

The moment had come. The year 1974 saw the company's reinvention as Nürnberger Messe- und Ausstellungsgesellschaft (NMA) – the true birth of NürnbergMesse. Thus the firm cut itself free from its role as a simple space administrator, and became an event organiser and host. Early lean years were followed by decades of expansion – from 15 employees to more than 1,000, from one location in Germany to seven around the world, with more than 100 trade fairs and conferences every year. For NürnbergMesse to achieve success called for tenacity at first, along with inventive minds, rousing ideas, a knack for business, and political facilitators – leading to **almost 50 years of growth.**

**T**he hard work of building a new exhibition venue had paid off, and the groundwork was laid for Nuremberg's future as a trade fair hub. In 1973, the city had an Exhibition Centre that could satisfy the most modern expectations – at least its first segment did.

Now, in addition to completing the second phase of construction, which had already been planned, the exhibition centre also had to be equipped for the future both organisationally and institutionally. And most importantly, it had to be filled with new trade fairs and other events. Because while the Spielwarenmesse was safely under contract and would be held in Nuremberg for the next decade and a half, that fair alone would not make a venue of this size profitable. The same held true for the other established events that AFAG, the Nürnberger Bund, and others had already been holding in the old exhibition halls at the City Park; they would not be enough to cover the costs of a centre on this new scale.

In 1973, the body responsible for the Exhibition Centre was Messehallen GmbH, a municipally owned subsidiary. It would have to reinvent itself, because the "construction, maintenance, and operation of exhibition halls" – as the articles of association and the Commercial Registry entry still specified until 1973 – would not suffice to carry the new site into the future.<sup>45</sup> The organisation needed to evolve from a simple owner, operator, and administrator of exhibition halls into an active host, a partner for both exhibitors and visitors, and especially a planner and organiser of its own events. The new company would have to be a "capable administrator of the trade fair business in Nuremberg and the resulting overall economic benefits for citizens, the city, the region, and the economy", as it would describe its mission in the late 1980s.<sup>46</sup>

### **The city is added to the company name**

The outcome of this transformation arrived on 25 January 1974, when a Shareholders' Meeting adopted a resolution to amend the articles of association. The most obvious change was that beginning on 1 January 1974, Messehallen GmbH would now be known as Nürnberger Messe- und Ausstellungsgesellschaft mbH



The challenge from 1974 on: to keep 60,000 square metres of exhibition space busy.

(NMA), so the city was now included in the company's name. The newly formed company's objective would be more than just "building, maintaining, and operating exhibition halls and the associated functional, service, and other facilities at the Nuremberg Exhibition Centre": They would include "promoting business, especially the exhibition and event business in Nuremberg", as well as "holding trade fairs, exhibitions, and other suitable events."<sup>47</sup> It was a paradigm shift. In addition to its managing directors and the Shareholders' Meeting, NMA was now equipped with a Supervisory Board and an Advisory Board.<sup>48</sup> The Spielwarenmesse had left Messehallen GmbH in 1972, leaving the City of Nuremberg the sole shareholder – and for Messehallen's successor as well. This move established groups of eminent figures who would play a major role in shaping the exhibition company's business policies. The Supervisory Board's constituting meeting was held on 20 March 1974 at the Wolff'scher Bau of the City Hall.<sup>49</sup> Nuremberg Lord Mayor Dr Andreas Urschlechter was elected Chairman, while Assistant Mayor Willy Prölss and City Councillor Helmut Bühl were named Deputy Chairmen. The new company was capitalised at DM 6.3 million.

**5 April  
1974**

Nürnberger Messe- und Ausstellungsgesellschaft is entered in the Commercial Register.

# From 0 to 180,000 square metres in just under 50 years

*Space at the Nuremberg Exhibition Centre  
has grown massively over the years.*



Source: NürnbergMesse



## A rising company becomes a brand

Well into the 2000s, the trade fair site's development was still dominated by the international Spielwarenmesse's increasing need for space. That need was successfully met through a cooperative approach.

At the same time, NMA was demonstrating that this pressure could create both a strong commitment and a tailwind. A period of emancipation began. The successes of the first decades imbued the company with daring, and they also began to inspire business policy. It was evident that a large segment of the public still associated the Nuremberg exhibition venue with the Spielwarenmesse. But in the exhibition market, the Nuremberg team was gaining visibility and respect. The buildings continued to grow – and as a company, NMA was also outgrowing its baby shoes and setting new goals of its own.

Another sign of this increased entrepreneurial strength emerged in the second half of the 1980s. NMA began thinking about its brand image based on an analysis of the competition and an image study. In spite of the events it had acquired to date, as well as the steady expansion of the venue, Nürnberger Messe- und Ausstellungsgesellschaft was considerably less well-known than organisations like the Spielwarenmesse and AFAG.

