

ESSEN AFFAIRS

THE MAGAZINE FROM MESSE ESSEN

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02
25

EVERYTHING IN FLUX IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION

How an entire industry is being transformed

TO CHINA AND BACK

How the Essen Motor Show connects two markets

STRAIGHT TALK ON HEATING AND BATHROOMS

Ahead of SHK+E ESSEN:
What's driving the industry

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Dear readers,

Stability is the top priority in the power grid. The energy transition doesn't change that. At the same time, however, it is transforming an entire sector – bringing forth new technologies, new business models and new stakeholders. A fascinating chapter in economic history is currently being written here, as our report ahead of E-world energy & water shows (page 8).

The HVAC sector is, as we know, also directly affected by questions of energy supply and other political requirements. We spoke with representatives from the industry and skilled trades (page 17).

The Ruhr region is driving many of the innovations of tomorrow (and the day after tomorrow) – thanks to a broad network of policymakers, businesses and researchers. The successes are remarkable, and a second structural transformation is on the horizon (page 36).

We wish you an inspiring read.

Best wishes,

Oliver P. Kuhrt,
CEO of Messe Essen GmbH



Hall 3 of Messe Essen was the venue for the gymnastics competitions at the FISU World University Games. More on page 6.

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»SHARE WITH YOUR COUNTRIES HOW FANTASTIC THE FISU WORLD UNIVERSITY GAMES IN GERMANY WERE.«

Dr Christiane Schenderlein, Minister of State for Volunteering and Sport in North Rhine-Westphalia



FISU WORLD UNIVERSITY GAMES THE POWER OF SPORT

With around 1.2 million visitors, the Rhine-Ruhr 2025 FISU World University Games achieved an impressive overall response. From 16–27 July, nearly 8,000 students from over 2,000 international universities competed for medals. Messe Essen served as a central venue for the world's largest multi-sport event of the year – made possible in no small part by the commitment of 10,533 volunteers from 114 nations. Dr Christiane Schenderlein, Minister of State for Volunteering and Sport in North Rhine-Westphalia, said at the conclusion of the Games: "The Rhine-Ruhr 2025 FISU World University Games have shown how much power sport can unleash. I was impressed by the outstanding performances of the athletes. To our guests from all over the world, I say: share with your countries how fantastic the FISU World University Games in Germany were."

Basketball in the well-attended Grugahalle – one of the highlights of the World University Games.



www.rhineruhr2025.com/de

SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN READY TO INVEST

More than 37,000 guests from 100 nations visited the 20th SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN at Messe Essen. From 15–19 September 2025, the world's leading trade fair for joining, cutting and surfacing offered them the opportunity to learn about and order the latest technologies, trends and innovations from over 800 exhibitors representing 44 countries. Some 80% of visitors have purchasing and procurement authority in their companies; about one-third placed orders during the trade fair averaging 840,000 euros, while also announcing additional investments to follow. The sectors represented most strongly included the automotive, ship-building, energy, construction and defence industries.

www.schweissen-schneiden.com



The 20th SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN impressed as a high-calibre business platform. Some 65% of exhibitors secured their space for the 2029 edition while the event was still running.



SPIEL ESSEN

A GRAND CELEBRATION

SPIEL Essen 2025 was a trade fair of superlatives: From 23–26 October, 220,000 people attended the gaming event of the year – a new record, thanks in part to the inclusion of Hall 7 for the first time. This also meant a new record in terms of exhibition space (77,500 square metres), without compromising the atmosphere, as Carol Rapp, Managing Director of organiser Merz Verlag, pointed out: “Our goal is to ensure a smooth visitor flow while welcoming as many guests as possible.” Thanks to a combination of daily ticket availability, wide aisles and intelligently structured halls, that goal was achieved. A total of 948 exhibitors from 50 nations presented more than 1,700 new products and services in Essen. But on the Friday of the fair, one classic took centre stage: 1,170 people played CATAN Connect together in the Grugahalle – setting a new world record.

