



## SISO/EFI Deeper Dive: Case Study on MAGIC, WWIN, and OFFPRICE

Three independent show organizers join forces to bring a safe in-person marketplace to the fashion industry with COVID-19 testing



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Tarsus worked with Visit by GES to manage contactless registrations for OFFPRICE Orlando. The show included lead-retrieval as part of an exhibitor package.

## Overview

Eleven months into a global pandemic, fashion forward at an industry trade show means COVID casual, face masks and festival wristbands to signify that participants have tested negative for COVID-19. Despite disruptions and government restrictions, the fashion industry continues to set trends with many firsts in early 2021 for the trade show industry at [MAGIC Pop Up Orlando](#), [WWIN Orlando Showcase](#), and [OFFPRICE Orlando Market](#), held Feb. 9-11 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL.

Not only was it the first-time collaboration for three of the largest independent show organizers in the world, Informa Markets, Clarion Events and Tarsus Group, but also it was the debut of three regional co-located show launches that required negative COVID-19 tests for all participants — attendees, exhibitors, staff and vendors. And it all came together in 12 weeks. The organizers were the first to offer and administer rapid COVID-19 testing, with the help of an on-site medical partner.

The collaboration between Informa's MAGIC Pop Up Orlando, a women's and men's apparel, accessories, and footwear event, Clarion's WWIN, a womenswear fashion and accessories trade event, and Tarsus's OFFPRICE, serving the affordable apparel, accessories and footwear sector, provided an answer to the industry's call for a much-needed comprehensive physical buying event in the first half of 2021.

As the largest scale trade show to date in the U.S. since the pandemic, the co-located events provided an estimated \$15.35 million in economic

value to Orlando over the course of just 3 days.

SISO and UFI take a deeper dive to offer insight into how the show teams managed the testing component, collaborated instead of competed, and provided a safe marketplace for the buyers and sellers who were ready to get back to business and meet face-to-face.

## Looking Back

In February 2020, the three shows were held in Las Vegas as part of Fashion Week before the industry shut down in March. The biannual shows,

### Go LIVE Together Video Highlights Success



This showcase proved that, with strict enforcement of protocols, trade shows can do business safely. These are the kinds of examples that help us make a strong case for reopening events across the nation. Please join us in highlighting this success story by sharing the Go LIVE Together new [video](#).

typically held in February and August to coincide with seasonal buying cycles, had one of their most successful years ever. To get a feel for the vibe, [check out highlights of 2020 MAGIC](#) or the [sizzle reel from OFFPRICE 2020](#).

The winter shows attracted tens of thousands of retailer buyers and hundreds of exhibitors. There were fashion shows with glitz and glam, celebrity appearances and exclusive parties, sessions and panels focused on the latest trends, DJs and music, and a strong international presence.

In February 2020, OFFPRICE drew 450 exhibitors and 12,000 attendees (including booth personnel). WWIN attracted 400 exhibiting companies and more than 4,000 buyers, and MAGIC drew 78,000 attendees and more than 3,330 exhibitors.



In addition to requiring that participants had a negative COVID-19 test, face masks were required for all.

While the three shows are typically held during the same timeframe in Las Vegas, each are at a different locations, including the Mandalay Bay Convention Center, Las Vegas Convention Center, Sands Expo Center and the Rio Convention Center (WWIN was scheduled to move from the Rio to Caesar's Forum in February 2021). Besides being held in the same city, the organizers operate independently in terms of venues, operations, marketing, housing, transportation, security and contracting.

### Collaboration and co-locating

"We had strong indicators that our customers wanted a show in February," said Desiree Hanson, EVP, Clarion. "As we were watching the calendar and noticing where Nevada was in opening up, we started having the conversations with our colleagues at Informa and Tarsus about what they were thinking."

Tricia Barglof, Executive Director, OFFPRICE, added: "By putting all of our shows together and having more product available and accessible to a retailer, it seemed to make sense for us to work together and create that type of environment for our attendees."

When it became clear that holding an event in Las Vegas would not be possible in February due to government restrictions, the organizers began looking for other destinations to hold the co-located events.

"Obviously Las Vegas and New York are not open right now for large events, so we had to

look at other opportunities to be able to convene the market in a live way,” said Kelly Helfman, Commercial President for Informa Markets Fashion. “When we looked at the different states that were open for larger-scale events, we narrowed it down to three being Texas, Georgia, and Florida.”



