

# German IT sector in bullish mood at world's top tech fair

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A man adjusts a pole dancing robot on the Tobit Software stand at the CeBIT IT fair, in Hanover, Germany. The German IT sector headed into the world's biggest high-tech fair in bullish mood, seeing record sales in 2012.

The German IT sector headed into the world's biggest high-tech fair in bullish mood, seeing record sales in 2012 ahead of the event's inauguration Monday by the leaders of Germany and Brazil.

Shrugging off the European economic crisis, IT industry lobby BITKOM said it expected sales growth of 1.6 percent this year to 151.0 billion euros (\$199 billion), pinning its hopes on the futuristic "cloud computing" technology.

If confirmed, this would be a significant improvement on the 0.5 percent gain seen last year in the sector and the first time sales have topped the

150-billion-euro mark.

"The debt crisis in Europe has not been able to touch the German high-tech sector yet. Companies' order books are filled nicely," said Dieter Kempf, the body's president.

"The IT sector is doing much better than the general economy and is therefore acting as a stabilising factor," Kempf told reporters, presenting the new forecasts.

The positive trend in the sector should feed through into the labour market, BITKOM added, predicting an additional 10,000 jobs would be created this year.

The most meteoric growth was likely to be registered by the "cloud computing" sector, the idea of storing data online remotely, rather than on individual machines, he said.

Kempf added that this concept, which has proved to be a "complete change in the way the sector operates", was expected to enjoy growth in Germany of 37 percent per year on average until 2016.

This year, the "cloud computing" business was expected to grow by 47 percent to 5.3 billion euros.

Despite the bullish forecasts, BITKOM said that the IT sector in Europe would underperform other parts of the world.

In China, the sector was expected to grow by 9.7 percent, in the United States by 3.1 percent, in the whole 27-nation EU by 1.8 percent and in Japan by 1.1 percent.

At a global level, the sector is expected to grow by about four percent

this year.

The publication of the BITKOM forecasts is the traditional first event of the CeBIT high-tech fair, which will be inaugurated by Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Dilma Rousseff later Monday.

The fair, which runs until March 10, throws open its doors on Tuesday.

Around 4,200 exhibitors are expected in the northern German city of Hanover, including sector giants Samsung, Sharp, Microsoft, Google and Facebook.

They will be showing off the latest ultra-thin tablet computers and the smartphones of the future for work and futuristic, weird and wacky gadgets for entertainment.

Among the highlights is a robot that can make your lunch and a car that can change its length to slot into those tricky parking spaces.

Others include a virtual "eraser" for wiping out traces of potentially embarrassing mistakes on the Internet, a system for protecting smartphones from eavesdropping and a mobile device for asthmatics to assess the air quality.

Hot-button issues in the computing world will also play a role at the fair, especially the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), which opponents say is a threat to Internet freedom.

The pact sparked tens of thousands to protest against it in a dozen European cities last month, including 41,000 in Germany alone.

"We have worked a lot on the topic of ACTA which has not been easy. The draft of the text is as easy to understand as a compilation of German

tax law," said BITKOM president Kempf.

"It doesn't help anyone when international agreements are stitched up behind closed doors," he added.

ACTA is awaiting ratification from several governments, but intense opposition led by Internet users has forced several EU states including Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia to freeze their ratification process.

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