

Arie Brienen: UFI President 2012

Valencia speech

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Dear friends, UFI members. Thank you Eric for those kind words and to all of you for your support in selecting me as your 2012 UFI President.

I would like to start by offering special thanks to Eric for your energetic and inspirational leadership during this year. You have brought your own, special, dynamic style to UFI and I hope that I will be able to build on a number of the innovations you have introduced.

I would also like to offer my thanks also to Manfred Wutzlhofer. It has been a privilege to serve on the UFI Trio with one of the giants of our industry. His wisdom and experience have frequently helped us all to make better decisions and his vision has launched a number of important new initiatives for UFI. I look forward to working with Chen Xianjin as he joins the Trio as incoming president today bringing his perspectives from the exciting Chinese market.

As I hope you all know, I come from Utrecht, a university city of just over 300,000 people in the heart of the Netherlands. The company that I represent, Jaarbeurs, has been holding important international exhibitions in Utrecht since 1917 and is, I am proud to say, one of the 20 founder members of UFI. I am honoured to be the third UFI President from Utrecht and to follow in the footsteps of Juuls de Vries and Ruud van Ingen.

For those of you who have not yet visited my city, I look forward to welcoming you to a series of UFI meetings there in April next year.

I would like now to turn my attention to the UFI programme for the year. My preferred approach is one of evolution, not revolution. I believe that UFI is already strong and that our opportunity is therefore to focus on building up those strengths, improving any areas where we are weak.

I think it is vital for any organisation to ensure that we are maximising value for members, that we are doing what you want and what you need. So, we've been listening to you. Paul already told you something about the member survey we did in the middle of the year and this is very important. I think it's something that we should do on a regular basis so that we can track more clearly how we're doing. So, thank you in advance for your continued feedback and support.

I know that my year as President will go by quickly, so would like to focus my attention on an action plan built around two key themes: firstly, we must make sure that we are maximising the benefits of our wonderful UFI network . You all told us that the power of the UFI network is the most important

benefit for you of membership. With that in mind, we need to find new ways to ensure that you can interact with each other at UFI meetings and throughout the year.

Secondly, I would like to see us focusing our activities on the idea of “Pushing the power of exhibitions”. You told us that the “Promote” area of our Promote – Inform – Network ‘PIN’ mission was an area where we could and should be doing better. And, I agree that it is fundamental to the role of an international association like UFI to be playing its part in ensuring that our industry gets proper recognition for what it does so well.

I’d like to expand on both of these points just a little. The network is consistently and clearly the biggest benefit members see in UFI. Let’s be clear, it is already very strong. Bringing together over 570 leading companies in 84 countries is a remarkable resource and the record-breaking turnout here in Valencia is evidence of just how you all want to work together. There are still some gaps and some important companies missing and we will continue to work on that. But overall, UFI represents the A-List of our industry.

However, I do think that there is more we can do to ensure that you all get maximum value from this network. You have made it clear that you do not want more UFI events. However, many of you come to them looking for business opportunities and new partnerships and we will look for ways to help make that happen in a more structured way.

We also need to find more effective ways to provide year-round access to the network benefits. We have taken some important steps this year with the re-launch of the UFI website and a more active participation in social media channels such as LinkedIn. But we will need to consider carefully how we can do more and what resources we need for that.

Under the heading of “Pushing the power of exhibitions”, there are a number of elements of UFI activity which should be getting more attention. You all ranked information and research just behind networking as top of your priorities from UFI. As you know, we have already invested quite heavily in this area in recent years. You heard a brief summary of the results of this from Paul yesterday and some of you attended our first ever researchers’ meeting on Wednesday.

But there is clearly more to be done. If we are to be as effective as we can be as an industry when interacting with our customers, with governments and with our future employees, we need really compelling information to share with them. Having established a solid base of industry statistics, we need now better research to support our arguments about why we are important to business and to the communities in which we operate.

Education is a complicated subject but clearly an important one for an association like UFI. If we can better educate our current team members, our future team members and our clients about our

industry, then we will help to promote and ensure its long-term success. With our global reach, we clearly have some challenges. There is a place for traditional courses and seminars, but also for taking advantage of the opportunities that new technologies provide us. This was a priority that Eric mentioned last year and some good work has been done by the team on preparing to move forward with a number of online education initiatives. Next year will be a time to make this a reality.

And, finally, a few words on promotion. There are some really interesting initiatives being undertaken by industry associations around the world to raise the profile of our industry. The UFI Associations Committee will be discussing that this afternoon. My hope is that the key associations serving our industry at a national, regional and international level can work better together to ensure that we are speaking strongly and with one voice to all the audiences that matter. We have interesting discussions under way right now with EMECA here in Europe and AFIDA in South America and we enjoy excellent relations with SISO in North America. Our partnership with CCPIT on the CEFCO project in China is also vitally important in getting out the message in that hugely important market. We all operate with relatively limited resources and, only by pushing in the same direction can we ensure that the power and effectiveness of business events, especially exhibitions, is properly recognised.

There is a lot of detail to put around those relatively simple ideas but I look forward to working with all of you and with the UFI team to make progress on them. The economy is looking a bit rocky but, I am confident that we can move forward in promoting the long-term health and strength of our industry.

I'm looking forward to a busy year and to meeting as many of you as possible. Most of all, I'm looking forward to seeing the exhibitions industry continue to thrive and to be recognised for its importance in supporting trade, employment and innovation by the business community, by government and by the communities in which we work.

Thank you for your support.