On Dec. 9, the shows announced the relocation from Las Vegas to Orlando. From March 2020 to February 2021, OCCC safely hosted more than 50 events under modified operations.

As the shows evaluated the pros and cons of each destination and venue, Orlando stood out based on a number of key factors. “We looked at our attendance base within a 700-mile radius,” Helfman said. “We also looked at the safety and the different campuses, and Orlando is great because it feels like that outdoor campus and everything is right on property or very close.

You don’t have to take a ton of shuttles or transportation to go back and forth to hotels. Everything is within walking distance.”

From March 2020 to February 2021, OCCC safely hosted more than 50 events under modified operations. MAGIC, WWIN and OFFPRICE were able to secure space at OCCC as all of the major trade shows on the calendar for February 2021 were either canceled or rescheduled to a later date. Those included the International Builders Show, Kitchen & Bath Industry Show, Pri-Med South, The True Value Company Spring Reunion 2021, Orgill Spring Dealer Market, and American Physical Therapy Association Combines Sections Meeting.

On Dec. 9, the shows announced the relocation from Las Vegas to Orlando. “Following market disruption in 2020, this joint effort’s aim is to address the industry’s return to in-person experiences, with rigorous safety measures in place, while also driving greater commercial opportunities and business continuity for brands and buyers,” according to the [joint press release](#).

“We are honored to have played a role in successfully hosting MAGIC Pop-Up Orlando, WWIN and OFFPRICE. We are committed to keeping employees, guests and attendees healthy and safe at all events hosted at the OCCC, and we are thrilled to collaborate with organizers like Informa, Tarsus and Clarion who share our commitment to safety,” said Mark Tester, OCCC Executive Director.

All three shows followed the [All Secure Guidelines](#), which are industry-wide, medically-vetted health

and safety procedures and measures that meet CDC requirements and local or state guidelines with respect to large gatherings at minimum.

## Testing Required

On Dec. 22, Informa, with assistance from Freeman, was approved to get an adequate supply of rapid COVID-19 tests from Abbott Labs. After the new year began, Informa, Clarion and Tarsus quickly ramped up their communications efforts via their web sites, email and phone call campaigns.

“The collaboration with the other groups has been

tremendous as far as being open and scheduling the timing of communications,” Hanson said. “Everybody in the fashion industry talks to one another, so the timing of communications is essential. What’s worked for us is getting these customers on the phone. We had a robust call campaign about the testing.”

Informa hosted a live webinar about a week before the show to explain the testing process and answer questions from the audience. The session was recorded and archived on the MAGIC web site.

For more insight on testing, read the sidebar, Testing Q&A with Informa VP Operations Kevin Thornton on pages 11-12.

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## Buyer sentiment

“When we surveyed the industry, they told us loud and clear ... get me back to a live event. We are ready, and here to support you,” Helfman said. “The majority were ready to get back to a live event as long as there were safety measures in place. The surveys told us that more than 70% would come with masks required. That was a great stat for us. Over half of them said we want temperature screenings. With safety measures and testing in place, that gave them even more of the vote of confidence to be able to show up.”

More than some industries, the retail sector was disrupted by the pandemic with shipping delays and supply chain issues. Some stores were closed for months, and most were still dealing with capacity restrictions in early 2021. To stay afloat,

retailers pivoted to online sales, but inventory shortages impacted many that were open in states and cities with fewer government restrictions.

“The biggest challenge during COVID for me was shipping,” said Shantel Assata, Owner of Solely Shoe Boutique, who is based in Upper Marlboro, MD. “I don’t know if there’s anything we can get around with that right now other than just making sure that my vendors are in the U.S., which is helpful.” She was able to write orders with new U.S.-based vendors at the shows.

“The struggle is that inventories are a little out of season for some things because nobody can get anything,” said Tiffany Ivanovsky, Rush Apparel, a boutique in Houston. “Recently there was a container situation and a lot of delays.”

While the attendance paled in comparison to pre-pandemic levels in Las Vegas, the Florida shows attracted a number of new buyers who had not attended the shows in Las Vegas previously.

