

Saxony-Anhalt's IT sector well prepared for "Industry 4.0"



A 13 000 strong workforce in well over 500 companies shapes the sector of information technology and telecommunications (ITC). Since 2006, an increase in the number of workers to 39 per cent has been recorded. Turnover is currently more than 1.6 billion Euros. Dirk Bartens, chairman of the board of the Verband der IT- und Multimediaindustrie Sachsen-Anhalt e.V., provided information on the current situation and prospects for an entire industry sector.

The framework conditions between Altmark and Burgenland appear to be good for the sector. How would you assess it?

The same. A lot has been done since the beginning of the 1990s. Just after reunification, a high number of companies were founded, numerous of them look back across two decades of successful performance. Five, six years ago we experienced another small boom in the number of companies being founded. Graduates from universities ventured to make the step towards autonomy. That remains optimistic. The average annual growth of the sector of five to eight per cent in both turnover and employees is definitely thanks to this dynamic. Sometimes I wish I was more proud of what has been achieved and our abilities. Our light must not be put under a bushel in any way.

You spoke just now of the education landscape. What role do universities play when it comes to information technology?

A very important one. Not only because the research and training there is well positioned. You can find excellently equipped labs and teaching facilities everywhere which in no way must be concealed when compared with the rest of Germany. We also notice this in the numbers of students. These are increasing mainly because young people from other federal states and largely from abroad have discovered the good study opportunities here for themselves. Education is something of an export hit for Saxony-Anhalt.

Specialists are sought from all over Germany...

Of course, and the same goes for us. The competition for the best talent is there. In addition to the companies in the sector, there are many who deal with the topics of the future in terms of IT with their own research and development. For example, this concerns the development of medical technology as well as logistics solutions. This is demonstrated by the fact that specialists today practically require a second qualification in another specialisation in addition to their knowledge of information technology. Our universities are also well equipped in this regard and prepare their graduates in an excellent way.

Where do you see the future trends of the sector in Saxony-Anhalt?

We are on the brink of a new, fourth industrial revolution. The Internet is proving to be a driving force in this. The real and virtual worlds are growing together into an "internet of things". Industrial production has set out, relies on the individualisation of products under the conditions of production made more flexible. Production and high-quality services go together. Products are becoming increasingly more universal. Saxony-Anhalt's industry can be actively involved in shaping this "industry 4.0" process. For the coming 10 to 20 years, there is a range of topics where it is in demand. An example I can think of is the longstanding traditions of machinery construction in the state. This will play a decisive role in this revolution. These opportunities should be seized. Or think of electromobility. In the future, the car will not only play a role in efficient energy consumption. I think developing components for it would be a very exciting task.

In terms of energy, there will also be new challenges in this sector as well...

On this we agree. Just think of the intelligent distribution of alternative energy sources. We are dealing with how to meet these challenges in distribution systems. The potential in Saxony-Anhalt is great with its high share of wind energy production. And in terms of topics of the future I'm thinking of medical technology, whether it's the logistics processes in manufacturing medicines, IT supported operation methods or the care of patients already on their way to hospital. I can also see the linking of social processes in society. Citizen and state communicate increasingly via IT solutions. This will be indispensable particularly in sparsely populated regions. Even medium-sized companies can prove themselves in this area, participate with their ideas and solutions and demonstrate their efficiency.

Thank you for this in-depth discussion!

Author: Klaus-Peter Voigt

Contact:

Verband der IT- und Multimediaindustrie Sachsen-Anhalt e.V.
Humboldtstraße 14
39112 Magdeburg
ph: +49 391 6288819
E-Mail: info@vitm.org
Web: www.vitm.org

Contact person:

Chairman of the Board Dirk Bartens

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