

# Google boss lays out future vision at world's top tech fair

March 5 2012, by Richard Carter

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Google's executive chairman Eric Schmidt cast a science-fiction vision of the future as the world's top tech fair opened Monday, with the German IT sector predicting record sales in 2012.

"Think back to 'Star Trek', or my favourite the 'Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy'. Much of what those writers imagined is now possible," said Schmidt.

"Translating .. voice recognition, electronic books. The people who predict that [intelligent robots](#), virtual reality or self-driving cars will soon be commonplace are right," he added.

"Governments will be able to spot the economic makings of a crisis before they happen and doctors will be able to accurately predict the outbreak of disease before anyone feels it," predicted Schmidt.

The tech boss was speaking at the opening ceremony of the CeBIT, the world's biggest high-tech fair in the northern German city of Hanover, with 4,200 exhibitors from 70 countries expected to wow punters with their [latest gadgets](#).

This year, the fair was to focus on the possibilities offered by "[cloud computing](#)", the concept of storing data remotely rather than on individual machines, as well as "managing trust", or the hot topic of Internet security.

Declaring the fair officially open, Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) returned to this theme of "managing trust", saying it was especially important among world leaders as they battled to solve the [global economic crisis](#).

Dilma Rousseff, the president of Brazil, this year's "partner country" at the CeBIT, expressed the hope that "technology, when put to human interests, can certainly produce a true revolution for the well-being of the people at large."

During the fair, tech giants Samsung, Sharp, Microsoft, [Google](#) and [Facebook](#) will be showing off the latest ultra-thin [tablet computers](#) and the smartphones of the future for work as well as futuristic, weird and wacky gadgets for fun.

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

And in the run-up to the fair, the German IT sector published new forecasts saying it expected to shrug off the eurozone debt crisis and register record sales this year.

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 "cloud computing", which has proved to be a "complete change in the way the sector operates", he said.

This sector 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, according to the BITKOM forecasts.

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