“This is my first trade show, and it’s been a really great experience,” said Assata, who launched her company that specializes in luxury shoe wear in 2018. “I’m getting a lot of insider industry information, which is helpful for me as a new business owner.”

Like most buyers in attendance, she found value in finding new products, sourcing new vendors, establishing and cultivating relationships, and writing orders. “I had a few brands I was looking forward to seeing in person,” said Assata, who attended all three shows. “I browse their sites online, but I got a chance to meet them. I placed

In Orlando, the three shows attracted more than 400 exhibitors. MAGIC had 250 brands, WWIN had 100 companies, and OFFPRICE had 70 exhibitors.



some orders, and that process was exciting. Now that I’ve established relationships with reps at these companies, it will be helpful when I need to call and talk to someone.”

While the shows didn’t offer receptions, dinners or cocktail parties due to the pandemic, buyers still said they found value in attending to gain industry insight, trends, networking and learning.

“I came mostly for industry information, and I got that,” said Assata. “The truth is, being an entrepreneur, it’s a small community. It’s nice to be able to speak with other business owners and find out what’s working well, where they’re



MAGIC piloted an open-air booth concept, in part to help with disinfection and air flow. Exhibitors used rolling racks or shelving units to act as the sidewall separators, but it was not an actual wall.

having issues and how it relates to my store. I am a little overwhelmed with information, but it's also preparing me for what's to come at the Las Vegas shows in August, which I'm really excited about."

Buyers like Ivanovsky were focused on finding new products and inventory. "We found a couple other vendors that we haven't worked with before, which is nice," said Ivanovsky, who has been to the markets in Dallas and Atlanta and some local pop-ups since the pandemic.

"We were able to do all three shows in one day, which is not normal. We're used to spending a week and not seeing everything," said Ivanovsky, who has attended the events in Las Vegas

four times. "In Las Vegas, there are lots more wholesalers and vendors. I miss Sourcing. This felt like a local event, and it was more difficult to spend more money."

Helfman said: "It's quality over quantity right now. We wanted to get real buyers who had an open to buy."

## Exhibitor experience

In Orlando, the three shows attracted more than 400 exhibitors. MAGIC had 250 brands, WWIN had 100 companies, and OFFPRICE had 70 exhibitors.

Traffic at the shows was lighter than in previous editions in Las Vegas, but the shows also had much wider aisles to allow for physical distancing. MAGIC and WWIN did not have carpeting on the show floor, while OFFPRICE opted for gray aisle carpeting so that exhibitors wouldn't spill over into the aisles.

MAGIC piloted an open-air booth concept, in part to help with disinfection and air flow. "For the majority of exhibitors, there was a shared back wall to define the space with no sidewalls," Helfman said. "Exhibitors used rolling racks or shelving units to act as the sidewall separators, but it was not an actual wall."

OFFPRICE had five feet of separation between each booth. "It's a much smaller footprint than we're used to in Las Vegas," Barglof said. "Based on the crowd that we were expecting, we did go out with a lower price point with all

of those factors in mind.”

WWIN also shifted its pricing because it was a more intimate event, and the show was three days instead of four. “We tried to keep our exhibitor package very much in line with what they’re used to getting from WWIN,” Hanson said. “It is more of a comprehensive package where they get their equipment and a hotel room. We wanted to continue providing those amenities because that’s who we are. That’s part of what our promise is to our customers.

“We’re also offering a little more value,” Hanson continued. “We were typically a pipe-and-drape show, but we did all hard wall so it’s more of a turnkey booth solution.”

As with most trade shows, some booths were busier than others.

“Day One was super busy right at 9 a.m. when the doors busted open,” said Kylie Griffin, a MAGIC exhibitor who works for Southern Grace, a women’s clothing and accessories company based out of Carrollton, TX. She has never worked the booth at MAGIC before, but the 6-year old company with 40 employees has exhibited previously. “We had an influx of people, and it carried on throughout the day. We had a lot of new customers, a lot of existing customers, and a lot of people from different states that haven’t previously ordered with us before.”

Did exhibitors get a return on investment? “Our goal coming into this market ... since it was at a new location, we just wanted to gain some new customers,” Griffin said. “We’ve already



Informa surveyed buyers to gauge buyer sentiment. More than 70% indicated they would come with face masks required.

accomplished that, so we pretty much crushed our goal. We know our brand does well when it’s face to face with a client so we love that our clients are able to come in and touch and feel — actually experience the product for themselves and that is the best thing for us.”

