

## Interview

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## Wolfgang Marzin: "ISH is an economic driving force and cult event"

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**Wolfgang Marzin, President and CEO of Messe Frankfurt, explains how important it is to hold the ISH in March 2021. As the first worldwide Sanitary and HVAC event since the outbreak of Corona, the ISH offers the sector the much needed business platform to really pick up speed again.**

**Mr. Marzin, can you tell us something about the current state of planning for ISH 2021?**

The current situation shows precisely how important real meetings between people actually are. ISH in March 2021 will be the first major sanitary and HVAC event to have been held since the outbreak of the coronavirus. After months of stoppage in the trade-fair business, now the industry has a significant need to see new products and to do business, but in particular to gain new contacts again in personal meetings. It is precisely in times like these that trade fairs are vital business platforms to boost the economy. The business urgently needs these platforms now, in order to get going properly again. Even – or perhaps especially – under the restrictions which we may have.



Wolfgang Marzin, President and CEO Messe Frankfurt GmbH

Source: Messe Frankfurt / Sutera

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ISH is and will remain the most important venue for personal and business meetings in the sanitation, heating and ventilation industry. Now that all sanitary and HVAC platforms have been cancelled for 2020 both in Germany and Europe, ISH will enjoy a significantly greater importance. The ISH team is working at high pressure to make ISH a success. There exists a great need for communication with exhibitors because there is major uncertainty about how the safety and hygiene regulations can be put into practice.

### **So what are your expectations?**

I am a thorough optimist, combined with a healthy realism. On the current showing, trade-fair operations will be starting again at our Fair & Exhibition Centre in Frankfurt am Main with the Book Fair. Taking into account, of course, the current measures governing hygiene and protection. Holding trade fairs will also depend on how rules are applied to air travel, rail travel and public transport, and how far travel restrictions will be lifted. In the case of ISH, we are assuming that European travel at least will be as possible as it is now. Thus visitors from Germany and Europe will be able to travel safely to ISH. Especially for visitors from outside Europe, and for those who nevertheless do not want to travel to Frankfurt, at Messe Frankfurt we are developing digital offers, which will be available during the ongoing event – as so-called hybrid forms – and in the follow-up to the fair. In this way we shall bring these visitors at least virtually to the event – thus extending its reach for the exhibitors.

I am a trade-fair man through and through and so am perfectly sure that the business economy needs trade fairs in order to market its products. You experience these products, when they are live and on the spot, in a quite different way. Not everything can be reproduced digitally. The focus will always be on personal meetings, and here we are making the right preparations to comply with all the measures governing hygiene and social distancing.

The majority of exhibitors and visitors at ISH have always been very strongly national and European in their composition. Given the overall lack of trade fairs this year in Germany and abroad, exhibitors urgently need a suitable platform again to present themselves. So we hope that as many as possible will be attending. Bookings are definitely looking good. On the visitor side of course it is hard to forecast how the situation will be in the individual countries of the world in March 2021. If we take a simplified calculation and use visitors from Germany and Europe at ISH 2019 as a basis, then this would still potentially be 160,000 to 170,000 visitors. I consider this to be realistic, particularly in view of the fact that we shall be launching a large-scale communication campaign to bring the sanitary and HVAC trades to ISH again at an increased level. It may also be interesting to know: during the first SARS pandemic of 2003, no less than 178,000 visitors still came, which amounted to a decline compared with 2001 of some 20,000 visitors. In addition, the latest loosening of travel restrictions for countries outside Europe will also have a positive impact here.

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## **What exactly are the hygiene and social-distancing rules?**

Messe Frankfurt has drawn up a plan and agreed it with the authorities, covering matters of hygiene, medical questions and organisational measures. The hygiene and safety plan is based of course on the requirements currently in force. No-one can see into the future, nor do I have a crystal ball on my desk. Nevertheless, restrictions are being increasingly loosened, so that we can reasonably assume that less conditions will have to be imposed than are currently required.

Overall, the plan is based on three elements: Firstly, social distancing of 1.5 metres, so that the compulsory wearing of masks can be avoided; secondly, an active visitor-management system, which will allow us to control visitor streams better. With regard to the overall number of visitors, due to the size of the Fair & Exhibition Centre we shall have no restrictions.