www.spiel-essen.de



Photos: SPIEL Essen/Lars Heidrich

55 editions of North Rhine-Westphalia's major consumer fair have been held. MHH Erlebnisswelten took place from 6–9 November 2025, marking the “double number” anniversary with exciting new highlights such as the “Design Summit” and the fantasy world “Annotopia”.

www.mhh-essen.de

NEW IMAGE CAMPAIGN

EMPLOYEES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Closeness, flexibility and authenticity – these are the core corporate values conveyed by Messe Essen's new image campaign. Under the slogan “Success made in Essen”, the spotlight is on the people behind the scenes – employees from a wide range of departments who act as authentic ambassadors for the company. “Our strength lies in the combination of a central location, customised space solutions and outstanding service. The new image campaign perfectly conveys this formula for success,” explains Daniela Mühlen, Head of Communications & Advertising at Messe Essen GmbH. The new brand identity was developed by the Düsseldorf-based marketing and creative agency Hey Unkelbach. Employees from nearly all departments took part as testimonials in Messe Essen's new brand campaign.



Employees from almost all departments have contributed testimonials to Messe Essen's new brand identity.

GRUGAHALLE

CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP



Event Manager
Sylvia Thum

On 1 July 2025, Sylvia Thum took over management of the Grugahalle. The experienced event manager previously headed operations at Stadthalle Mülheim an der Ruhr, after spending around 20 years in various leadership positions at renowned event agencies in Düsseldorf and the Lower Rhine region. “I am very pleased that with Sylvia Thum, we have

found an outstanding expert in live communication who shares our high standards for customer service and professional event management,” said Oliver P. Kuhrt, CEO of Messe Essen GmbH. For Sylvia Thum, “the Grugahalle is a true institution in the Ruhr area's event landscape. It is a great honour for me to shape its future together with a dedicated team.”

www.grugahalle.de



The large display screen in Amprion's main control centre covers 133 square metres, making it one of the largest in the world.

EVERYTHING IN FLUX



New technologies, new business models, new stakeholders: The self-conception of the energy industry is changing, and the cards are being reshuffled. Some are even talking about disruption. A look ahead to E-world energy & water.

■ If you're looking for the big picture when it comes to the energy supply, a visit to a building complex in Brauweiler, near Cologne, is recommended. The main control centre of the transmission system operator Amprion is located in a brick building in this small town. That may sound unremarkable – until you see the feedback display. That's what the engineers call the roughly 133-square-metre screen in front of them. The lines, diagrams and columns of figures show power flows – including the states of 70,000 switching devices in 1,100 substations and measurement data from around 3,500 transmission lines. All of it in real time, supported by two data centres and artificial intelligence. A large part of the energy industry today is data science, after all.

For a long time, the industry was not exactly a pioneer of digitalisation. But that is changing: Combined with the shift to renewable energy, new technologies are profoundly transforming the energy sector, and new business models are attracting new stakeholders. Anyone who wants to get a sense of this development will find no better place

than E-world energy & water. Europe's largest energy trade fair has increased its number of exhibitors by more than 48% over the past decade, and it will come as no surprise if the next event, from 10–12 February 2026, once again breaks attendance records.

The grid operator as innovator

Amprion is a good example of the industry's evolving self-conception. The term “grid operator” might sound a bit old-fashioned at first. It's true that the former RWE subsidiary's roots go back to the 1920s, when its mission was to supply the industry along the Rhine and Ruhr – not only with coal from the region but also with hydropower from Austria's Vorarlberg region. Then as now, Brauweiler remains one of the system's nerve centres. But to meet the challenges of the energy transition, Amprion aims to reinvent itself – as a “next-generation transmission system operator”. What that entails goes far beyond simply expanding and upgrading its 9,300 kilometres of transmission lines, as outlined in the company's first Innovation Report, published in 2022: “The spectrum ranges from new drilling methods for laying underground cables to the use of artificial intelligence in system management; from new operating equipment that stabilises the grid to digital analysis tools that help us model the energy system of the future.”