Moving from Las Vegas to Orlando meant different demographics and new prospects. “We met some new customers and wrote orders with new customers,” said Dan Son with VERY MODA, LLC, an exhibitor at OFFPRICE. He drove from Houston where the wholesale clothing company that sells women’s apparel and accessories to

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the Atlanta Market the week before and then to Orlando.

"We've exhibited in OFFPRICE for more than 10 years," Son said. "OFFPRICE is something that we consider a good margin of our total revenue of the year. Even so here, despite the fact that it's definitely different from the Las Vegas times. We are seeing fewer companies coming out to buy, and traffic has definitely gone down. But we absolutely got a return on investment from exhibiting in the show."

MAGIC exhibitor Mike Parti with Mata Shoes, a company based in Los Angeles with a staff of 18, agreed: "The show exposed us to a lot of local boutiques and businesses," he said. "MAGIC Pop-up Orlando was good for us. We absolutely got a return on our investment in the show."

WWIN exhibitor Amy Labbe said: "I have a showroom with a friend at the Dallas Market Center. My friend got COVID, so I decided at the last minute to come down and set her stuff up. I brought my jewelry. The traffic is pretty light, but we have actually written quite a few orders. I've picked up some new accounts."

Without trade shows, many small and mid-sized U.S. companies clearly felt the financial impact of losing one of their key marketing channels. "During COVID, we've definitely had to go through some losses, but we are trying to bounce back. The impact of no shows? For all these wholesale businesses, it's really about exposure. Buyers like to be able to meet and greet and get to know each other to do business. That has impacted us because we couldn't make that happen face-to-face," Son said.

## Looking ahead

The fashion events are planning to return to the desert in August. The dates and venues: MAGIC, Aug. 9-11, at the LVCC; OFFPRICE, Aug. 7-10, at the LVCC; and WWIN, Aug. 9-12 at Caesar's Forum.

## Testing Q&A with Kevin Thornton, VP, Operations at Informa Markets

**Q:** Does everybody need a negative COVID-19 test to enter the show?

**A:** Yes, we required everyone who attended the events to either submit to a COVID test on site and receive a negative result or to pretest prior to arriving. We had some date parameters around that. If they came with a verifiable negative COVID test, they were allowed on the show floor.

**Q:** If a participant had tested positive previously for COVID, how was it handled?

**A:** The question is a concern that's came up quite a bit. That is ... if I've had COVID in the past, will I test positive to the rapid antigen test we're using? The answer is no, you shouldn't. We've consulted with the infectious disease specialist with Orlando Health, a medical provider we partnered with, as well as Abbott, who is the manufacturer of the test we're using.

Anyone who tested positive outside of 30 days should no longer receive a positive test with this rapid antigen test. We recommended anyone who traveled to test prior to coming. It's always good to know before you go and to have that assurance. Lateral flow antigen tests — we have been instructed — will not give a positive test for someone who no longer has sufficient viral load.

**Q:** Since you're the first organizer in the U.S. to offer and require testing, tell us about your thought process ... how did you come up with your testing strategy and goals?

**A:** We have two equally important priorities to deliver to our community — success and safety. Our customer success is more important than ever in the wake of the pandemic. As one of the first events to return to the show floor, we felt equally responsible to create the safest environment possible for our visitors. The goal of investing in testing was that simple. It was to create a safe and successful platform for reconnection and recovery. And if that goes well and accomplishes both those goals, we also think it'll be a good proving ground for other events within the industry.

**Q:** How did you determine and evaluate the testing companies and suppliers?

**A:** That was one of the most important decisions we've made. We started with procuring the test itself. We chose the new Abbott BinaxNOW ag card test, which is a lateral flow rapid

antigen test. We picked it both because of Abbott's reputation in the testing industry and because the BinaxNOW tests has market-leading sensitivity and specificity. That accuracy is really important to us. Once we had the test procured (they received approval on Dec. 22), we contracted with U.S. Mobile Health to administer the test on site. We wanted to find a reputable testing service that was based locally but that also was CLIA certified and approved to administer the BinaxNOW ag card test. Along with the Abbott test and with U.S. Mobile Health throughout the entire process, we leaned heavily on the local healthcare provider and Orange County Convention Center partner Orlando Health to provide us with overall guidance.

