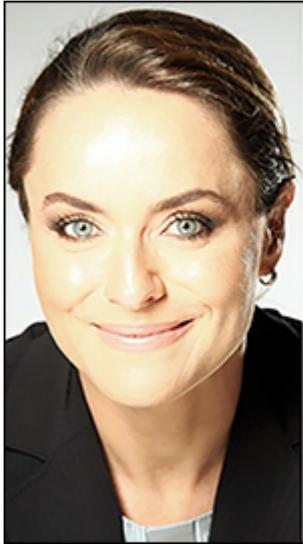


How Technology Can Help to Ensure Safe Events in the New Norm

The use of technologies with a great deal of innovation and creativity will be even more necessary to make events safer in the wake of the worldwide COVID-19 health crisis, which has been responsible for the establishment of what is being called the “new norm.” Radio frequency identification (RFID), digital printing and QR codes are some examples of technologies that can solve such problems as safeguarding crowds, preventing contact with objects, and protecting the health of exhibitors and visitors, among other new issues being discussed in the conference and exhibition sector.

One person exploring these questions is Brena Baumle, a managing partner at [Baumle Fairs Organization](#), based in São Paulo, Brazil. The company specializes in the organization and administration of Brazilian exporting companies participating in international business fairs. With a degree in social communication, advertising and propaganda, as well as a post-graduate degree in services marketing, specializing in digital marketing, Baumle held the position of director of [Hannover Fairs of Brazil](#) and Hannover Fairs Sulamérica, as well as representing Brazil at [Koelnmesse](#) as a speaker on commercial promotion areas at trade fairs. [IoP Journal](#)’s Edson Perin recently discussed the situation at length with Baumle.



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Edson Perin: Are there new protocols and recommendations being discussed for holding events inside and outside Brazil?

Brena Baumle: Several organizations are discussing what precautionary measures can be taken when returning to fairs. We can wait for the publication of a manual listing the procedures, but here at Baumle, we believe that some ideas will be a reduction in the number of visitors; controlling the number of exhibitors and visitors inside booths; public control, with temperature gauges and some way of disinfecting suitcases, bags, boxes and other objects; mandatory restrictions in the construction of booths to make them wider and more spaced apart; the frequent cleaning of closed environments, such as auditoriums, bathrooms, etc.; better ventilation of pavilions; ensuring that face masks or tissues are available, as well as special receptacles for trash disposal; greeting people without touching them; avoiding contact with common objects, such as light switches, taps and doors, which could be replaced by automatic models; social-distancing measures being reinforced through signs, posters and floor markings; and the permanent use of masks, proper hand hygiene, and hygiene labels, which will become standard.

Perin: Do you believe these protocols will be followed?

Baumle: Yes, without a doubt. The rules will also be followed

by the promoters of national fairs, mainly in big centers like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and at big public events. [FIESP](#) [the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo], for example, launched a post-quarantine economic activity recovery plan, which serves as a guide for various segments of society—schools, gyms, offices and shopping centers—to help them structure themselves so that the restarting of activities occurs safely.

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Perin: How can radio frequency identification, digital printing, QR codes and other technologies help companies carry out events, within what is being called the new normal?

Baumle: All of these technologies can help prevent unwanted contact by people with buttons and objects in general, allowing access and more hygienic movement within pavilions—that is, within what is considered a security protocol today, which we are calling the new norm after the coronavirus crisis. I imagine, for example, that NFC [Near Field Communication] tags or a card printed by means of digital printing can be the best means of providing access to certain environments, helping to control the number of people in each space within security limits for health purposes.

Or you could have a QR code at the entrance of each booth that, through an app, would notify a visitor when an attendant was available and waiting to chat in person, without the need to create queues at certain points that are more crowded. Broadly, intelligently and with a lot of creativity, these technologies should be used to offer comfort and tranquility to visitors at fairs and conferences.



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Perin: What other changes can we expect to see?

Baumle: Another big change will involve meeting schedules. Organizers will increasingly need to track participants’ interests at very detailed levels and will be able to organize meetings between exhibitors and visitors based on interests, accelerating the sales process. The promoters of big fairs will have to offer a platform capable of efficiently interacting with participants at various levels, from the pre-conference to the post-event periods, because professionals will attend fewer events and will be much more focused on results. All pavilions that host business fairs, without exception, will need to offer excellent free Wi-Fi internet connections—something that is not yet a reality—and charging stations for visitors to use their own gadgets so that they will not need to have contact with *touch screens* for information, which was so common pre-pandemic.

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Perin: How are the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus impacting businesses at the moment?

Baumle: In our company’s 27 years, we have never had to live through a scenario like this, with mass cancellations and postponements of events due to a serious global pandemic. This is an unprecedented situation and, therefore, quite difficult

to be able to measure impacts. However, one thing is certain: without government support, despite the great efforts of the events and exhibition industry itself, the sector will not be able to survive this period and be capable of an agile recovery in the near future. This is a very important factor for exhibiting companies that need to quickly sell their products, which were largely hurt by the quarantine periods imposed by the governments of several countries. Companies will urgently need events to ensure sales platforms.



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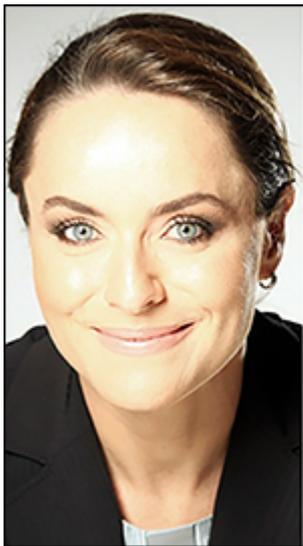
Perin: What are your sector’s doubts at the moment?