The challenges involved are complex and, in many cases, only understandable to experts. Simplified, the formula for the grid's future might read: more capacity and higher utilisation with the same stability – despite vastly increased volatility. The cause of these fluctuations is well known: the expansion of renewable energies. In 2024, it also introduced Germans to a new word – the “Hellbrise” (“bright breeze”). This is the opposite of the →



Technologies known as STATCOM systems are among the tools grid operators use to keep the system stable.



»Our goal is to enable municipal utilities to market their renewable energy independently.«

Hind Seiferth, CEO and Co-founder, Unigy GmbH

→ already familiar “Dunkelflaute” (“renewable energy lull”), namely a day when renewable sources generate more electricity than the grid can absorb. On the one hand, that’s good news – proof that decarbonisation is well underway. On the other hand, it brings new challenges, because maintaining grid balance remains the operators’ top priority.

At Amprion, the focus is not only on its own 11,000-kilometre-long grid. A separate section of the large display wall in the main control centre shows a map of Europe with system conditions, alarm messages and cross-border electricity flows. Together with Swissgrid, Switzerland’s national grid company, Amprion is responsible for coordinating emergency measures within Europe’s interconnected power system, which spans 30 countries – making it the largest of its kind in the world. That the system’s stability can be at risk was demonstrated by the blackout in Spain and Portugal in April

2025. “According to initial information, there were problems with voltage control in Spain,” explains Dr Christoph Schneiders, Head of Grid & System Operation at Amprion. Investigating the causes of the Spanish blackout is complex and is also expected to take some

time, with the final report scheduled for publication in 2026. For Europe’s grid operators, this is “an important process for learning from the event

– including in Germany,” Schneiders continues, adding: “International cooperation and knowledge sharing will help us operate the system safely in the future as well.” According to Schneiders, regardless of the events in Spain, “the technical requirements for facilities connected to the continental European synchronous area should be updated promptly.” This, he said, is “an important next step for the safety of the interconnected grid in continental Europe.” Proposals from the industry have already been submitted to the European Commission, “but their adoption is still pending.”

AI for municipal utilities made in Essen

The uncontrolled feed-in of ever more renewable energy can not only destabilise the grid but also cause wild swings in electricity market prices. In the first half of this year, for example, the peak price for one megawatt-hour of electricity reached 583 euros on 20 January, while on 11 May – a sunny Sunday – it fell to minus 250 euros. Negative price days, when producers must pay to inject electricity into the grid because supply exceeds demand, are expected to become more common in the future.