**Q:** What were some of your biggest concerns in terms of testing overall for your event?

**A:** One of our biggest concerns was also probably one of our most important goals. We were only allowing individuals with a negative test to enter the show floor. That meant there were a few people who have traveled to the event who couldn't attend. Ultimately that meant that we're protecting the rest of those in attendance.

**Note: There were a total of 18 positive COVID-19 cases identified from the testing process.**

**Q:** Walk us through what the process was like when somebody is tested and then, if it's negative, what happens? If it's positive, what happens?

**A:** The 30,000-foot view: Individuals had two options. They could choose to go get a pre-test on their own. We provided a list of retailers they could go to. We also gave them resources for the state test facilities. They could do PCR or antigen as long as that test is administered on Friday, February 5th or later. They could bring it to the event, and we'll verify that with a photo ID. They'll get a wristband, and that wristband will signify they have received a negative COVID test and they'll have access to the show floor along with their event credential. The other option is you can come on site, and we will give you a free COVID rapid test.

The whole process for the test takes less than 15 minutes. Door to door, we're looking for maybe 30 minutes or less. It's relatively painless process. The individual will register for the event. They'll be prompted by our 42 Chat bot to schedule an appointment. When they show up on site, they'll come over to the testing area and check in. We prompted them to download the NAVICA app that the Abbott test pairs with so that they can get the results confidentially.

They'll go through the line. Socially distanced, of course. They'll get their test. We'll put them in a staging area. They'll get the result on their phone. And at that point, if it's a negative result, they'll go over to the banding area, show the negative result and get a wristband and they're on their way.

For those that unfortunately do have a positive test, we're going to give them the opportunity to go to a private room. We will give them a retest if they would like. If they were to get a positive result again then we're going to provide them with a key contact sheet that includes information for Orlando Health and a QR code, where they can schedule a tele-health consultation for next steps and medical guidance.

Or they're more than welcome to go across the street to the hospital where Orlando Health has a facility. We're also going to include information for the hotels and airlines and some of our other partners to have a quick reference for them. At that point, what they do is entirely up to them.

Neither we, as MAGIC and Informa, nor our partners at WWIN and OFFPRICE, the venue, or anyone outside of U.S. Mobile Health, will have access to their health data, which is an extremely important part to note. Testing and the results are completely confidential.

**Q:** I know you might be limited in what you can talk about here in terms of paying for the test or cost per testing but what can you comment on in terms of funding or any numbers that might be helpful for this audience?

**A:** This was a collaboration between Informa, Clarion and Tarsus, so I'd be remiss if I didn't make a comment on that. We're not yet ready or able to release specifics on the budget. I will say that it is expensive, as you can probably imagine. Because it's not just the test, there's a lot of other costs associated with it. The testing administrator being a big one.

**Q:** What are some of the other things you're budgeting for, or that are part of testing that people might not realize that you have to do when you're doing testing?

**A:** The tests themselves and the testing administrator are two of the big ones. The rest is what you would traditionally think — stanchions, drape, counters, signage and banners. You need staff because you don't want to have 3,000 people showing up at an entrance, standing next to each other. There's a lot of front-end communication that takes place that's maybe not necessarily a line item in the budget, but does take resources. We made a significant investment to have a scheduling app developed that would meet the specific needs of this program. We're very thankful that Orange County Convention Center has been a great partner. You need WiFi to have a

pairing app. You need space to do testing, and OCCC offered complimentary services to support this program, which has been extremely helpful and beneficial.

**Q:** Any advice for organizers who might be considering testing for their events?

**A:** My biggest piece of advice would be to make a decision on testing as early as possible, to educate your community as early as possible, and to think of it through the point of view of a customer. The biggest challenge we had is that we made this decision a little late in the game for a variety of reasons. That's one of our biggest learnings. We put a tremendous effort and investment into prioritizing the customer experience and ensuring we not just met, but exceeded expectations on what we knew was important and that is ease, efficiency, confidentiality, and accuracy. But given the tight timeframe, we couldn't effectively educate our customers on all of those considerations and facts in advance like we wanted to. People have very strong opinions on topics such as testing so the sooner you go to market with a program like this, the more successful you'll be.

