed delegates in the city's Kölsch culture, a private organ concert at the historical Cologne Cathedral, and an elegant dinner at Flora Köln, in the heart of the city's botanical gardens.

To cap off the experience, delegates had a choice of post-congress tours that showcased Cologne's cultural gems, including the historic old town, the Chocolate Museum, and ancient Roman sites—each one creating a memorable close to this year's Congress.

UFI Global Congress – Context and Outlook

Open to over 50,000 industry professionals from UFI member companies worldwide, the UFI Global Congress is held each November and stands as the exhibition industry's largest global gathering of the year. It offers exceptional networking opportunities, along with unique content and experiences tailored to industry leaders.

In 2025, the 92nd UFI Global Congress will be held from 19 to 22 November in Hong Kong, hosted by AsiaWorld-Expo. For 2026, the Kingdom of Bahrain has been selected as the host destination.

Recent hosts have been Las Vegas (USA) in 2023, Muscat (Sultanate of Oman) in 2022, and Rotterdam (The Netherlands) in 2021.

Sponsors and Partners

UFI is grateful to the Sponsors and Partners who helped to make the Congress a success, first and foremost UFI's Diamond Sponsors, Art of Fiber, AsiaWorld-Expo, IT-EX, Thailand Conventions and Exhibitions Bureau (TCEB), and Visit Qatar, as well as the Congress Gold Sponsors, Hong Kong Tourism Board, Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority (LVCVA), and Saudi Conventions and Exhibitions General Authority (SCEGA).

The full list of Congress Sponsors and Partners is available here:

www.uficongress.org/sponsorship.

Attachments:

- [91st UFI Global Congress key visual](#)
- [Photo of UFI President Hugh Jones during inaugural speech](#)
- [Photo of 2024/25 UFI Trio \(Incoming, Present, and Outgoing Presidents\)](#)
- [Photo of Koelnmesse CEO Gerald Böse during speech](#)
- [Photo of 2024 UFI Award winners](#)
- [Photo of NGL session on AI](#)
- [Photo of delegates in front of Cologne Cathedral](#)
- [Photo of UFI Medal of Honour ceremony](#)

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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