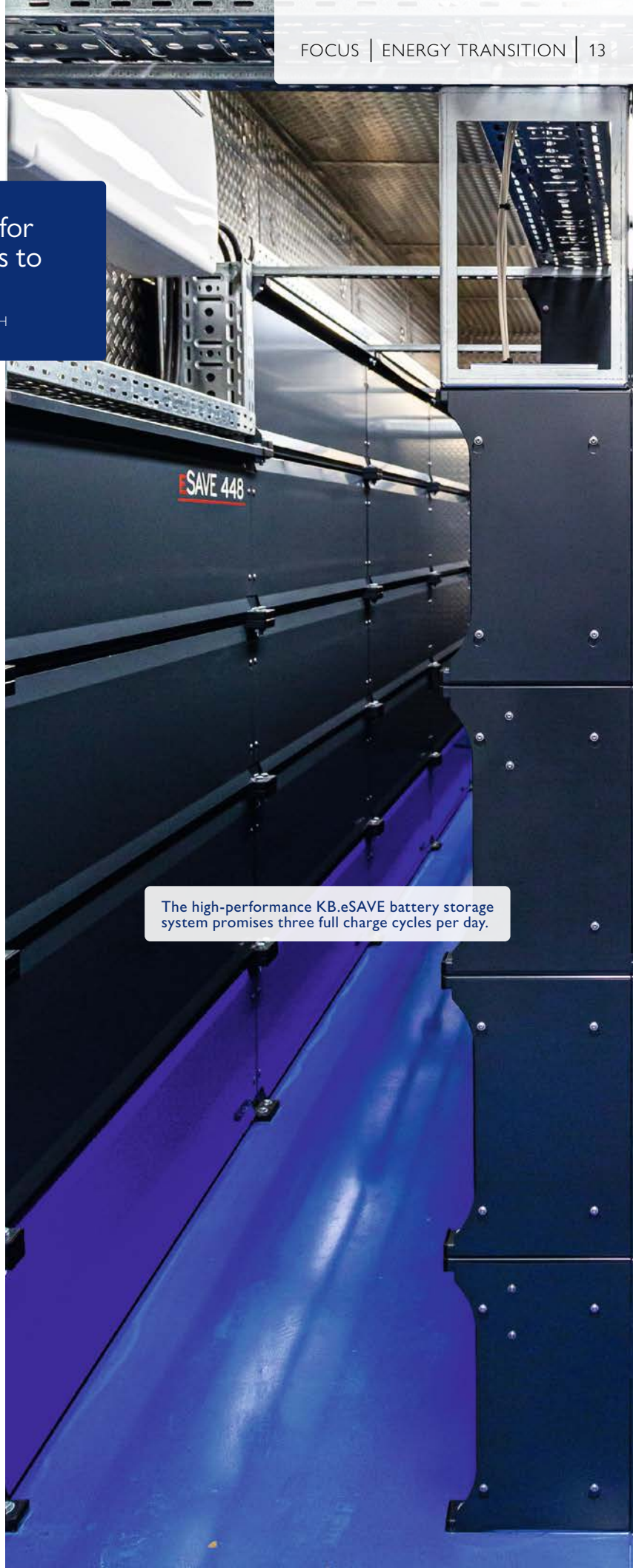
»Demand has been high for a year now and continues to grow steadily.«

Dirk Labudda, Managing Director, KB.energy GmbH

In Europe, there are two main electricity exchanges, with the EPEX SPOT in Paris specialising in short-term (intraday) trading. Prices there fluctuate by the second, determined by the interplay of supply and demand, much like on a stock exchange. Large corporations have long managed their trading operations using AI. The Essen-based start-up Unigy provides its algorithms primarily to small and medium-sized municipal utilities. There are around 1,000 such local electricity providers in Germany – a unique feature that Unigy co-founder Hind Seiferth sees as an advantage in shaping the energy transition, thanks to their flexibility and proximity to customers. “Our goal is to enable municipal utilities to market their renewable energy independently, rather than handing over most of the value creation to external providers.”

Some 19 utilities are already customers, two even co-shareholders, and demand is high, Seiferth assures. The main obstacle to the start-up’s further expansion – which won the NRW Founder’s Award in 2022 – lies in financing. Because Unigy purchases electricity on behalf of its clients but receives payment only later, there is a gap of up to six weeks. There is no state support for this, and according to Seiferth’s experience, banks are extremely reluctant to offer advance financing. “That’s really a huge problem.”

Anyone wanting to enter the battery storage business must also raise millions quickly – at least if they aim to compete in the lucrative megawatt segment. The potential, however, is clear: Generate electricity yourself and sell it when prices are high – it sounds logical. In Sulingen, Lower Saxony, one such high-performance battery storage system is already in live operation. It was developed by KB.energy, a subsidiary of the KB Group, one of the market leaders in home and energy tech- ➔



The high-performance KB.eSAVE battery storage system promises three full charge cycles per day.



€833

→ nology located in north-west Germany. Interest has been growing since last spring, says Managing Director Dirk Labudda, and his team now demonstrates the KB.eSAVE system “almost daily”. The potential customer base is large and includes municipal utilities, solar park operators, project developers and even commercial property owners.

