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Digital transformation and a successful restart: NürnbergMesse looks towards a better 2022

- **Year 2 of the extraordinary pandemic environment led to sales of about EUR 70 million in 2021 and a smaller net loss than in 2020, less than EUR 50 million**
- **Savings on costs, shortened work schedules, and postponed investments safeguard precious liquidity during the COVID crisis**
- **“Trade fair” business model validated: Customers enthusiastically welcome restart**
- **Mixed outlook: A full calendar of more than 100 events and new hybrid trade fair formats raise hopes of a better exhibitions year than 2021, despite further postponements and cancellations**

Once again in fiscal 2021, the coronavirus pandemic deeply impacted NürnbergMesse. Of the 77 trade fairs planned for 2021 worldwide, 51 had to be cancelled or postponed. The result was that the NürnbergMesse Group saw sales of some EUR 70 million in Year 2 of the pandemic (prior year: EUR 110.3 million), together with a loss of less than EUR 50 million (prior year: EUR 68.6 million). NürnbergMesse CEO Dr Roland Fleck summarised: “We are looking back on a fiscal 2021 governed by extraordinary pandemic conditions. Systematic savings on costs, shortened work schedules, and postponements of planned capital expenditures enabled us to keep the net result from deteriorating significantly further. And in Nuremberg, as well as worldwide, we enjoyed a successful restart in the autumn; the vigorous welcoming response from our customers provided impressive validation for our trade fairs business model.” At the same time, by sagaciously expanding digital options, NürnbergMesse extended the reach of its trade fair themes. And still more, “for the first time, our digital formats generated ten per cent of total sales”, enthused joint NürnbergMesse CEO Peter Ottmann, celebrating the success of the company’s digital strategy.

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By systematically putting the brakes on costs and capital expenditures, NürnbergMesse kept the net result from 2021 from deteriorating further, and thus made an important contribution towards safeguarding necessary liquidity. Personnel and material expenses were cut by about 25 per cent from pre-coronavirus plans. Currently the Nuremberg site has 566 employees (NürnbergMesse Group: 943), roughly 10 per cent fewer (NürnbergMesse Group: 20 per cent) than in the pre-coronavirus 2019 year. Cancelling or postponing investment projects for the exhibition centre saved nearly EUR 70 million for the year in comparison to pre coronavirus planning – a reduction of almost 90 per cent.

Autumn restart at the Nuremberg Exhibition Centre

After some 19 months without face-to-face events and a total of 243 days during which events were banned, in the autumn of 2021 a variety of sectors and industries enjoyed a successful and emotionally stirring trade fair restart: HUBANA, FACHPACK, it-sa, FeuerTrutz, ConSozial and KOMMUNALE, as well as the CONSUMENTA, BIOGAS and RETRO CLASSICS BAVARIA guest events, filled exhibitors and visitors alike with enthusiasm, even as compliance with the applicable hygiene rules was maintained. “By their participation, they once again underscored the significance of our own events, partner events, and guest events as important, indispensable platforms for their respective industries, and as an economic engine for the Nuremberg Metropolitan Region,” said Dr Fleck.

NürnbergMesse Group has global restart

Exhibitors and visitors also enjoyed the pleasure of meeting in person once again at the trade fairs held by NürnbergMesse Group and its subsidiaries around the world. Various segments of the food and tourism industries gathered for artoza, FOODTECH and XENIA, held by FORUM S.A. in Athens. NürnbergMesse Brasil likewise marked the restart in São Paulo with an array of three fairs at year’s end: FCE Pharma and FCE Cosmetique, and PET South America, were the first shows the Brazilian subsidiary had held since the pandemic began. BIOFACH INDIA took place in New Delhi. NürnbergMesse China advanced further along its path towards normality; thanks to careful contact tracing, this subsidiary was able to continue its events almost without a pause. Compared to 2019, CHINA DIECASTING and CRAFT BEER CHINA in Shanghai were able to catch back up to pre COVID levels or even exceed them, in terms of exhibitors and exhibition space. Dr Fleck: “The restart has shown that our customers want to get back to their trade shows – in person, and on site!”

