

# **Opening address by Joseph Ghossoub, Chairman & World President, International Advertising Association**

Posted on



Welcome to this great event in one of the finest cities in the world. I will like to begin with some good news.

I am glad to announce that this is the largest ever turnout to an IAA World Congress, with the largest number of countries represented -2000 registered delegates from 67 countries as of this morning.

This is a great achievement and I would like all of you to join me in a round of applause to the UAE Chapter of the IAA which has worked hard for many I any would months also to like to make this event happen. I would also like to thank all of you who have taken time from your busy schedules to come to our beautiful city to attend this Congress. We have in our midst communications experts from all parts of the globe – China and Chile, Sweden, and South Africa.

In many ways, this Congress feels like the United Nations of Communicators. Some of the most important people in the communications world are here with us during this 40th IAA World Congress – the leaders of the biggest and most influential agencies, media companies and publishers, besides thought-leaders of the biggest and most influential agencies, media companies and publishers, besides thought-leaders from civil society.

But like in Noah's Ark, we're all in the same boat. We are all equals here, in terms of the contribution we can make to our industry and to the global community outside this convention centre.

I know you must be as excited as I am to get a Congress of this nature and magnitude underway, and to listen to people who are far more eloquent and exciting than I, so I will try to keep my comments this morning as brief as I can. I do want to take this opportunity to comment on our theme for this year: "Challenges of Change." There are a number of such challenges in store for our industry, the IAA, the Arab world and the city of Dubai, and I hope you will bear with me for a few minutes to make a few points about them. Firstly, I'd like to say that there could be no more suitable place to discuss the challenges of change than Dubai. This city is a mirror of those changes having gone through dramatic challenges, being part of a tough neighborhood. But every challenge that this city has faced – it came out the winner. In the last 30 years, Dubai itself has gone from being a small trading town populated by dhows, small traders, palm-frond houses, to being one of the business and tourism capitals of the world. Today Dubai is known as the island of hope in a region that is otherwise painted by western analysts as a war zone. Dubai is today

home to people from over 180 nationalities with an annual GDP growth rate of 16 percent and has a vision to transform this metropolis into an international city and a business hub with a 1.5 billion consumer base across the Arab world, Africa, the Indian subcontinent and other countries. But Dubai never rests on its laurels and is constantly changing and reinventing itself – setting a pace that is punishing and creating new benchmarks.

The IAA has more in common with Dubai and the Arab world, than you could imagine. Both of us need to reinvent ourselves, and each of us can learn from the other. As we all know from recent events in the US on the political resistance to the P&O deal, even being one of the best business hubs, financial centres, tourism destinations and most livable cities of the modern world, did not prevent Dubai's reputation from being distorted. What Dubai and the UAE have quickly learnt is that it, and the other progressive nations in this region, need to connect more fully and be more attuned to the current realities of the modern world. Similarly, the IAA needs to reach out and move faster with the times. The IAA needs to 're-brand' and stay relevant to its membership.

We need to engage with the world of communicators in a direct way and bring together all of its various disciplines – advertising agencies, advertisers, media, publishers, public relations, direct marketing, corporate identity, research firms and academia – all within one community that enriches itself from challenging dialogue and action. I must say that the name 'International Advertising Association' is a bit of a misnomer. The IAA is not advertising only – it involves everyone who is working within communications. And we are going to address this issue in our work in the coming months. The IAA and the region are also faced with the challenge and opportunity of youth. This region, for example has a huge reservoir of young people who are educated, highly discerning and truly international. Our challenge in the industry is how do we train them, teach them, bring them into the fold? How do we make the communications profession an interesting and rewarding career choice for these young people? The IAA has always played a part in education and professional development, and has a host of successful educational initiatives to its credit. It is crucial that we continue this **work** by sharing best practices, drawing the best and brightest, and encouraging and retaining the talent we have.

The IAA will continue to play a key role in education and professional development. It is a little known fact that the Association has over 50 universities and colleges, including the American University in Dublin, that offer IAA accredited diploma programmes. We will focus more on making these programmes more attractive

to young graduates.