While the KB.eSAVE, equipped with lithium-iron-phosphate (LiFePO₄) cells, is designed for electricity trading and promises up to three full charge cycles per day, iron-air batteries are experiencing a renaissance elsewhere as a long-duration storage solution. At Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands, the start-up Ore Energy has installed the first operational iron-air battery storage unit in the EU. Meanwhile, in Lincoln, Maine, Form Energy is planning an XXL storage facility with a capacity of 1.5 megawatts lasting up to 100 hours. Originally, the company – financed by Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson – had aimed for 8,500 megawatt-hours, but that would have overwhelmed the local grid.

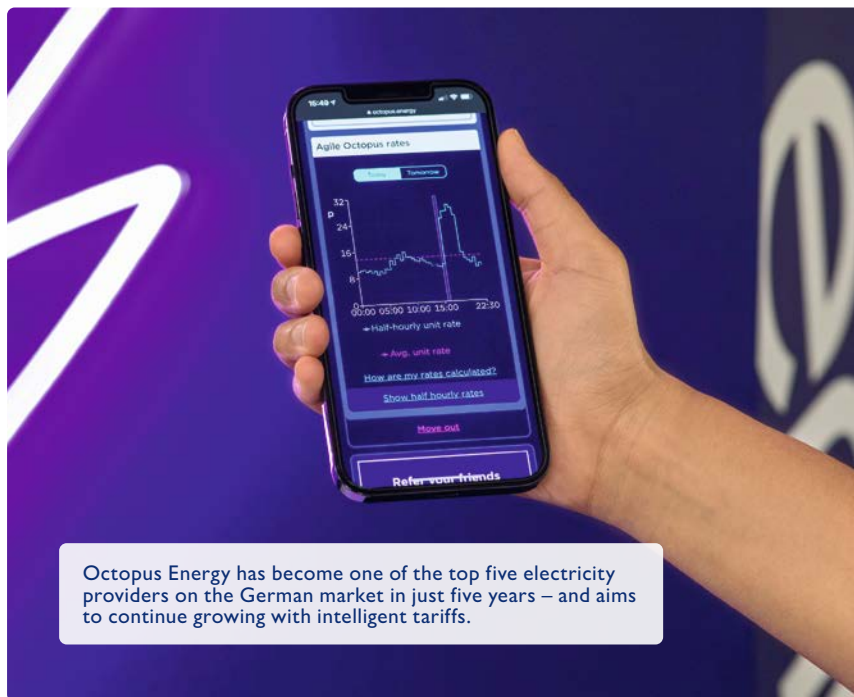
Smart meters: the biggest gap

In Germany, the biggest gap between ambition and reality lies in the roll-out of so-called smart meters – digital meters that, when integrated into digital grids, can coordinate electricity generation, storage and consumption. Grid operators could, for instance, temporarily shut down small PV systems to prevent overloads, while private consumers could benefit from dynamic electricity tariffs or charge their electric cars according to the availability of renewable energy.

“Smart Energy” has been a dedicated exhibition area at E-world energy & water since 2010, but the roll-out has yet to gain real momentum in Germany.

was the range between the highest and lowest price for one megawatt-hour of electricity on the European power exchange in the first half of 2025.

As of early this year, only 2% of households were equipped with smart meters – compared to near-universal coverage of next-generation meters in Finland and Sweden. The United Kingdom also serves as a model, with nearly 70% coverage. There, software entrepreneur Greg Jackson has written an impressive success story: The company he founded in 2015, Octopus Energy, is now the market leader – thanks largely to innovative electricity tariffs based on smart meter data. The company has been active on the German market since 2020, and “we couldn’t have wished for a better start” is the sentiment within the company. With over one million customers, it is already among the top five providers. And this is “only the beginning”, as Germany CEO Bastian Gierull declared in the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung” in late September. “The German energy market is definitely ripe for disruption.”

