

“We have never had such a big pavilion as this year”

From 30 May to 2 June, one of the world's largest industrial trade fairs will take place: the Hannover Messe. **Sabrina Sagramola** of Luxembourg's Chamber of Commerce discusses digital networking and the chamber's strategy.

Like other events of its kind, the Hannover Messe was cancelled in 2020 and went digital in 2021. What lessons were learnt in the process?

Last year we were strongly present in digital form, although we realised that it wasn't the same because all the parameters were new. They were new for the trade fair organiser; they were new for us in making such an event successful... it's more difficult to run a digital pavilion because you don't have the natural flow that you have at a fair; and, of course, it was also difficult for companies because they had to deal with new digital tools... All this has made us put in place a reinforced individual assistance approach that is even stronger than what we used to have.

There's been a question mark even this year--the Hannover Messe has suffered because the date was postponed... which is a strong sign [that it wasn't cancelled], because nothing in the trade fair business can replace the human side of negotiation, be it the B2B aspect or to pitch a project, see a product and so on. Even if there are sectors that have done this in digital form very well, like the medical sector, I think in this world the human component prevails--which is a good thing.

We were afraid of how companies would see it this year. Shall we go? Is it stable? How can we reach critical mass? And I was really overwhelmed to see the strong interest in Luxembourg, because we have never had such a big pavilion as this year: we have 12 companies.

It seems that, in the business world, networking in the traditional, in-person sense remains the major way in which connections are made and deals are eventually struck. Is networking something that resists digitalisation?

I see it as a very important added-value service, but not as a replacement. It has been a replacement



Sabrina Sagramola is the manager of international affairs at the Chamber of Commerce

recently because we had no choice. And, of course, we have digital evolution and integration, which goes very fast and which happens in parallel. So maybe digital networking will become more natural, but it will never replace human networking. That's why I consider it...

a complementary added-value service, an additional service that we can offer. Digital networking can accomplish other things that maybe human networking cannot, and vice versa, and I think we have to bring all these ingredients together to really give a maximum of opportunities to our Luxembourg companies.

What is the Chamber of Commerce's strategic approach to fairs like this?

A before/during/after approach. It's not just that you go to Hannover and try to make something out of it. We have to prepare our companies. That's why we do information sessions about the fair: What is new? What can you expect? What are your questions? What are your expectations?... And then the next step will be: What happens afterwards? How can I optimise the business leads that I get at the stand?

We also guide them during the event to optimise their meeting schedule.

And we follow up with them afterwards. The follow-up becomes maybe even more important in this digital part, because digitally you can remain connected. The tools that we use nowadays, they have algorithms and so on--and social networks also play a very important part. —