Another issue is technology. What is coming up is completely different from anything we've seen before. The IAA has the network, the largest grass roots international organisation of its kind with chapters in more than 75 countries. But we have fallen behind in staying current, and keeping abreast of the latest developments. My generation used to read books, magazines, go to the movies once a week. The current generation, as you well know, has everything at its fingertips: WAP-enabled cell phones, Bluetooth, srns, video I-Pods, wireless broadband, Blackberry, biogs, pod casts, TiVo. This is one of the biggest challenges for our industry. It's also a challenge in my home: trying to get and keep my kids' undivided attention. Many of you know our history; Founded in 1938, the IAA has been the voice of international advertisers for 68 years – serving the many constituents of our industry across borders. Our mission is to promote and facilitate excellence in communications. We will always be impartial, independent and influential in this industry.

This World Congress is partly to address the issue of how we can make the IAA more relevant, more useful, for all of us. In many ways we can take inspiration from Dubai, which is constantly reforming, re-energising and re-inventing itself.

This Congress is also an opportunity for you, our guests, speakers and delegates from the world over, to see, touch and feel the new Middle East. This is the hub of the communications industry in the region, and a bridge into the new Middle East, one of the fastest growing markets you will ever know.

The diversity of traditions, languages, dialects, and religions in this region means working across borders, a multitude of markets in this one market. But the rewards are tremendous, given the accelerating level of investment here and the relatively untapped advertising market compared to Western Europe and North America.

I want to leave you with one last thought, a lesson that I have learned from the example of Dubai, and its leadership: Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare. Starting today and continuing into the next two years, you and I together will combine both.

My vision for the IAA is to make it more relevant, to restore it to the days when publishers, agencies and clients sat together as colleagues with the same interests. Together, we are an industry. Separately, we can achieve little. Let us not miss the

boat.

I also want to push for greater self-regulation in the industry so that as we move forward, our role in the modern marketplace evolves with us. We need to inspire confidence in our consumers, and taking the lead in following a framework of rules is far better than having one imposed on us.

I would urge you to be part of this discussion and debate over regulatory threats and opportunities wherever you are, participate in it wherever possible and involve the IAA as much as you need to. Help us to help you.

Responsible advertising is part of our social responsibility, one that we cannot take lightly. We may be a mirror of society, but we are also one of its shapers. With your help, I want to re-define the role, the position and the goals of the IAA, to make our voice in the industry a clear one by taking positions on major issues such as sustainable development, corporate social responsibility and responsible marketing. We need to raise our profile worldwide, and to provide our members with value-added benefits and services including a knowledge base on issues of the industry. I hope I can count on your support in the days, months and years ahead to make this vision a reality. A task of this significance will not be completed overnight, and nor should it be. The world's eyes are on us right now, both because of the congress being here and my presidency. I hasten to add that this presidency is not mine alone, but a beacon for the Gulf, the Middle East, and an opportunity for all of you who practice in the region to talk to the world, and an opportunity for all my colleagues from around the world to talk to us. If we use this opportunity properly, we can be in much better shape than we are at the moment. By promoting communications around the world, we can give back to our societies and communities – which is the best part of what we do. Congresses like this are not only about speeches and presentations, but about getting to know each other, creating relationships, networking and building bridges with different parts of the world. This is the opportunity of a lifetime, and I want to urge everyone in the industry, every one of you here today, to make the most of it. I hope that the dialogue we begin over the next three days can be continued into the weeks, months and years ahead. In closing, I would like to thank some of the people without whom we would not be here today First, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai for his kind patronage of this 40th World Congress in Dubai; His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Bin Saeed Al Maktoum, President of the Dubai Department of Civil Aviation and Chairman of the Emirates Group, for his gracious presence and

participation; His Excellency Mohammed Al Gergawi, UAE Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and the Chairman of this Congress, for all his help and unflinching support; The members of the IAA-UAE Chapter and the Steering Committee of this 40th World Congress, and all the others who have helped to make this congress a success. All our sponsors and supporting firms. And to you, our delegates and friends, for making all the hard work and efforts of the last two years worthwhile. In conclusion I would like to thank our most recent World President, Michael Lee, for tremendous tenure as World President and it humbles me take charge of such an important position. I am honored to serve you as the World President of our beloved association.