

The announcement in February that the OutDoor exhibition, which has taken place in Friedrichshafen for 25 years, would be moving to Munich, and the subsequent fallout from the decision, means the industry has been faced with some uncertainty over what the summer trade show calendar would look like from 2019. *WSA* takes a closer look at the unfolding story.

A new future for OutDoor

The first indication that OutDoor might be leaving its long-term home in Friedrichshafen came in November last year when the European Outdoor Group (EOG), which owns the show, announced it had been carrying out a comprehensive review of the event with the help of independent experts. This review was part of what EOG calls its 'Vision 2020 project' and it aimed to examine all aspects of what the industry needs from OutDoor.

At the time, the final report and recommendations of the review had already been presented to and accepted by EOG members. They agreed that, although the core trade show should remain the same, the way it is delivered and other aspects of its format should be changed. As a result, the organisation invited applications for potential new partners to develop the future of OutDoor.

At the EOG general assembly at the end of this January, members were presented with proposals from three potential partners – Messe Hamburg, Messe München and then organiser Messe Friedrichshafen. Messe Stuttgart and Fiera Milano had already been cut from an initial five-group shortlist by the EOG board of directors. The final three candidates delivered presentations outlining their vision for the show, before fielding questions from those in attendance.

OutDoor is leaving its long-term home in Friedrichshafen from 2019.
Messe Friedrichshafen

Immediately afterwards, the individual proposals and videos of the presentations were made available to the entire EOG membership. There then followed a secure digital voting process, during which all members were given the opportunity to indicate their preferred option. The results were unveiled by EOG in February, with Messe München the clear winner, polling more than 65% of the overall vote. In total, 94% of EOG members voted, according to the group.

EOG president, John Jansen, described it as "a robust, inclusive and transparent process". He added that the decision had been made "in a truly democratic manner" and that the choice of Munich was a "clear sign of unity and determination from the membership".

A chapter closes

Long-term organiser Messe Friedrichshafen was understandably disappointed with the decision. Following the announcement, its chief executive, Klaus Wellmann, stated: "We view the vote with great disappointment. After all, OutDoor was born here at Lake Constance and has been here for a quarter of a century. We have written a unique and successful chapter in the history of this industry."

He went on to say that Friedrichshafen still has "good support" from many EOG members as well as the backing of "numerous other outdoor industry players" and that the company would work to develop a new, independent outdoor exhibition for launch in the summer of 2019.

For his part, Stefan Reisinger, who managed the OutDoor and Eurobike exhibitions in Friedrichshafen, said a large number of exhibitors who took part in the 2017 show (the last before the vote) and who "were not part of the EOG decision" had expressed support for Messe Friedrichshafen's vision.

He added: "Our location and services have contributed decisively to the success of the OutDoor show. There is scepticism whether this success can simply be transplanted somewhere else. We are going to continue to offer the industry an authentic and unique home at Lake Constance."

Representative decision

The EOG was adamant that the decision was representative of the European outdoor industry. In response to reports that appeared after its announcement it issued a statement which it said aimed to "clarify some key facts".

It explained that Vision 2020 project, by which the future of OutDoor has been guided, began more than two and a half years earlier and included consultation with hundreds of retailers, brands and suppliers from every country in Europe and from many others around the world.



Klaus Wellmann, chief executive of Messe Friedrichshafen, expressed "great disappointment" about the EOG's decision.

Messe Friedrichshafen.

It added that the Vision 2020 team completed over 90 hours of face-to-face interviews with industry stakeholders.

The organisation went on to describe its membership as "fully representative of the whole sector", adding this meant the decision to move OutDoor to Munich was "representative of the interests of the whole sector" and not taken by the minority. Although not directly addressed as such, these comments would seem to be a response to Messe Friedrichshafen's objections.

The statement also insisted the three shortlisted locations, Friedrichshafen, Hamburg and Munich, had had an "equal opportunity to propose solutions for the ambitious challenges that were set". As it was, Munich polled more than three times as many votes as its nearest rival. "Ultimately, the result of the vote was definitive and clearly represents the will of the industry," EOG concluded.

New platform

Once the dust had settled, the question arose of what the OutDoor exhibition would look like under the direction of Messe München. The answer came at an event the company held at the end of June to officially launch OutDoor by ISPO, a new event that will take place in Munich for the first time in summer 2019 (June 30-July 3).

The grand unveiling was attended by 250 brands, retailers and media representatives. It was also made available via an online livestream.

Speaking at the launch event, Mark Held, general secretary of EOG, said: "OutDoor by ISPO is the international platform for the outdoor industry that creates content, fosters relationships, inspires enthusiasm for outdoor topics, and creates new opportunities."

For his part, the director of the OutDoor by

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Messe Munchen unveiled its vision for OutDoor during an event at the end of June.
Messe Munchen

ISPO exhibition, Markus Hefter, said the new concept would offer "added value" to companies of all sizes, from start-ups to global brands.

The organisers explained that "established outdoor topics" like mountaineering and climbing would form the core of the new shoe. Other sectors, such as yoga, trail running and mountain biking, will also feature, as will surfing, watersports, travel products and wearable digital devices. In addition, there will be areas dedicated to textile innovations and to start-ups.

High hopes

The 2018 OutDoor, which took place from June 17-20, attracted a total of 30,000 visitors from 88 countries, according to Messe Friedrichshafen. As well as being the last held on the shores of Lake Constance, it was also the exhibition's 25th. More than 950 exhibitors attended on this occasion.

In his closing remarks, Klaus Wellmann from Messe Friedrichshafen, said: "With the concept for this fair, we are continuing our tradition of showing what the industry needs - in the past, in the present and in the future. The weather is glorious and both exhibitors and visitors are delighted. As a result, we have the highest hopes for next year."

These comments are interesting given what has gone before. During the 2018 event there were signs Messe Friedrichshafen's promise to launch its own independent show was starting to come to fruition. Sources told *WSA* that banners carrying branding for an event called 'OUTDOOR 2019' were on display at the entrances to the exhibition centre. A website operated by Messe Friedrichshafen (www.outdoor2019.com) is available online and carries the slogan: 'OUTDOOR 2019 – simply different'.

At the start of August, Messe Friedrichshafen held a press conference during which it officially unveiled its new trade fair, OUTDOOR Friedrichshafen, the first of which will take place from September 17-19, 2019. The organisers have described it as "the trade fair for retail" and said it will "shift the focus onto the interests of specialty retailers".

"We are convinced that, despite the increase in online sales, there is no way of avoiding bricks-and-mortar retail," said Stefan Reisinger, now head of OUTDOOR. "Innovative and product-driven brands devoted to the experts in the trade as well as independent retail specialists represent the backbone of the industry. Specialist retailers and the loyal brands that serve them are at the centre of our efforts"

He explained that they have chosen to schedule the event for mid-September so as to be outside of the main sales season and the holiday period. It will be directed at visitors from the markets of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, which he calls the "most important outdoor sales regions".

In terms of the products that will be exhibited at the show, Messe Friedrichshafen states that the "main emphasis" will be on the hardware segment from the areas of mountaineering, camping and caravanning, water sports and the outdoor lifestyle. It adds that OUTDOOR's September slot fits within the timeframe when specialist retailers are making their final decisions on these products for the coming season.

Although the respective announcements from Messe München and Messe Friedrichshafen had shed some light on the future of the European outdoor trade show calendar, it will take some time before it becomes clear exactly what roles these two shows will play going forward.

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