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Intelligent design for trade fairs

What are the multiple intelligences at hand to design, plan and realise modern trade fairs? The latest volume of the *Brand Experience & Trade Fair Design Annual* by Janina Poesch follows this question by presenting almost 60 example projects. Read an excerpt:

Multiple intelligences:

Designing a trade fair as a multi-layered place

Trade fairs have always been spaces for encounter, exchange and innovation. But the framework conditions are changing rapidly: Global multiple crises, economic weakness, technological change and a growing awareness of environmental responsibility are once again forcing the trade fair industry

to rethink its position. Traditional concepts are losing their appeal, changing visitor needs are leading to new challenges and, at the same time, there is growing pressure to compete with digital formats and hybrid experiences as a meaningful and indispensable part of brand communication.

Constant change is inevitable, but also offers great opportunities. Because trade fairs can be more than just product presentations: As multi-sensory experience platforms, they have the potential to inspire people and drive innovation. To achieve this, however, they must come up with intelligent solutions – in every respect! Intelligent design is not just a question of aesthetics, but a pioneering interplay of several aspects that allow us to rethink trade fairs: as an emotional experience and social place that promotes real relationships, with sustainable, flexible and modular concepts, with technologies that enable new interactions, and with design

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processes that are inspired by art and urban life. This is the only way the format can remain sustainable, versatile, inspiring and relevant.

Emotional and social intelligence: Rethinking encounters

People are looking for inspiration and a sense of belonging. The future therefore lies in real experiences: Visitors want to immerse themselves in multi-sensory spaces that tell stories and create an emotional relationship with the exhibitor – surprising productions that engage and touch. The more emotional the experience is, the longer it will be remembered. The real added value of trade fairs no longer lies in the product catalogue on display, but rather in the authentic relationships that can be established here – with brands, experts and like-minded people. Formats that enable networking and dialogue and focus on people must therefore become more important in the future: The aim is to create attractive spaces for communication and collaboration, as the trade fair increasingly becomes a social platform.

Ecological intelligence: Creating added value through modular and flexible concepts

Ecological intelligence means conserving resources without losing sight of aesthetic and functional requirements. Even if this changes the aesthetics we have developed over many years, sustainability must be more than an obligation: It must become a creative driver. However, in times of growing and rapidly changing requirements, exhibition stands also need to be as flexible as the markets they serve. The key to future-orientated design are modular systems that can be adapted to different stand sizes, themes and target groups. And even if shrinking budgets and smaller stand footprints are increasing the pressure to find creative solutions, one thing is clear: The art of doing more with less will take centre stage in future. Clever low-budget concepts can attract at least as much attention as large-scale productions.

Artificial intelligence: Understanding data as a design factor

From design through to implementation: AI is a game changer. Not only in the design of exhibition spaces with generative tools, but also in the analysis of visitor flows and data: Offers, content and interactions can then be tailored and adapted in real time to the individual interests of trade fair visitors – creating hyper-personalised experiences and making the visit unique. The challenge of the future will be to use technology in a way that it remains human and does not overwhelm us.

Technological intelligence: Intensifying real experiences

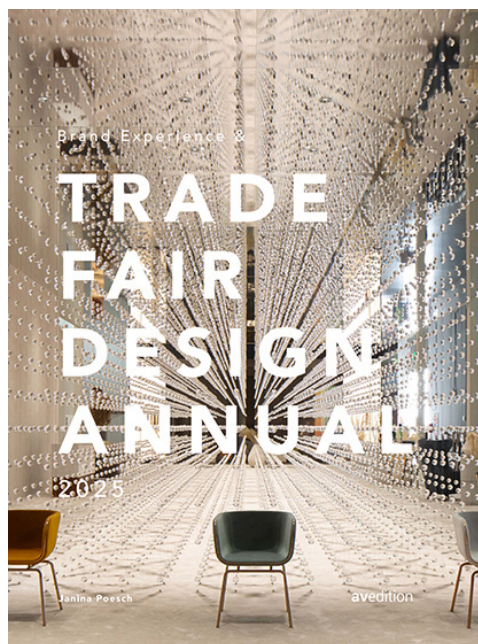
The pandemic and climate crisis have demonstrated how valuable flexible, hybrid formats can be. After the hype, however, it has become apparent that they have not established themselves as a standard, but rather as a valuable, complementary tool: They offer added value by reaching new target groups, facilitating access to content and extending the reach of the trade fair beyond the event itself. Nevertheless, physical presence remains indispensable, as real encounters, haptic experiences and spontaneous conversations cannot be completely replaced by digital concepts. The future will not be about completely replacing the face-to-face trade fair, but about using digital tools such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and interactive displays in a targeted way and skilfully combining real and digital experiences.

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Artistic intelligence: Strengthening narratives through new associations

Art is a powerful medium for telling stories. It is no coincidence that high-profile collaborations between artists and brands now have a long tradition. But artistic practices and elements from fine art, sculpture or performance can also be consciously integrated into the design process and the audience reactivated through unexpected connections. However, trade fairs are also increasingly shifting from the traditional halls to urban spaces. This means that in future they will not only be functional extensions, but also interactive, social and creative contributions to the life of the city – the public space as a stage.

From the editorial by
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How can artificial intelligence revolutionise interactions with visitors, ecological intelligence promote sustainable solutions, emotional intelligence create lasting ties between brands and people, and artistic intelligence transform places into creative spaces? How can technological intelligence push the boundaries of what is possible and how can collective and social intelligence culminate in participatory concepts?

The latest edition of the Brand Experience & Trade Fair Design Annual aims to answer these questions and inspire exciting new projects by showcasing about 60 outstanding projects and presenting essays contributed by true industry experts.

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