The abbreviation NMA was not easy to understand without knowing the company's full name (which in itself was not especially expressive), and it was difficult to communicate visually. And the brand icon showing the hexagonal honeycomb grid of the exhibition halls also said little – so the company also needed a catchy icon.<sup>62</sup>

With support from an agency, a new brand identity was conceived. The main selling points: special flexibility to meet customer needs, loyalty to guest events, no copying of other exhibition locations, personal involvement, a high-quality venue, Nuremberg's special flair as an exhibition site, and an advantageous cost-benefit ratio for exhibitors.<sup>63</sup>

Nuremberg was also portrayed as an ancient city for trade but a young one for trade fairs. "We consistently avoid interpreting the tradition of medieval

The new word-picture mark from 1988 combined the new name with the familiar symbol reflecting the honeycomb configuration of the exhibition halls.

27  
October  
1989

The renamed NürnbergMesse GmbH is entered in the Commercial Register.

trade as a historical tradition of trade fairs", read the brand manual from 1988.<sup>64</sup> Then as now, the company was well aware of Nuremberg's strong tradition and its role in long-distance trading in both medieval and early modern times; this book describes that relationship, too. But NürnbergMesse has never laid claim to any continuity for the city as a trade fair hub with centuries of history.

The new word-picture mark combined the familiar symbol with a new name: NürnbergMesse. That was catchier and more easily understood internationally. In 1988 the decision was made, and that same year the company name was changed to Nürnberg Messe NMA Nürnberger Messe- und Ausstellungsgesellschaft mbH.<sup>65</sup> This was a cautious interim step, "So as to document the visual connection and continuity between NMA and NürnbergMesse for the outside world during a transitional period." As a second step, in September 1989 the Shareholders' Meeting approved the new name: NürnbergMesse GmbH. That name was entered in the Commercial Register on 27 October 1989.<sup>66</sup>

### Iconic



*Getting oriented in the new exhibition halls was tricky at first because they all looked the same. Help came from graphic designer Otl Aicher, with iconic pictograms and a new colour scheme.*



## Bavaria invests at last!

The Free State of Bavaria had not wanted to invest in NMA as a shareholder in 1974 – which Nuremberg would certainly have welcomed, especially since that would have created a broader economic base as well as contacts at the Ministries. Regardless, the State of Bavaria was given a seat on NMA's Supervisory Board, because support from the State was



essential to Nuremberg’s development as a trade fair hub. Both the Spielwarenmesse and Messehallen GmbH had benefited since the 1950s from financial support from the State capital in Munich during the first steps at Berliner Platz, and later NMA benefited as well. The site for the Exhibition Centre could not have been purchased without help from the Bavarian government.

As a result, in the latter half of the 1980s Nuremberg Economic Affairs Officer Dr Wilhelm Doni began a campaign “to constantly remind the Free State of Bavaria of its trade-fair policy responsibility for Nuremberg, the second largest trade fair site in Bavaria.”<sup>67</sup>

The negotiations for State grants for the construction of Hall N (now Hall 10) finally presented an opportunity for the City of Nuremberg, now the sole shareholder, to make the State another offer to participate as an investor. This time, the State capital was open to the idea. Nuremberg’s growing significance as a trade fair centre was surely no obstacle to the State’s change of heart.

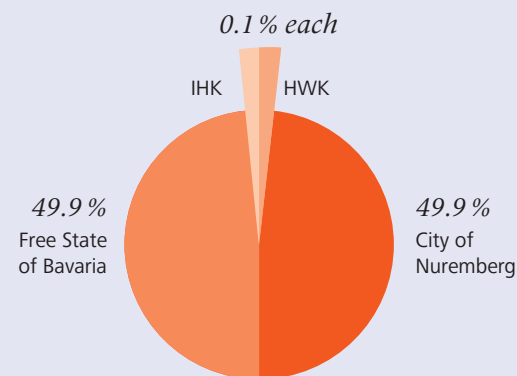
The negotiations with Bavarian Finance Minister Gerold Tandler began early in 1988, with major leadership from Nuremberg Mayor Dr Peter Schönlein, Economic Affairs Officer Doni, and trade fair Chief Executive Dr Hartwig Hauck. But the process dragged on. The city wanted to get the greatest possible cash inflow for its shares, at DM 50 million; the State pointed out how much it had already granted so far.<sup>68</sup>

In the end, in 1989, the two parties reached agreement on new articles of association that provided for the Free State of Bavaria to contribute DM 40 million to the company. Of this amount, DM 20 million would be used to stock up equity, while the State bought shares of the company from the City of Nuremberg for DM 10 million. The remaining DM 10 million was given to NürnbergMesse as a shareholder loan. In this context, the City of Nuremberg also granted a loan of DM 10 million.<sup>69</sup>

The articles were notarised on 19 February 1990 and took effect on 1 May 1990, and they made the City of Nuremberg and the Free State of Bavaria equal majority shareholders in NürnbergMesse GmbH, each with 49.9 percent of the shares. Two more shareholders were added: The Nuremberg Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Middle Franconia Chamber of Trades bought in for DM 60,000 each, each holding 0.1 percent of the shares.<sup>70</sup> The two Chambers were included mainly to provide their economic expertise when business was being conducted. They were neither included in distributions of profits nor were they required to assume losses. The shareholders would work together primarily in the Shareholders’ Meeting and on the Supervisory Board. The Shareholders’ Meeting would be presided over

## NürnbergMesse shareholders

As of 1990



After multiple capital increases, today the City of Nuremberg and the Free State of Bavaria each hold 49.969% of the company while the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) and the Chamber of Trades (HWK) each hold 0.031% (as at 2023).

