

Schwarzenegger, 'green' gadgets at giant high-tech fair

March 1 2009, by Deborah Cole

The world's biggest high-tech fair kicks off Tuesday hosting guest-of-honour Arnold Schwarzenegger and offering cutting-edge solutions promising to beat the economic crisis as well as climate change.

The California governor, whose state's IT industry will be centre stage at Germany's CeBIT, will join Chancellor Angela Merkel for speeches on the eve of the event and tour the fair with her when it opens early Tuesday.

Some 4,300 firms from 69 countries will display the latest in information and communications technology in the northern city of Hanover -- a quarter fewer than last year due to the global economic slump, organisers said.

"Given the depth of the world economic crisis, this number represents a success," Deutsche Messe board member Ernst Raue said, admitting that small hardware and telecommunications suppliers from China, Taiwan and South Korea had pulled out in droves.

It is the first time the CeBIT is honouring a state as opposed to a nation and Schwarzenegger will lead a delegation of around 50 firms from California, most from Silicon Valley.

While in Hanover, the Austrian-born governor will also pick up an award Tuesday from the American Chamber of Commerce in Germany for "his exceptional commitment to the global issues of environment and

energy."

Hot topics at the CeBIT this year are to be "green" technology and innovations on mobile Internet use -- two areas that industry experts said could be particularly appealing in tough economic times by allowing people to save money in the long run.

CeBIT vice president Sven Michael Prueser said energy-saving products had major growth potential and would be spotlighted for the second year at an expanded section of the fair co-organised by the German environment ministry.

"At the heart of 'Green IT World' are issues relating to the energy efficiency of the IT systems themselves, but also the central question of what kind of efficiency gains can be achieved by industry through the intelligent use of IT," he said.

Among the product highlights expected this year are new, ultra-thin, ultra-efficient Netbooks, including the first "zero-watt" laptop from Fujitsu-Siemens that uses no electricity when in sleep-mode.

New videoconferencing technology promises to allow more companies to save money on travel, while axeing more emissions-heavy flights.

And Japanese giant Toshiba is to show off televisions that use half the power of normal sets.

Although the CeBIT is primarily a trade fair for sector executives, each year it also showcases quirky new gadgets ranging from the brilliantly practical to the fancifully futuristic.

German premium sound specialists Blaupunkt plan to unveil prototypes for what they call the world's first Internet car radio, promising access to

"tens of thousands of stations" via cellular phone networks.

A Taiwanese firm will be showing off a waterproof GPS tracker allowing owners to locate stolen motorcycles, boats and caravans or even shut down engines remotely via text message.

A so-called gentle alarm clock will also be on display that monitors sleep rhythms as shown by the body movements of the sleeper.

It then chooses a shallow sleep phase within 30 minutes of the desired wake-up time to go off, encouraging what the German manufacturer says is a smoother start to a more productive day.

And visitors will be able to try out a German design prize winner: an age-simulation suit made to allow young people to understand first-hand the physical limitations of the average 75-year-old.

Another boom sector gaining special attention this year is "telemedicine," or using state-of-the-art technology to monitor and treat chronically ill patients while they are still living at home.

The CeBIT runs until March 8.

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