Baumle: Some of these doubts are: Will digital platforms be able to keep businesses afloat? How will the trade show sector survive? How will calendars be readjusted for an eventful second half? We have been exchanging information intensively with the main trade fair associations and promoters in the 20 countries where we work, both to discuss new dates and deadlines, as well as to address new rules and protocols, and especially to ensure that those involved adopt a flexible commercial policy to deal with the crisis which does not further harm exporting companies. The relevance of these discussions is great, given that investment in fairs and events is around 50 percent of the total marketing budget of European companies.

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Perin: What data are you working with, especially in the context of international events?

Baumle: We work with relevant data. For instance, of the 2.9 million professionals who occupy decision-making positions in Germany, 82 percent are in the habit of holding important meetings at business fairs. If we consider those that are less than 40 years old in this sample, the percentage rises to 85 percent. £4.7 billion is the figure invested annually by visitors to events in Germany, according to [AUMA](#) [an association of the German trade fair sector]. Germany, recognized as the country of events, has already been hit hard by cancelations and postponements in its extensive calendar of events.



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Trade fair organizers and all service providers, such as booth builders and catering companies, among others, are already suffering heavy financial losses. Many other lines of business are also affected, such as the hotel, transport and printing industries, among several suppliers and thousands of local contractors. According to AUMA, a loss of around £3 billion is expected for the economy alone with the cancelations and postponements of fairs, affecting more than 24,000 jobs, not to mention that the country will lose at least £470 million in

tax revenues.

Remember also that these values do not include the lost sales contracts of exhibiting companies that do their business primarily at fairs. Germany is number one in the world in terms of organizing international fairs. Annually, 160 to 180 international fairs are held in the country, bringing together 180,000 exhibitors and 10 million visitors from 160 countries, on average. The investments of exhibitors and visitors to fairs, in a macroeconomic manner, amount to more than €28 billion. More than 230,000 jobs are guaranteed annually, and tax revenues based on fairs total €4.5 billion every year.

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Perin: What are the expectations regarding Brazilian events and other international conferences?

Baumle: In Brazil, with some event venues being converted into field hospitals during the COVID-19 crisis, the entire calendar is being redone. Updates are frequently being released by [UBRAFE](#) [União Brasileira de Feiras] so that exhibitors and visitors can plan better. We don't have very accurate data yet, but I believe that soon we will have very heavy estimates as well. There is a huge effort to secure some platforms. Sial China, for example, which would have taken place in Shanghai in May, was moved to September at another pavilion—in other words, the entire fair has to be redesigned. Some events with an annual cycle will not take place this year at all and will be postponed to the next regular date in 2021, such as the traditional Hannover Industrial Fair.



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It has also been seen that digital platforms have become much more relevant, and some events are moving from classroom to digital quickly, such as the largest gaming fair in the world, Gamescom, which was scheduled for the last week of August in Cologne. The federal government of Germany, on Apr. 15, announced a ban on events with more than 100 people until Aug. 31, and that fair received 373,000 visitors at its last event, so it has already been relaunched as a 100 percent digital event. Canton Fair, China’s oldest multi-sector fair, which attracted more than 195,000 foreign buyers, will also take place online in 2020.

Perin: Are there exhibitors looking to hold events this year?

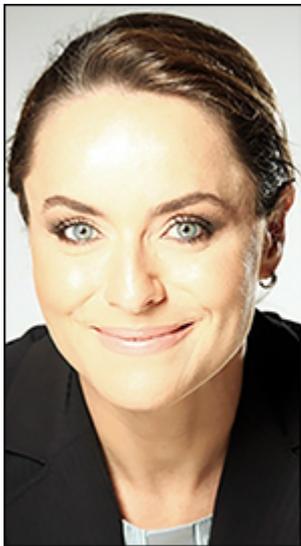
Baumle: Yes. Promoters are being strongly pressured by exhibitors for fairs to take place at the end of the year, as it is understood that there is a need to make urgent sales. But although September, October and November are theoretically normal months for events, they will certainly be smaller this year and with some restrictions, like those discussed above. I believe that once the final protocol has been defined, a communication plan will be built and implemented for all major world fair centers.

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Perin: Do exhibiting companies intend to participate in world

events?

Baumle: Gradually, and with great caution, we are seeing a movement toward a retraction of the *lockdown* in order for the economy to resume, which should lead to a greater degree of security and stability. After four weeks of complete silence, we are seeing an interest from exhibitors in planning events for the second half of the year. Gradually, we are getting back to booth briefings and questions about value and deadlines. Companies are realizing that using this quarantine period to plan and define priority markets is a very efficient attitude.



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We are guiding our customers to maintain contact channels with their clients, even with their teams at home, to organize their mailings and take advantage of this period of time to analyze and discover new opportunities. It is a job that cannot be left until later, because with leaner structures, companies will not have time to speed up the resumption of international business. Those that are not prepared may miss opportunities.

Perin: What are your expectations for the second half of 2020 and for next year?

Baumle: We know that the events sector is crucial to countries' economies and involves not only businesses that

promote fairs, but also pavilions, booth assemblers and countless service providers—not to mention the exhibiting companies that rely on this business platform to promote their products and services efficiently. A huge chain involving numerous jobs brings many losses when it stops. No other marketing device is able to represent a company and its products as comprehensively as personal contact. Thus, I believe this immense crisis is fleeting and companies will quickly be able to adapt to the resumption of business. Apparently, in Europe, we will already have events happening from September onwards, and October and November will be very busy months.