

news +++ ISH
22 to 26 March 2021



Interview

Wolfgang Marzin: “We see ourselves as partners of the sanitary and HVAC sector”

Frankfurt am Main, 25 February 2021. Messe Frankfurt has been working closely together with the sanitary and HVAC sector for many years. Every two years, the whole industry meets to hold discussions and do business at ISH, the world’s leading trade fair for HVAC + Water. This year, it will be held as scheduled from 22 to 26 March but as a digital event. In this interview, Wolfgang Marzin, President and CEO of Messe Frankfurt, emphasises the importance of ISH digital for the sector and offers insights into the programme of events.



Wolfgang Marzin, President and CEO of Messe Frankfurt GmbH
Source: Messe Frankfurt GmbH / Sutera

Mr Marzin, can you please tell us briefly what form ISH digital 2021 will take.

Wolfgang Marzin: As the name of this year’s event implies, ISH 2021 will be a purely digital occasion. We planned this last autumn after holding detailed talks with the sector. We decided against a hybrid event in favour of a purely digital format focusing on a business platform, which is urgently needed, and knowledge transfer. This format thrives primarily on the exhibitors and their product presentations. But also on an extremely interesting programme of events. During the five days of the fair, visitors can take part in a stimulating blend of expert lectures, panel discussions and product shows, several of which will be streamed around the world live from the Messe Frankfurt recording studios. Additionally, we are providing a variety of functions at ISH digital platform. For example, an AI-aided matchmaking process will offer contact recommendations on the basis of individual

interests and thus connect the right exhibitors with the right visitors. Through a chat function, video calls and digital conference rooms, participants will be able to communicate and interact personally. With this format, we are offering the sector the chance not only to meet and exchange ideas and information but also to reach international customers. This was an important aspect for exhibitors and visitors and, therefore, an assignment we were pleased to carry out.

Which highlights are you particularly looking forward to?

Wolfgang Marzin: With its core themes of water, heating and air-conditioning, ISH has always been a trade fair with social relevance and the corona pandemic has underscored this. This is also shown by the top themes of this year's fair – the green deal, ventilation technology for clean and healthy air indoors and the hygiene trend in the sanitation segment – all of which are highly topical issues. Accordingly, the political world will also be represented at ISH digital 2021 and I am delighted that Hesse's Minister President, Volker Bouffier, will take part in the opening ceremony on 22 March. Other highlights include the ISH Technology and Energy Forum with discussions on, for example, biomethane and hydrogen as green alternatives to oil in the heating market and the Air-Conditioning Forum, which will present, inter alia, ventilation technology that reduces the risk of infection indoors. Under the title 'Inside | Outside', the 'Pop up my Bathroom' trend show will present not only the latest design trends but also spotlight important topics, such as modernisation and hygiene in public sanitation facilities and private households, as well as show which technologies will make bathrooms smarter in the future.

ISH has always reflected the spirit of the age and, this year, will once again be a driving force for innovation in the sanitary and HVAC sector. I am looking forward very much to discovering which new products our exhibitors are showing next month. Moreover, I am pleased that we have been able to demonstrate with ISH digital that we at Messe Frankfurt can also hold major international trade fairs as online events. Smaller fairs, such as Cleanzone, Formnext, SPS and Hypermotion, have already passed the acid test. Despite the circumstances under which they were held, the echo from both exhibitors and visitors was positive.

Why did Messe Frankfurt decide to make ISH 2021 a purely digital event? After all, you could have cancelled the event altogether and focused on holding it in 2023.

Wolfgang Marzin: Cancelling ISH 2021 was not an option. We see ourselves as partners of the sanitary and HVAC sector and want to do everything possible to support it during these challenging times. The sector's representatives indicated that they urgently need a trade fair because business is good at present. Therefore, we did everything possible to find a suitable solution taking account of the current pandemic. The decision to make ISH 2021 a purely digital event was fully correct – despite the fact that it will be different and take place in a smaller setting. We have no illusions about this. Nevertheless, thanks to the AI-aided matchmaking, the live streams and various communication functions, the digital platform can offer much of what the sector requires. This year, everything is simply rather different. From my point of view, however, the situation also gives rise to a host of new opportunities. Our business model is, of course, based on personal encounters and we are working on making them possible again, especially for our exhibitors. However, we will certainly be able to take much from that we have learnt and will learn and incorporate it into ISH 2023 – but back at Frankfurt Fair and Exhibition Centre again.

Mr Marzin, will you also be 'on site' for ISH digital?

Wolfgang Marzin: Of course. If we want to be the partner of the sanitary and HVAC sector, we must also know what the driving forces are. In the past, I have always toured the exhibition halls and spoken with customers. And I will do so this year at ISH digital too. In other words, I will log in and use the platform to make new connections. To be honest, I am simply looking forward to interacting with people on a personal plane again. Everybody is missing this at the moment. And that includes me.

A glance into the future: what role will digital formats play in tomorrow's trade fairs and events?

Wolfgang Marzin: Purely digital events will certainly be held into spring 2021. However, we are once again planning physical events at the Exhibition Centre for the second half of the year. For example, Indoor Air, a trade fair for ventilation and air quality, which is being held at the request of the sector as a one-off event in Hall 12 of the Exhibition Centre. Despite the ban on events over recent months, digitalisation has made it possible for us to bring people together online and to offer them a business platform. We are very pleased and grateful for this opportunity. As I mentioned before, I see digital elements as being an important addition to physical events in the future. They open up new perspectives: exhibitors and visitors can make their trade-fair experience even more individual; brands are present online the whole time between fairs; visitors from outside Germany can depart earlier in the case of appointment clashes but still participate digitally from their home country. Nevertheless, I am a trade-fair man through and through. Digital encounters cannot fully replace personal meetings. And should not do so. Accordingly, I am already looking forward to welcoming people from all over the world back to real events in Frankfurt am Main.

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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. The Messe Frankfurt Group employs around 2,500* people in a total of 30 subsidiaries. The company generated annual sales of approximately €250* million in 2020. Even in difficult times caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we are globally networked with our industry sectors. 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. We are expanding our digital expertise with new business models. 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

* preliminary figures 2020