

In its Jubilee Year, NürnbergMesse is facing economic and social challenges that require far-reaching changes amidst hard-to-assess contexts. The search for solutions will be influenced by new trends like transformation, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, new work, and sustainability. For a trade fair and conference organiser, host, and catalyst that operates internationally, each of these terms has great relevance. And as usual, NürnbergMesse is tackling the task with a strong, steadfast team. They are heading into this newest of all futures with far more questions than answers. So it is a good thing that the company's strong personalities, committed shareholders, and stalwart partners are **working together in a visionary structure.**

# On the way to a sustainable transformation



How can you make a company sustainable when it has the scope and structures of an exhibition company that operates worldwide? The main focus: responsibility for employees and society, products and services – and for one's own acts.

*By Prof. Dr Matthias Fifka*

When a company gets to be 50 years old, that is a sign of sustainability all by itself. It proves, after all, that it has been doing business soundly for half a century. But a purely economic view of sustainability is no longer enough today – and especially if you look towards the future. The 21st century is proving too disruptive for “business as usual” to still be a viable concept. Climate change, rising shortages of resources, and demographic change – to name just a few factors – are posing hitherto unknown business and social challenges.

### **The trade show business model – Does it have a future?**

The trade show business, too, is among the sectors increasingly caught in the crossfire, since its business model relies on running extensive properties and on international travel. Is it a good match for the times if multiple thousands of people travel considerable distances – often by plane – for a stay that lasts just a day or two? Could not everything that happens in an exhibition hall be done virtually?

These and similar critical questions are what confront exhibition companies today. And the answers are not simple. That is partly because of the complexity of the underlying situations. Where are visitors and exhibitors travelling from? What modes of transport are they using? Are they coming only to attend the trade fair, or will they also use the trip for other purposes?

Then too, there's the question of what would happen if there were no more trade fairs. Would a German maker of specialty machines, with a newly developed product that might be the size of a one-room flat, fly it all over the globe to demonstrate it to potential business partners because they will not be gathering in a single place any more? Would a Chinese supplier visit all his European clients individually, while an Italian wine dealer sends cases of wine to every potential buyer in the world to hold online tastings together?

In a word, the virtual world has its limitations, especially in terms of haptic and sensory experience. On top of that, trade fairs make it possible for many actors within an industry to gather in a single place, thus reducing the travel activity that would develop from individual visits. But the crucial factor is that people want to meet face to face. That is something the coronavirus pandemic taught us.

So trade fairs are a business model that still has a justification – though that is no basis for “business as usual”. Because the trade fair industry will only be viable for the future if it can address the ecological and social challenges it faces – and changes accordingly.

### **Sustainable transformation at NürnbergMesse – A look back**

NürnbergMesse launched a strategic transformation process in 2021. That was by no means a “cold start”, because the company had already begun a lot of activities for greater social and ecological sustainability, ranging from programmes to encourage women's advancement, to trade fairs focussed on sustainability, to optimising its exhibition halls' energy consumption. But there had been no all-round, systematic approach yet.

The starting point for the path towards a sustainable transformation was to form a team of employees from every department. The overriding objective was to anchor sustainability in every part of the company, and to give colleagues from every area a chance to contribute.



Contemporary architecture: The pool creates ventilation for the Mitte entrance.



When a company sets off for terra incognita, external expertise and experience are not out of place. That is why NürnbergMesse sought support from a long-standing cooperating partner, the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. Prof. Dr Matthias Fifka was brought on board as a navigator for the voyage through the sometimes confusing waters of sustainability.

But exactly where is the trip going? What is a sustainability strategy really supposed to accomplish? What will happen to the company? And what resources can be contributed? The crew concluded that NürnbergMesse should not just be an escort ship that does the same thing as everybody else to measure up to sustainability needs. Instead, in selected areas it should be a flagship sailing ahead of the rest, thus acting as a pioneer who employs sustainability as a way of standing out and gaining a competitive advantage.

The next step was one that is always part of a good preparation for a journey – an inventory of everything that has already been done about sustainability. The result was more extensive than had been expected. Just a few examples: The “home port” in Halls 3A and 3C had already won Platinum certification from the German Sustainable Building Council. The quartermaster and his team in Facility Management had already harvested a wealth of key environmental figures. There was also a broad commitment to the staff, with opportunities for continuing education and training, and flexible models for work hours. But the stocktaking also revealed areas in need of improvement. Not enough was known especially about visitors and their needs. There was also potential in terms of health options for employees or support for regional products. As for the events themselves, expanding the range of digital formats and establishing sustainability as a trade fair topic were identified as important aspects.



