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Exhibitors offer new views on data

News Story by Peter Sayer

MARCH 03, 2005 (IDG NEWS SERVICE) - PARIS -- It's hard to grasp the scale of the annual CeBit IT exhibition in Hanover, Germany: there are more than 30 halls, many of them seemingly big enough to swallow soccer fields, and to visit them all would certainly take the entire week for which the show lasts.

Last year, CeBit's organizers sold around 312,000 square meters of floor space to 6,411 exhibitors, and attracted 510,000 visitors, around a quarter of them from outside Germany. This year, the organizers expect 6,115 exhibitors, and

bookings for floor space are down about 2% at 306,000 square meters -- but that still leaves the show more than twice the size to which the best-known U.S. IT event, Comdex, grew in its heyday. (Comdex started shrinking somewhere around 2001, and last year's event was canceled.)

There's no sign of terminal decline at CeBit, however, and last year the show was buzzing. Hot topics included the introduction of 3G (third-generation) mobile networks in Germany, growing numbers of Wi-Fi hotspots, VoIP (voice over Internet Protocol) telephony, 64-bit PCs, high-resolution digital photography and giant flat-screen displays.

This year, you could say that an underlying theme is new ways to look at old data.

Beyond Germany, other European countries have rolled out 3G networks based on the UMTS (Universal Mobile Telecommunications System) standard, and manufacturers will be exhibiting smaller phones to exploit them, making multimedia services viewable in new ways from new

places. Some of Europe's biggest Wi-Fi network operators have signed a bunch of roaming deals, too, opening up the hot spots on the showground to hundreds of thousands more visitors carrying PDAs and laptops.

Microsoft Corp. will show how workers can look at data together, using its Office Live Collaboration Platform. The beta version of its universal instant messaging client, code-named Istanbul, will make its first public outing at the show, and its Office Live Meeting and Office Live Communications Server 2005 products will also be on show. On other stands, Microsoft will display consumer products in three theme areas: digital living, on the road and sports.

Abas Software AG will showcase support for 64-bit computer platforms and Web services in the latest version of its ERP software for medium-size businesses. Businesses will be able to view their data on IBM.'s Power 5 or OpenPower architectures and systems based on Intel Corp.'s Itanium or Xeon Nocona chips. Business can access the data through Web services, which allow editing of ERP data over the Web, and the creation and integration of online shops, supplier intranets and Web-based customer information systems.

Novell Inc. will show identity management and Linux tools, and officially open its German migration and support center in Nuremberg. In conjunction with the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, the company will also show an online Linux evaluation tool that analyzes a company's future IT plans in five questions, and proposes a list of studies relevant to those plans.

ThinPrint GmbH demonstrated its universal printer driver software at last year's show, allowing documents or photographs to be transmitted from an e-mail account or mobile phone for printing in a kiosk. This year, the company has a system for the enterprise, allowing businesses that use Microsoft Terminal Services or Citrix MetaFrame to access SAP and other Unix applications to print from those terminals, wherever they may be located, with no worries about printer drivers.

RSA Security Inc. hopes to stop data being seen in places it shouldn't, and will show additions to its range of identity management and access management products. On the sidelines of the exhibition, RSA will host a discussion panel on psychological aspects of computer security, involving representatives of the Austrian government, NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and software vendors including Symantec Corp. and Microsoft.

Other companies are trying to make data more mobile.

Members of the Personal Computer Memory Card Industry Association will demonstrate a new generation of notebook expansion cards, with the first ExpressCard products going on display at the show. ExpressCard is a successor to the PC Card standard, and defines interfaces for removable expansion cards containing flash memory or communications and multimedia interfaces.

Researchers from the Fraunhofer Institute for Computer Graphics will be offering visitors a taste of augmented reality and a way to replace bulky travel guides and city plans with a mobile phone. The researchers hope travelers will be able to dispense with paper guides, downloading instead 3-D models of tourist sites selected according to the traveler's location and automatically adapted for a mobile device's small screen. The laboratory has also developed an augmented reality viewer, the AR Telescope, which can overlay computer-generated detail on the surroundings, displaying demolished or planned buildings as they appeared or will appear. All these images can also be protected from unauthorized copying using another new technology developed by the Institute: Geomark, a watermarking system for 3-D models.

Antig Corp. will exhibit a prototype notebook computer fuel cell the size of a CD-ROM drive, and another model intended to power mobile phones, enabling notebook users to stray further from an electrical outlet while looking at their data. The company plans to release commercial versions of both models later this year. Antig offers modular fuel cell components in capacities from 3 watts to 50 watts, which can be linked together to provide cells of other capacities.

In the Innovation Zone at the show, IBM's research and development division will show a prototype storage medium that can hold 1T bit of data in a chip just one inch square. IBM likens the chip, a product of its Millipede Project, to an old-fashioned punch card -- but on a much smaller scale, and with the ability to delete and rewrite data.

IBM will also be laying on remote access to one of the most powerful supercomputers in Europe, MareNostrum, at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center. The computer's 4,500 Power processors deliver a peak performance of 40 TFLOPS (floating-point operations per second) and IBM plans to use it to demonstrate a number of scientific applications live at the show.

Cebit runs from March 10 through March 16 at the Hanover Fairground.

With additional reporting by Tom Krazit and Joris Evers in San Francisco; James Niccolai in Paris; John Blau in Dusseldorf, Germany; and Scarlet Pruitt in London.