



VIRTUOSO

VIRTUOSO HOSTS 2026 SYMPOSIUM WITH A FOCUS ON WHAT IT MEANS TO HUMANIZE THE EXCEPTIONAL IN LUXURY TRAVEL

Global Gathering in Seoul Convenes Industry Leaders to Examine How Human Connection Is Reshaping Value in Luxury Travel

SEOUL (April 17, 2026) – [Virtuoso](#), the leading global network specializing in luxury and experiential travel, is hosting its 2026 Symposium, the organization’s annual gathering focused on thought leadership, April 15-19 in Seoul, South Korea. Held at the [Conrad Seoul](#), the event brings together 360 executives from Virtuoso’s travel agency members and preferred partners across 33 countries. Throughout the program, attendees will engage in thought-provoking discussions, professional development and networking activities, as well as interactive sessions led by industry leaders and peers. Select sessions will be inspired by restaurateur and author Will Guidara’s new book, *Unreasonable Hospitality Field Guide*, which was shared in advance for Symposium guests.

Opening the event, Chairman and CEO Matthew D. Upchurch delivered a forward-looking address on the intersection of technology, human connection and value creation – themes that will be explored throughout the week. He acknowledged the global challenges facing the industry while emphasizing travel’s enduring relevance during times of disruption. Reflecting on previous periods of uncertainty, he noted that each has ultimately strengthened travel’s role in people’s lives. While short-term impacts are inevitable, Upchurch encouraged the network to maintain a long-term view, pointing to recent *World Travel & Tourism Council* research projecting \$12.5 trillion (USD) in industry investment across major global economies by 2035, alongside the need to plan for both growth and resilience.

Framing Symposium as a crucial moment for the network to pause, challenge assumptions and look ahead together, Upchurch called the current era an “epoch” shift, driven largely by advances in artificial intelligence. He explained that his guiding principle for the network, “Automate the predictable so that you can humanize exceptional,” has become reality. This year’s Symposium programming explores both sides of this equation: how automation can enhance efficiency and support travel advisors, while reinforcing how a human touch is more essential than ever before to creating the elevated moments that define exceptional experiences.

“AI has expanded what can be automated at a scale we have never seen before,” he said. “More of the predictable is being handled, which shifts where human value truly resides. He noted that as technology advances, not all tasks carry equal worth. “The real challenge is not just technological, it is human. The instinct in times of change is often to do more and respond faster, but that can work against us. We need to be precise about where we create impact.”

Looking ahead, Upchurch encouraged attendees to focus on the interplay between technology and the human elements that define exceptional service. He pointed to sessions with tech leaders Gilad Berenstein and Kelly Monahan, who will explore how AI can enable more effective collaboration and informed planning, while ensuring the advisor and client relationship remains central. Each advisor frames that balance in their own way, guided by their individual business model and client needs, and by how they choose to use technology without losing the human element at the center of their work.

“What we’re experiencing isn’t incremental change,” Upchurch continued. “It is reshaping how work is structured across the industry. As capabilities expand, the opportunity is to be more intentional about how expertise is applied in practice. Technology can enhance the experience, but it can’t replace the depth of understanding that comes from truly knowing a client.”

The Symposium also highlights the strength of Virtuoso’s global network – not just in size, but in its ability to learn and evolve collectively. Through shared insights, collaboration and increasingly sophisticated data and feedback loops, the network continues to refine how it delivers results across diverse markets and client needs.

“We don’t move ahead individually – we move ahead together,” Upchurch said. “Our collective intelligence has always been our greatest advantage. What’s changing is how quickly and precisely we can act on it. I’m energized that we’re having the right conversations across the network, including the hard ones, because that’s where real progress happens.”

As the industry faces continued disruption alongside unprecedented growth, Upchurch emphasized that innovation must be guided by clarity of purpose and enabled by the right capabilities. Evolving leadership structures, expanded global reach and sustained investment in technology and data are supporting Virtuoso’s next phase, all while remaining grounded in the network’s core values: human connection, human-enhancing tech solutions and the pursuit of excellence.

“As we look ahead, the goal isn’t to predict the future perfectly,” said Upchurch. “It’s to navigate it together with transparency, adaptability and a shared commitment to creating meaningful human experiences. In moments of uncertainty, leadership begins with conviction about who you are and what you stand for. That sense of purpose becomes the foundation for your path forward.”

For more information on Virtuoso and its events, please visit www.virtuoso.com.

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About Virtuoso

Virtuoso is the leading global travel agency network specializing in luxury and experiential travel. This by-invitation-only organization comprises over 1,200 travel agency locations with more than 20,000 travel advisors in 58 countries throughout North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and the Middle East. Drawing upon its preferred relationships with 2,800 of the world’s best hotels and resorts, cruise lines, airlines, tour companies and premier destinations, the network provides its upscale clientele with exclusive amenities, rare experiences and privileged access. Annual sales of (U.S.) \$35 billion make Virtuoso a powerhouse in the luxury travel industry. For more information, visit www.virtuoso.com.

Media Contacts:

Misty Belles, Virtuoso – Vice President, Global Public Relations

+1.202.553.8817 / mbelles@virtuoso.com

Lauren Wintemberg – Vice President, Alice Marshall Public Relations

+1.212.861.4031 / lauren@alicemarshall.com