Source: NürnbergMesse

by the rotating Chair of the Supervisory Board, an office that would alternate every three years between the City of Nuremberg and the State of Bavaria.<sup>71</sup> This new investor structure was a key step in the advancement of Nuremberg as a trade fair centre; without it, the scale of the company’s future growth probably would not have been manageable.



The four shareholders sign up in 1990 (L to R): Dr Gustl Drechsler (President, Nuremberg Chamber of Industry and Commerce 1989–1995), Gerold Tandler (Bavarian Finance Minister 1988–1990), Dr Peter Schönlein (Nuremberg Lord Mayor 1987–1996), Heinrich Mosler (Vice President, Chamber of Crafts for Middle Franconia 1989–1997).



## Service orientation was a critical factor

The staff at NürnbergMesse worked hard for their customers and partners, and this resulted in a critical difference in quality. A 1999 study by the GfK market research institute noted three significant strengths among the team: with their expertise, shared skills, and a partnership-based service orientation, the Nurembergers enjoyed a nearly unique position in a nationwide comparison.

Nuremberg's industry trade fairs, with their specialisation, proved to be extremely successful for exhibitors. The city's easy accessibility for events helped further consolidate its reputation.<sup>89</sup>

One novelty for exhibitors showed how completely the company understood service: They could let NürnbergMesse handle all the work of organising their booth after a special department was formed for the purpose. In the past, exhibitors formerly had to concern themselves with booth construction, logistics, catering, décor, cleaning, and even marketing services; but starting in 2003, NürnbergMesse customers received an offer for all of these services, along with a contact partner for coordination.<sup>90</sup> Exhibitors could plan their trade fair appearance from anywhere in the world using the online booth configurator.

## Conferences and trade fairs: An ideal combination

In the 1990s, the strategic importance of conferences grew for NürnbergMesse. Trade fairs and conferences held at the same time on the same topic had once been viewed as competitors in some parts of the trade fair market; the fear was that a conference

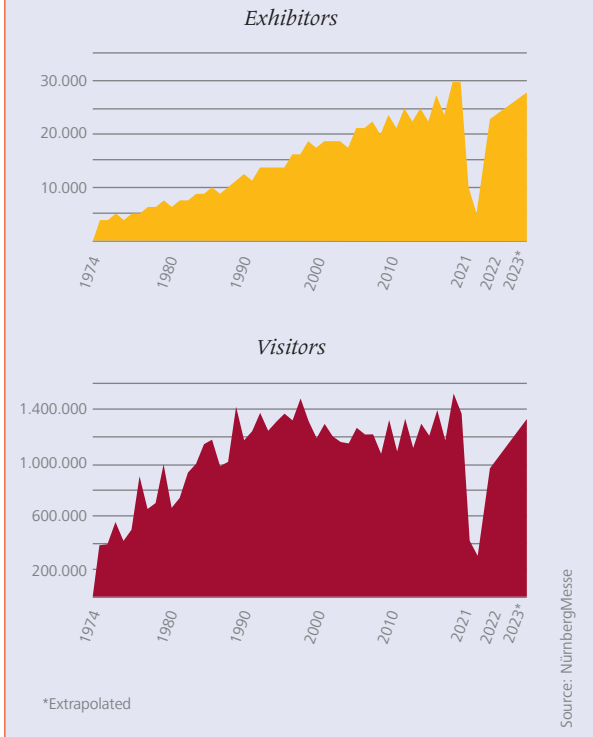
The company's service team offers everything from booth construction to décor and logistics. Since 2004 it is also offered the "Get-it!" express service. In no time, the team can organise "anything missing, from pizza ovens to hundreds of ping-pong balls, to an ornamental fish, to unusual computer cables."<sup>88</sup>

## 2 April 1992

First subsidiary founded, NürnbergMesse Service GmbH

## Well-attended events

Exhibitor and visitor figures for NürnbergMesse Group events around the world.



would draw visitors away from the trade fair. But as it turned out, exactly the opposite was true. Efforts were intensified to develop more conferences, preferably application-oriented, because they often drew an international trade public to the trade fairs being held in parallel in the same field.

And new opportunities emerged. "Lobby fairs" are often held around the edges of conferences. These are smallish exhibitions by companies that complement the conference's focus. In Nuremberg, lobby fairs were often the starting point and nucleus for the development of a new trade fair.<sup>91</sup>

More spaces for larger conferences were built to support this strategy. In 1997, the first of three conference centres was built at the Exhibition Centre, and the CongressCenter NürnbergMesse (CCN) was founded. "Optimum benefit and convenience with a maximum of spatial, technical, and organisational flexibility" is how NürnbergMesse's website advertised this capability in 1998.<sup>92</sup> The concept caught on, and more expansion projects soon followed – and yet demand still exceeded supply.