New wave of smart tech on show at Taiwan's Computex

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An overview of the booths at the World Trade Center, during the Computex tech show in Taipei, in June 2014

Smart living and wearable technology will take centre stage at Asia's largest tech trade show from Tuesday with gadgets promising to do everything from analysing state of mind to identifying burglars.

Held in the capital Taipei, Computex will see 1,700 exhibitors from

Taiwan and around the world with 130,000 visitors expected over the five-day event, now in its 35th year.

"Smart living and wearable technology remain the focus, but visitors will find more mature products," said David Liu, of the Taipei Computer Association.

While standalone smart products were on show previously, tech firms are now broadening their ambitions, says Liu.

"Many of the exhibitors demonstrated their smart home devices last year, like plugs, lights or locks, but those devices did not work as systems," he told AFP.

"The latest products use an app and infrared sensors to come up with a total solution. So in the case of home security, say, users can now automatically receive images of any intruders into their home."

Wearables have a dedicated area—including smart watches, fabrics and glasses—and will this year feature a new device which promises to measure stress levels caused by work through analysing "mind waves", organisers said.

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Mobile technology and 3D innovations will also be key areas of this year's show.

But though Computex continues to attract major international players such as Intel, Microsoft and Ford, it comes at a time when Taiwan is fighting to maintain its tech edge in the face of intense competition from China.

Taiwan last month lowered its growth forecast, blaming increased competition from the mainland in the technology industry.

China has been forging ahead with the development of domestic smartphone brands and homegrown hardware, putting pressure on the

export-driven technology hub.

Industry observers say that Taiwan must innovate in the burgeoning Internet of Things (IoT) market—web-connected objects from watches to kitchen appliances—if it is to keep its position.

The IoT market is forecast to grow 19 percent in 2015, according to US research firm IDC.

"In the years ahead, the Internet of Things will include millions of wearables for consumers as well as sensors and networks used in smart city rollouts throughout the world," said Singapore-based tech blogger Alfred Siew.

More than 1,000 Taiwanese firms will set out their stalls at Computex and will be anxious not to lag behind in the nascent IoT market, said Siew, having struggled to compete in the mobile sector.

"If they could offer managed services, software interfaces and data analytics to go with their traditional technical expertise in hardware, that could make their offerings even more interesting," Siew added.

Liu Meng-chun of Taiwanese think tank Chung-Hua Institution for Economic Research agrees that the island needs to reinvent its tech identity.

"Mass manufacturing is no longer a proper way. Taiwan companies should put to use their innovation if they hope to survive the challenges," he told AFP.

"It's no easy task, but they have no choice."

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