NürnbergMesse is partly warmed by a district heating system. The company aims to make its entire energy supply climate-neutral by 2028.

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In preparing for the voyage, it would have made little sense for NürnbergMesse to focus only inwards. So another task was to analyse economic, technical, political, social, and ecological developments and their implications for NürnbergMesse’s business. What kind of impact will things like climate change and digitalisation have on the business model? What are the implications of increasingly scarce raw materials? And what about the consequences of demographic change – in terms of employees, but also for exhibitors and visitors, and thus the content of events?

The task force’s analyses yielded a definition of ten areas for action. Those provide a lucid, intuitive sustainability compass that offers all travellers a clear orientation by answering some key questions: What topics to focus on, how do they fit together, and how do they help us contribute to sustainable development? But the next question, which the compass does not answer, is about the goals to be achieved within the fields for action. Or in other words, the compass tells us the important regions to travel to, but not the exact destinations. So what are NürnbergMesse’s specific sustainability goals?

## Designing products and services to be sustainable

NürnbergMesse believes that allying with its customers offers important levers for making significant contributions towards sustainable development. That is based on a foundation of sensitising exhibitors and visitors to sustainability and its significance in industry-specific contexts. An additional goal is to offer tailor-made, environmentally friendly solutions like reusable or recyclable booths. There are also plans to offer calculation of one's own personal ecological footprint associated with attending a trade fair, since that is increasingly important to many visitors and exhibitors. So it is all about creating opportunities that generate added value for customers and the natural environment alike. That shared value is no contradiction for NürnbergMesse – quite the contrary. It treats sustainability as an important component of centring on the customer.

As for exhibitors and visitors, another objective for NürnbergMesse is to offer a platform for sustainability as a topic at trade fairs and events. It is in an excellent position to bring people together and promote ideas, innovation, and collaboration; its extensive reach offers a foundation for dialogue between exhibitors and visitors from all over the world. Without such a dialogue, it will not be possible to handle global problems like climate change or resource shortages.

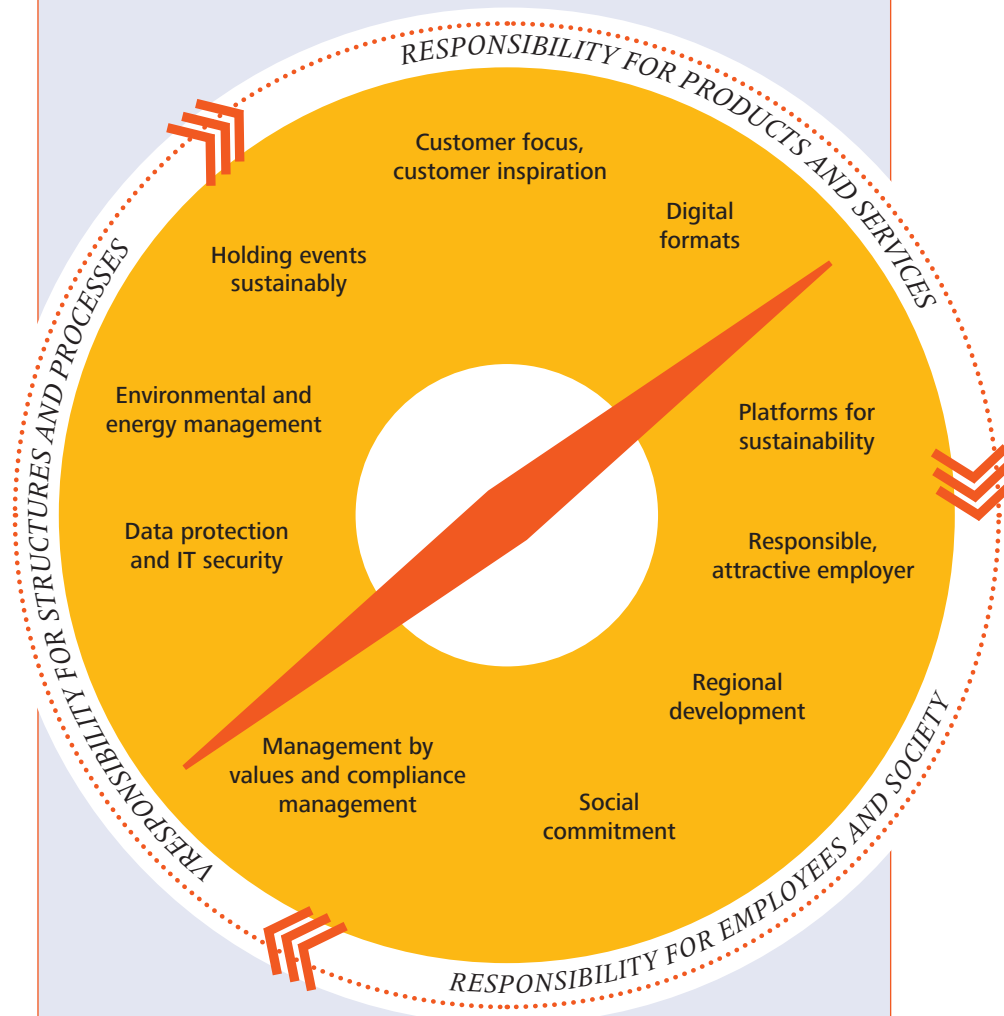
The approach here is not just based on conceiving and holding sustainability-specific trade fairs and events, like BIOFACH, a leading world trade fair for organic consumer goods. Instead, sustainability is also to be integrated as a topic into existing and new trade fairs. One example is EUROGUSS 2024 – Europe's biggest trade fair for all aspects of die casting and die-casting processes. Here there will be a range of topics where the industry-specific significance and implementation of sustainability is discussed and explained. That will not just call attention to the issue but also offer practical ideas for attendees.

