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“Ease of access – ease of success”

- **EMECA presents study on barrier-free accessibility on exhibition sites**
- **European exhibition industry booming**

“The European Major Exhibition Centres Association EMECA has set itself the target of strengthening Europe as an exhibition location to enable it to retain its unique position in the world. This necessitates continuously adapting the exhibition concepts, developing innovative services for exhibitors and visitors and expanding the infrastructure of the exhibition centres at a high level,” said Marc Granier, EMECA President and CEO of the Paris Nord and Le Bourget exhibition centres, at a press conference in Brussels. The study on accessibility at European exhibition centres was conducted jointly with the Universities of Milan and Brescia and is intended to provide a key contribution to this issue against the background of the demographic development in Europe.

Exhibitions and trade fairs in Europe are experiencing a real boom. In 2006, over 43.5 million visitors and some 388,000 exhibiting companies took part in the 1,200 exhibitions and trade fairs at the EMECA exhibition centres. This equates to a rise of some 9 per cent over the previous year for attendance and 14 per cent for exhibitors. Similar growth rates are emerging for 2007. “Europe is impressively defending its position as market leader in the global exhibition industry,” says Granier. This particularly benefits the small and medium enterprises in Europe, who provide 99 per cent of all exhibitors and visitors at the exhibitions.

EMECA venues want to offer excellent service

Of the 45 exhibition companies in the world with more than 100,000 m² of display space, 34 are located in Europe. 19 are members of the European Major Exhibition Centres Association EMECA. Europe thus has a world market share of some 75 per cent, Asia has 11 per cent and North America 13 per cent. “It is a matter of maintaining and defending this lead,” says Granier. This also includes offering the best service in

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the world for exhibitors and visitors. One major criterion in this connection is the accessibility for visitors – in the respective city, at the entrance to and on the exhibition site itself. To mark the EU “Year of Equal Opportunities for All”, EMECA therefore commissioned an appropriate study to examine this criterion.

The study has been prepared by the Technical University of Milan and the University of Brescia, renowned in engineering, urban planning, architecture, and design. It sheds light on the following research goals:

- Guaranteeing access to vulnerable users, thereby improving accessibility for all users
- Pursuing and enhancing the autonomy of individual users in visiting fairs
- Improving visitors’ reception, comfort and safety
- Enhancing the continuity in the connection between the fair’s collective space and the public spaces in the urban fabric
- Allowing for good access to fairs from urban public and international transport systems (stations and airports)

“The results of the study clearly show that the EMECA exhibition centres meet the “Design for All” requirements. The details of the study are important for the further development of the EMECA sites for several reasons and show us the possibilities for achieving perfection: The age pyramid in Europe increasingly resembles an upside-down triangle. This naturally has an impact on our exhibitor and visitor profiles. Moreover, over half of our visitors today, exactly 58 per cent, come to public exhibitions. It will therefore be necessary, for example, to provide more rest areas and in future refreshment areas as well for these events. Exhibitions in Europe already have the advantage that not only the exhibition site itself has spacious catering areas that make the visitor’s stay as pleasant as possible, but usually the exhibition booths as well. The study does, however, show us optimization potential, for example, in space for depositing luggage or car parks within walking distance of the exhibition entrance,” says Granier.

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The study makes the following detailed proposals:

Inside:

- Signals for reserved accesses and shortcuts leading to disabled-friendly services
- Complimentary wheelchairs available at fair receptions (both manual and electrical operation)
- Accessible and guarded wardrobes and luggage deposits, both at the entrance of the fair and at individual halls
- Use of European key for access to the handicapped restrooms and its distribution at the entrance when buying the ticket (upon request)
- Accessibility and suitable provision (frequency and location) of furniture (in particular seating, tables, drinking fountains, snack vending machines, information panels) at the distribution points, in the halls and in individual booths
- Accessibility of all accessory services in the fairgrounds (bars, restaurants, conference rooms, business rooms, secretarial offices, ATMs, etc., and – obviously – restrooms)
- Avoidance of architectural micro-barriers installed during set-up (floor cables, packaging material, installation equipment)

Outside access:

- Easy accessibility from public transport stations to the fair venues
- Overall accessibility to public transport from stations and airports to the exhibition centre (or, alternatively, availability of public shuttle buses for disabled and vulnerable users on request)

Online information:

- Dedicated website designed for disabled and vulnerable users
- Barrier-free access to the website (graphics, colours, and sound)
- Availability of printed material (leaflets, maps, etc.) including specific information for vulnerable users.

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An encouraging aspect of the study is that no EMECA exhibition centre is the best or the worst. Instead, all venues have many good examples, but also some less good ones. "The study shows that we can learn a lot from each other. This is a key EMECA value for its members beyond the results of the study," sums up President Granier.

EMECA intends to present the study to EU officials in more detail in the coming weeks and months. A meeting is also to take place with the technical departments of the EMECA member venues in spring 2008. "We want to discuss the results of the study, as these will have a great influence on the plans for future expansion or renovation of existing sites," explains Granier.

About EMECA

The 19 EMECA venues organize some 1,200 exhibitions a year with around 388,000 exhibitors and 43.5 million visitors on a gross rented display area of around 36 million square metres. According to their own estimates, the exhibiting companies generate a turnover of some 800 billion euros through exhibitions. A KMPG study shows that the economic effects initiated by exhibitions at the EMECA venues amount to some 16 billion euros and secure over 360,000 jobs in Europe.

"EMECA is reacting and adapting its work to the increasingly faster changes in the exhibition sector and in the whole economy. The goals are clear: benefit for the exhibition industry in Europe, benefit for our customers, and benefit for the EMECA members," explains Bernd A. Diederichs, EMECA Vice President Communication and CEO of NürnbergMesse.

"We also want to hold more talks with the European Commission in Brussels. The issues start with the protection of intellectual property rights at exhibitions and range from strengthening the European SMEs to codes of practice for events, security requirements and the question of barrier-free accessibility on our exhibition sites. We wish to represent these and other issues in good time and as a matter of priority," adds Michael von Zitzewitz, CEO of Messe Frankfurt and EMECA Vice President responsible for relations with the European Commission.

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The EMECA board comprises President **Marc Granier**, CEO Paris Nord Villepinte and Le Bourget, **René Kamm** (CEO Messe Schweiz AG) as Vice President Strategy and Development, **Michael von Zitzewitz** (CEO Messe Frankfurt) as Vice President responsible for European Union relations, and **Bernd A. Diederichs** (CEO NürnbergMesse) as Vice President Communication. The treasurer is EMECA Vice President **Juan Carlos Gomez** (General Secretary IFEMA Madrid).

The EMECA members:

Germany:

Deutsche Messe (Hanover), Messe Frankfurt, NürnbergMesse

Italy:

BolognaFiere, Fiera Milano, Rimini Fiera, VeronaFiere

France:

EUREXPO – Centre de Conventions e d'Expositions de Lyon,
PARIS EXPO, Parc d'Expositions de PARIS-NORD Villepinte & Le Bourget

Netherlands:

Royal Dutch Jaarburs Utrecht

Belgium:

Brussels Expo

Great Britain:

National Exhibition Centre Birmingham

Spain:

Fira de Barcelona, IFEMA – Feria de Madrid, Feria Valencia

Portugal:

Feira Internacional de Lisboa

Switzerland:

Messe Schweiz AG, Geneva Palexpo

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