And thirdly, the hygiene measures. Of course it is obvious that we shall comply with the compulsory measures governing hygiene. And Messe Frankfurt will undertake the provision of visitor data to the authorities in case of contact tracing. This will not be something which the exhibitors will be required to do.

In addition we shall therefore be providing up-to-the-minute information regarding possible revisions on our website:

[www.messefrankfurt.com/hygiene](http://www.messefrankfurt.com/hygiene).

Moreover all our halls can be supplied with a hundred percent fresh air, so that transmission by aerosols can be reduced as far as possible, or even excluded. Thus the situation inside our halls is basically the same as outside, since the air volume is replaced up to five times per hour, which is not the case in any restaurant or other building. Here the exhibitors from the ventilation industry can show the substantial contribution they are making.

## **Hand on heart: how realistic is it to hold ISH 2021?**

It is understandable that the coronavirus pandemic has destroyed confidence. Nor of course do I know how things will be in March. But really we can only look positively towards the future. If the situation in March next year should turn out to be exactly the same as today, then I quite definitely expect ISH to take place – under certain conditions, of course. After all, the protection and hygiene plan developed jointly with the authorities will give us an opportunity to hold ISH under the most stringent safety precautions. You can almost say: people will be better protected at the Fair & Exhibition Centre than outside it. Of course there will be cuts on all sides. It will become a different ISH, but it will be a trade fair in which it is still worth participating and still worth visiting.

To hold ISH, we must and will also keep in close mutual contact with ISH's associations – which, as the fair's sponsors, make all decisions with ourselves jointly. At this point I would likewise wish to emphasise explicitly that it is important for us to hold leading international trade fairs

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in Germany. We must get through these difficult times together. Here, I am happy to say, we are clearly aware of the support rendered by the majority in the sector – both nationally and internationally, in trade and in industry.

**And if, after all, political conditions should not permit it and the event, due to a second wave of coronavirus, has to be cancelled?**

Should trade fairs be prohibited by the authorities or unreasonable conditions be imposed, we shall consult jointly with our partners, in order then to decide in good time what course to take. Should this happen – which we do not anticipate – then the next ISH will not take place until March 2023. There will be no alternatives prior to that date – so much is certain since there is no free timeslot in autumn 2021 at the Frankfurt Fair & Exhibition Centre. In this case Messe Frankfurt will reimburse the stand rents without deductions at the rate of 100 percent, irrespective of whether the cancellation came from the authorities or whether we have made this decision jointly with our partners.

Allow me, however, to make one thing clear: Yes, for our exhibitors it means a decision with a certain risk factor to it. But then I am always thinking of the tradesmen who all the time have been installing our exhibitors' products directly on their customers' premises. Even during the peak of the corona pandemic they ensured that sales were going well. But we are not taking this decision recklessly. For us, the focus on the health and safety of all persons will always take precedence over all commercial interests. But – a missed chance is gone for ever; opportunities have to be grasped. The national and international sanitary and HVAC industries need a reliable platform – and that is in Frankfurt am Main.

The next edition of ISH will be held from 22 to 26 March 2021 (Monday to Friday) in Frankfurt am Main.

**Further information about ISH and registration at**  
[www.ish.messefrankfurt.com](http://www.ish.messefrankfurt.com).

**Press releases & photographs:**  
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**Background information on Messe Frankfurt**

Messe Frankfurt is the world's largest trade fair, congress and event organiser with its own exhibition grounds. With about 2,600 employees at 29 locations, the company generates annual sales of around €736 million. We have close ties with our industry sectors and serve our customers' business interests efficiently within the framework of our Fairs & Events, Locations and Services business fields. One of the Group's key USPs is its closely knit global sales network, which extends throughout the world. Our comprehensive range of services – both onsite and online – ensures that customers worldwide enjoy consistently high quality and flexibility when planning, organising and running their events. The wide range of services includes renting exhibition grounds, trade fair construction and marketing, personnel and food services. Headquartered in Frankfurt am Main, the company is owned by the City of Frankfurt (60 percent) and the State of Hesse (40 percent).

For more information, please visit our website at: [www.messefrankfurt.com](http://www.messefrankfurt.com)

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