



A mess at the Messe? - the state of IFA in 2022

Red Consultancy's consumer tech Director Simon Hilliard argues 'less is more' at IFA 2022 and, despite a 22% drop in coverage coming out of the show, there's never been more options for brands at Europe's largest consumer tech show

After two years off due to the extreme disruption of the pandemic, Europe's leading consumer tech trade show IFA made its return to a fully in-person event in 2022.

Coming up on 100 years old, having started in 1924, IFA is one of the largest consumer electronics shows in the world – up there with the likes of MWC in Europe and CES in the US. The last pre-pandemic IFA in 2019 attracted over 250,000 visitors during the 5 day event. The big question this year was;

how would the 2022 edition stack up in the post-pandemic world?

With official visitor numbers not out yet (at time of writing) it's hard to say exactly where IFA has netted out in 2022. The overwhelming feeling on the show floor was 'less' of everything, which was echoed by the media and brands we at Red spoke to during the press days, and by some media reports following the show. Our own Red Pulse data shows a 22% decrease in coverage coming out of IFA compared to 2019.

But 'less' isn't necessarily all to the bad. In fact, it might well be just what IFA (which started life as the 'Berlin Radio Show') needed to stay relevant in modern day. While there might be less at IFA itself, there's a whole lot more going on in consumer tech comms.

Six takeaways from IFA 2022 PR and Brand Communicators need to know

The 'less'

1 Big news announcements:

the feeling amongst the media we spoke to was there was less to see at IFA 2022 in terms of standout announcements. Usually a heaven for big new product launches and fun novelties (smart fridges, huge TVs, and robot vacuum cleaners among others have been staples at IFA in years past), the feeling this year was there notably fewer big announcements. Our own analysis backed this up. Looking at coverage of consumer tech launches in the run up to and during IFA 2022 vs. 2019, we saw a 22% decrease in overall editorial coverage for smartphones, TVs, white goods, audio, laptops, tablets, and consumer electronics (source Red Pulse, powered by NewsWhip).

2 Press day readiness:

show up to IFA on the first of the two press days in years past and you'd get to see a little behind the scenes actions. Booths having the last coats of paint, flight cases being wheeled away, and a few people busy sweeping up. This was not so in 2022, where the Messe really was in quite a mess. Multiple media commented to us how 'unready' booths were during the press days, with fewer opportunities to capture 'hands-on' and 'first look' content for products compared to years past. A reflection, we felt, of how brands were approaching news announcements at the show.

3 Attendee numbers:

while we don't have official figures, there was a clear feeling of fewer people in the halls and pavilions of the Messe. IFA this year felt less busy than even MWC, which still had some limitations in travel and access due to the pandemic. This also meant some of the larger keynotes looked a little empty compared to past years.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COMMS PLANNING

While fewer announcements and feet on the floor sound bad, it may not be all doom and gloom for media and comms people. The last few editions of IFA, and other shows in the tech world, were getting too big to handle for today's media landscape.

There's so much to see, products to get hands-on with, spokespeople to interview, and keynotes to attend. For media with shrinking editorial staff and tech influencers who have just themselves and their camera in-hand, how can they cover it all? In the

24/7 360 online news world, it's a lot all at once – and tempting to just sit out the show and let the press releases roll into your inbox.

Fewer announcements mean a greater focus on the products actually announcing at the show, giving smaller brands a shot at more attention and larger brands the chance to get more eyeballs than they might otherwise. For comms planning, the question becomes do you go all in at IFA or plan around it? Which leads up to...

The 'more'

1 More off show events:

while there were less announcements at IFA itself, there were still plenty to be had during IFA week. Sony, usually a big presence at IFA, held a virtual launch for the Xperia 5 IV entirely separate from IFA during the IFA press days. Philips hosted media in Berlin but held their launch outside the Messe and flew back the day before IFA opened, leaving some media to be hosted on a second trip by other brands. The gutsiest move came from OPPO, which hosted media at a launch event in Paris during the IFA press days (potentially as an 'up yours' to the ban of OPPO handset sales in Germany), and flying media who wanted to attend IFA out to Berlin afterwards instead of flying home.

2 More networking socialising:

Harry's bar may be no more (or may just be closed temporarily), but the UK PR and media contingent were not slow to find a new unofficial IFA afterparty spot in Sally Bowles bar. Combined with the various off-show events, there's more opportunities for networking than ever – and never underestimate how important the offsite chats over a beer can be in understanding what's most important to the media agenda and how well announcements have been received.

3 More branded content:

numerous media told us they had more of a split focus this year at IFA. As well as pure earned editorial, several were working on branded content for brand partners at the show, taking a leaf out of influencers' books to a degree. While there's so many eyeballs around IFA, there seems to be more of an opportunity for brands to work with media to create tailored content pieces to elevate their product news alongside earned articles.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR COMMS PLANNING

The idea of running events off-show is not new and has been a tactic brands have used to get quality day one coverage for some time. It seems this has been kicked into a higher gear in the post-pandemic world.

The high amount of interest in IFA and its host city plays into brands hands; knowing media will want to travel to the German capital gives you an edge in getting interest in attending a launch event without having to pay out for a booth at IFA itself. The catch is this must be balanced with the cost of a standalone event itself, plus no guarantee of attendance by media and no 'walk-ins' from the long list of international media who still turned up to the Messe.

In short, if you plan to cut through the noise by running an event off-show – you need to go all in.

Brands should also consider how they can elevate their news with paid content from media partners. While earned editorial will always get the most attention and quality impact, having a tailored piece of content during the hype around IFA can elevate a message above the noise.

Finally, always make the effort to network off-show. It may be the oldest advice in the PR world, but after over two years of virtual briefings and face-mask meetings, the true value of a chat over a stein has never been higher.

Making IFA work for your brand

Overall, the first IFA back has shown it isn't any better or worse off – but it certainly is different. It's important to assess exactly what is right for a brand before committing to the show. A simple booth with product demos, embargoed briefings on press day, and a keynote slot, will still work for some, while others may find value in branded content and smaller offsite events around the show itself.

In this case, 'less' for IFA means 'more' opportunities for brands.