As well, digital formats are to be more extensively integrated into trade fairs and other events.

NürnbergMesse views these not as a mere substitute for in-person discussions and an on-site experience, but rather as complementary contents and an opportunity for participation. After all, a virtual space is a way for people, especially from developing and emerging economies, to take part in events that economic or logistical limitations would make it hard for them to attend in person.

## Pointing the way toward the future

*NürnbergMesse is guided by this sustainability compass.*



NürnbergMesse has defined ten action areas for increasing sustainability. They are guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and include health and well-being, gender equality, clean energy, decent work, responsible consumption and production, and measures for climate protection.

Source: NürnbergMesse

## Responsibility for employees and society

At NürnbergMesse you can rightly talk about a human-centred business model. People are the focus, not just as exhibitors, visitors, or business partners, but especially also as employees. Accordingly, they play a lead role in NürnbergMesse's sustainability strategy. As a company that operates globally with a broad portfolio, NürnbergMesse believes diversity is an important factor for success, and wants to reinforce it with well-focussed staff selection and development. It intends to promote and make use of individual strengths, skills, and backgrounds for the benefit of both the employees and the company. Here again you can see its fundamental approach of generating shared value added.

It foresees such added value in creating flexible models for work hours and options for where to work. Modern work-time models help strengthen work-life balance, and also respond to many employees' wishes. A more compatible balance between home and job is also needed in view of the increasingly serious issue of demographic change in Germany.

NürnbergMesse especially concentrates as well on advancing the position of women, and has ambitious goals in that regard. By 2025 it intends to increase the percentage of women in all levels of management from the current 32 percent to 40 percent. A significant role here is played by the "JUMP" mentoring programme. Since its launch in 2016 it has helped increase the percentage of women in management by 66 percent.

Encouraging the upcoming generation is of fundamental importance for NürnbergMesse as a way of safeguarding a viable future. In total, it offers eight fields for vocational training and three dual-track programmes in which vocational training is combined with university study. It intends to hire at least ten trainees and five dual-track students each year in the years to come, and plans to hire 80 percent of those who complete their training.

Promoting health and well-being is likewise an employer's responsibility. That is why employees have many options for movement, preventive care, and nutrition. NürnbergMesse views the employee cafeteria as an important instrument in promoting health. It is constantly trying to expand the use



The Exhibition Centre draws 100 percent solar electricity from the photovoltaic system on its roofs.

NürnbergMesse plans to increase the proportion of women in management positions to

**40 %**

at all levels by 2025.

of regional and organic products, as well as the number of vegan dishes on the menu. It expanded its regional purchasing volume for catering from 80 percent in 2021 to 85 percent in 2022.