**Q:** So how much space did you have in that hall to spread out for everything?

**A:** 108,000 square feet in the primary testing hall. We had a secondary hall that we're used for pre-test verification, so that could reduce the density. We had a lot of space.

**Q:** Do you foresee testing at any Informa events going forward? Do you have one on the books and how will you determine when that's necessary?

**A:** We don't have a clear answer on that. It's our first event with a testing program and to my knowledge, the only trade show to date implementing testing. So it's very much a pilot for us and for the industry. But regardless of whether testing becomes part of the operational plan for future events, safety and instilling confidence within the communities we serve is going to continue to be at the core of our approach.

It's powerful that as an industry, we've committed to the All Secure guidelines to ensure that we are approaching safety with the same rigor and now more than ever. I believe it's important for our industry to work together, to prove that we can return to the show floor and that our communities can reconnect in safe ways. Testing may be an important piece of that, but long-term, I think the real value is in our shared commitment to events that consistently prioritize the health and safety of everybody who attends.



## Testing & Safety: What Exhibitors and Attendees Had to Say

What did exhibitors and attendees think of the testing component? We asked a few, and here's what we learned: Some were relieved and grateful, but others thought it wasn't necessary. Some speculated that testing may have even been a deterrent for buyers.

- Attendee Shantal Assata said: "I was nervous coming to Florida, and I didn't know what to expect. MAGIC, WWIN and OFFPRICE did a great job of having the COVID test. Once we got here, it was so simple. It took us maybe 20 minutes. It put me at ease. I'm traveling with my family — my mother, sister, and niece — so I wanted to make sure that it was a safe environment. Traveling during COVID was exciting and also fearful. I think we've all been quarantined for so long. We're ready to get out and have those in person sales."
- MAGIC Exhibitor Kelly Griffin said: "We actually pre-tested in Dallas on Friday before traveling. We feel like the show has taken a lot of precautions. We're super appreciative that booths are spaced out. Everyone has been tested. We feel really safe and just happy to be here."
- Attendee Tiffany Ivanovsky said: "I understand why they did it, but I feel like it wasn't necessary. Did it make me feel safer knowing that everybody in here is tested? Yes. I think it does make everyone feel better to know that everyone has been tested."
- OFFPRICE Exhibitor Dan Son said: "I feel most comfortable coming to this show because they do have testing. I went through the scheduling system to get tested and downloaded the NAVICA app to come into the convention center."
- MAGIC Exhibitors Mike Parti said: "We were iffy about exhibiting, but when I heard all precautions that were been taken we decided to come since everybody was going to be screened. Life has to go on. Nothing can stop the pandemic, but if you're careful, it can be done." He and his team tested on site. "It was pretty smooth and fast."
- WWIN Exhibitor Amy Labbe said: "We got tested on Friday before we left, and we hopped on a plane Saturday. I didn't want to get here and find out that I had it. I think the testing does give you a sense of safety, but I also think it deterred some of our customer base from coming."



**About SISO:** SISO members include companies, corporations and other for-profit entities that own, produce or provide full-service management of “face to face” trade shows, consumer shows, expositions, conferences and events. SISO membership is a combination of large corporations and small entrepreneurial enterprises that do business around the world. SISO’s almost 200-member companies produce thousands of events around the world. SISO’s Mission is to meet the common needs of our members by providing peer networking opportunities, education, industry information, streamlined business processes and best practices in the industry.



**About UFI** – The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry: UFI is the global trade association of the world’s tradeshow organisers and exhibition centre operators, as well as the major national and international exhibition associations, and selected partners of the exhibition industry. UFI’s main goal is to represent, promote and support the business interests of its members and the exhibition industry. UFI directly represents more than 50,000 exhibition industry employees globally, and also works closely with its 60 national and regional association members. More than 800 member organisations in 83 countries around the world are presently signed up as members. Around 1,000 international trade fairs proudly bear the UFI approved label, a quality guarantee for visitors and exhibitors alike. UFI members continue to provide the international business community with a unique marketing media aimed at developing outstanding face-to-face business opportunities. UFI is supporting the work of global, regional, and national institutions that deal with the COVID-19 outbreak. On this page, we are listing some resources for UFI members and the industry at large: <https://www.ufi.org/industry-resources/coronavirus/>.

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