Digital formats meet with a hearty welcome

In addition to well-established in-person events, NürnbergMesse has ventured in the direction of the digital transformation, as a way of enabling its customers both domestic and international to keep taking part in the trade fair experience. Its first digital concepts were created in 2020, and evolved in 2021 into a successful total of 10 digital formats. These enabled participants to exchange ideas with well-matched contacts, gather knowledge through the programme of presentations and conferences, and generate leads as a result – even without being able to attend an analogue event. The digital expansion of face-to-face events took another great leap ahead during the successful trade fair restart in the autumn of 2021. For FACHPACK, more than 4,300 participants attended myFachpack, representing almost 20 per cent of all the event's visitors. FeuerTrutz had a total of 1,228 digital participants, more than one-third of all participants at the event. With itsa365 and myBeviale, NürnbergMesse now also keeps digital platforms available to the IT community throughout the year. Peter Ottmann: "As a next step, we'll be tying in our digital formats even more closely with the in-person events, and offer our customers a total of six hybrid event concepts in 2022 using our successful 'on-site plus online' formula."

Dealing responsibly with the pandemic

Last year, NürnbergMesse also made an important contribution towards putting the national vaccination strategy into action, and thus towards holding events safely. Hall 3C served as a vaccination centre for the City of Nuremberg, where some 276,000 residents of the town were vaccinated against the virus. The company also arranged all three stages of vaccination for its own team, thus achieving a vaccination rate of more than 90 per cent among the staff, well above the national average. While the political debate still persists about legally imposing work-from-home rules, NürnbergMesse has already provided its employees with a wide range of flexible models for working hours and work locations. Thus the company has not only offered the best possible response to the evolving infection situation, but also highlighted its own appeal as an employer. "Another part of our taking responsibility during this pandemic is that during this period we increased the number of apprentice and trainee positions to 51, and filled every one of them," said Ottmann.

Hopeful outlook for 2022

A well filled calendar of more than 100 trade fairs, conferences and other events for NürnbergMesse Group, gratifying booking levels that in some cases have even surpassed the pre-COVID figures, and the many new formats incline management to a cautious optimism for fiscal 2022, even if the year has at first begun with postponements and cancellations.

There will be product innovations in China in 2022 with Car Symposium China (22 April) and Car Battery China/EVTec, a paired event focusing on the forward-looking field of electromobility and scheduled for the second half of the year. Also in China, embedded world China, the Chinese edition of the international trade fair for embedded systems, will be held for the first time (15–17 June). NürnbergMesse Italia is planning for the debut of its new trade fair for printed circuit board production, “Focus on PCB,” 18–19 May, in Vicenza. The product family of coating shows (colours and paints) will be expanded with two new events in Indonesia (21–23 September) and Dubai (16–18 October).

Any meaningful sales projection for fiscal 2022 remains contingent on how the infection situation develops worldwide, along with further easing of international travel restrictions and visitors’ willingness to return to events in person in sufficient numbers. Given that background, NürnbergMesse management does assume that the year will see a positive change of direction, and expects a mixed fiscal 2022 in which both sales and profits will ultimately perform significantly better than in the first two “COVID years” 2020 and 2021.

About the NürnbergMesse Group

The NürnbergMesse Group is one of the 15 largest exhibition companies in the world. It includes NürnbergMesse GmbH and that company’s 15 subsidiaries and affiliates. The Group employs more some 900 people at eleven locations in Germany, Brazil, China, India, Italy, Greece, Austria and the USA. It also has a network of international representatives in more than 100 countries. Its portfolio comprises some 120 national and international exhibitions and conferences held in person and as digital events, focusing on five general fields: Retail & Consumer Goods, Building & Construction, Process Technology, Electronics & Security, and Social & Public. Its events safeguard jobs; generate tax revenues as well as billions of euros in purchasing power effects each year, making NürnbergMesse a major economic engine for the Nuremberg metropolitan region and Germany as a whole.

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