Regional promotion is a core concern and a mission for NürnbergMesse. Its events have an immense economic impact on the regional economy. The ifo research institute has calculated that in 2022, NürnbergMesse generated purchasing power effects of some EUR 1.4 to 1.6 billion, tax revenues of some EUR 280 to 300 million, and around 12,500 to 13,000 jobs.

But NürnbergMesse supports its region not just economically but socially. Since 2015, it has cooperated with AFB Social & Green and donated decommissioned hardware to this non-profit company, which is additionally one of the biggest employers of people with disabilities. One key step for NürnbergMesse is to support volunteerism among its employees. The nearby Langwasser Residents' Association offers numerous opportunities. In recognition, the company encourages such involvement with a day's special leave per year.

## Responsibility for own actions

In addition to an economic responsibility and a social one, NürnbergMesse also feels it has an ecological responsibility. As a company that owns large,

energy-intensive properties, it has set itself ambitious goals for further reducing its ecological footprint. Its ultimate goal is to achieve a climate-neutral energy supply by 2028. Besides a full conversion to green electricity that has already been achieved, in 2023 it took a further step by starting work on a photovoltaic power plant with battery and hydrogen-storage support.

To conserve the most precious resource of the 21st century, NürnbergMesse plans to reduce its water consumption 15 percent by 2025. For that purpose it will make wider use of rainwater and intelligent irrigation concepts for the exterior grounds, optimise toilet flushing volumes, and check the water supply network for leakage.

Also in line with an all-round approach to climate and resource conservation, NürnbergMesse includes its own and guest events in these efforts. It is working on gradually reducing laid carpeting, for instance in corridors and directional guideways. Event-specific signage at the Exhibition Centre is to be replaced with consistent use of the “myLocation” navigation and information system.

Central importance here attaches to sustainable booth construction to reduce exhibition waste. As a 2022 survey showed, exhibitors are willing to pay an average of 5 to 10 percent more for sustainable booth solutions. NürnbergMesse’s goal, jointly with its subsidiary Holtmann and booth construction service partner Wörnlein, is to be able to offer a portfolio of reusable standardised booths.

NürnbergMesse always takes a value-oriented approach in accepting economic, social, and ecological responsibilities. It has adopted three guiding values, People – Passion – Progress, that combine its traditional strengths with its focus on the future: putting people at the heart of passionate action to bravely and inquisitively seek out new opportunities and solutions.

## Full speed ahead, with a look at the log book

NürnbergMesse’s voyage towards sustainability has been a success story so far. Its nomination for the German Sustainability Award in 2023 is an impressive sign of that. So in retrospect, what was the formula for success?

No doubt one key factor was the dedicated team, who with their different perspectives and shared goals have continuously propelled the topic ahead, in the conviction that the best solution is one that best serves the sustainable focus of the company as a whole. It also calls for a pilot – who’s a woman, in NürnbergMesse’s case – to take charge of the topic, and coordinate the crew and the assignment of duties. And finally it takes captains who support



Team spirit, passion, and a progressive attitude are needed to handle the challenges. In other words, People, Passion, and Progress.



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implementing the topic to the best of everyone’s abilities, provide resources, and give it the necessary prioritisation. There is no sailing without a clear affirmation and signal from the bridge, because the topic can all too easily become background routine – especially when pandemics and wars demand so much of our attention.

Even if such events make it necessary to correct details of the course, there are two reasons why the basic direction needs to be maintained. For one, there’s no alternative to a sustainable orientation, in both the company’s own interest and the interest of society. And for the other, many challenges await on the horizon, and can only be overcome successfully with decisive action, including with a view to the long term.

For instance, impending regulatory challenges like extensive reporting obligations, or classifying one’s own operations under the principles of the EU taxonomy, can be viewed as rough seas ahead. Many new data must be gathered, evaluated and interpreted. That in turn will take new structures, processes, and systems. At the same time, ecological and social requirements are becoming ever more demanding – especially for companies who operate globally and must contend with diverse regulatory systems. And exhibitors, visitors, employees, investors, and the interested public are coming to have not only higher expectations, but more diverse ones. So the range of aspects included in sustainability, together with the associated tasks, becomes greater and greater.

So team spirit, passion, and a progressive attitude are needed to handle the challenges. In other words, People, Passion, and Progress. NürnbergMesse has impressively proven that it has not only incorporated these values firmly into its policies, but also acted upon them on its journey so far. What better qualifications could there be for the further course of the trip? So on that basis, full speed ahead – or better, set all sails! 🚢

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