

Dutch hi-tech group ASML profits leap 18 percent

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Dutch company ASML, which makes computer chip-making systems and is seen as a global hi-tech bellwether, on Wednesday announced a 2014 profit leap of 18 percent to 1.2 billion euros, driven by sales in the memory sector.

The [company](#) based in Veldhoven, southern Netherlands, said in a statement that its annual sales hit a "record" 5.86 billion euros (\$6.78 billion), up 12 percent.

Fourth quarter profits were 305 million euros from sales of 1.49 billion euros, the company said.

"Our 2014 fourth-quarter net sales came in ahead of guidance, as the memory sector was stronger than we expected," said Chief Executive Officer Peter Wennink.

The company makes systems for manufacturing processor chips as well as memory chips such as DRAM and SRAM, essential for mobile phones and tablets.

ASML, which supplies global hi-tech giants such as Samsung and Intel, also announced a buy-back programme worth one billion euros.

It predicted first-quarter 2015 [sales](#) of 1.6 billion euros, higher than the 1.5 billion euros predicted by analysts questioned by the Bloomberg news agency.

ASML is one of the world's leading makers of lithography systems used by the semiconductor industry to make integrated circuits and microchips.

The company, which employs more than 14,000 people and operates in 16 countries, is considered a good indicator of conditions in the microprocessing industry.

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