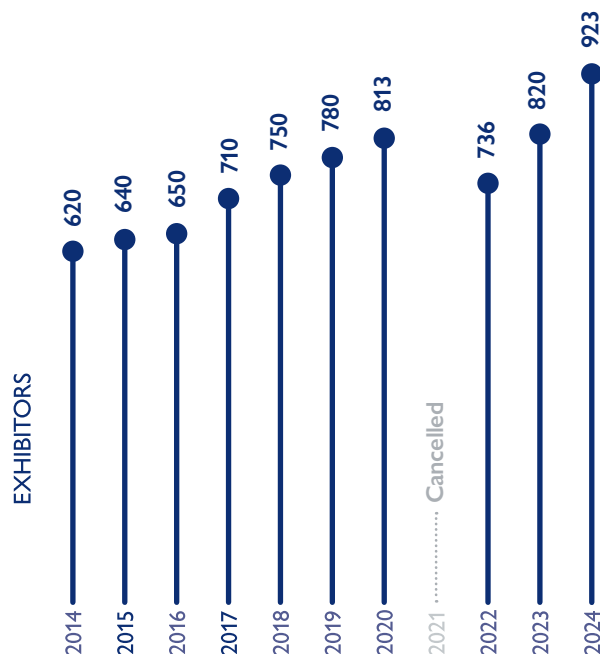


Octopus Energy has become one of the top five electricity providers on the German market in just five years – and aims to continue growing with intelligent tariffs.

E-WORLD ENERGY & WATER – EUROPE’S INDUSTRY MEETING POINT

E-world energy & water won’t actually open its doors at Messe Essen until 10 February 2026, but in the virtual space, the kick-off has already taken place. In mid-September, the digital launch event featured discussions on the future of Europe’s power grid, followed in November by a lecture series on the use of AI in the energy sector. Anticipation for the top event of the energy industry is enormous. Even though the 2026 edition of E-world energy & water will, for the first time, also occupy Hall 6 at Messe Essen, by the end of August nearly all exhibition spaces had already been booked.

www.e-world-essen.com



IN THE MOOD FOR TRAVEL

Already planning for 2026? The holiday and recreational fairs in Essen showcase the trends of the new season.

www.reise-camping.de

www.fahrrad-essen.de

■ **AT HOME EVERYWHERE** – Van life clearly isn't the short-lived trend some had expected. Living in a mobile home is on the rise, with endless possibilities for personalisation and upgrades. "It has produced a real form of craftsmanship," says Gunter Arndt, Project Head of Reise + Camping. At the holiday fair, which will be held from 25 February to 1 March 2026, the Van Life section is growing significantly.

■ **CAMPING WITH A FUTURE** – Overnight stays at German campsites reached a new record of 42.9 million in 2024, and figures from the first half of 2025 suggest yet another record will be attained. What the campsite of the future might look like will be showcased at Reise + Camping in cooperation with the German Camping Association (Bundesverband der Campingwirtschaft in Deutschland e. V.). Visitors can expect regional and thematic experience zones – from beer garden to playground.

■ **SEA FOR EVERYONE** – The cruise industry continues to be a growth driver for tourism, and AIDA Cruises' 200 sqm stand at the next Reise + Camping highlights this. On the occasion of its 20th anniversary, Germany's third-largest tour operator will showcase its increasingly diverse range of offers, including some ships of various sizes and thematic profiles that have been completely refurbished.



Photos PR, Diana Blinkert

■ **NATURE IN THE CITY** – Sustainability remains one of the major tourism megatrends. Urban hiking allows experiences in nature to be combined with the charm of a city trip. In Essen, for instance, 100 kilometres of well-marked trails are just waiting to be explored. Traditional hiking destinations are, of course, also represented at Reise + Camping.



■ **LIGHTER AND SMALLER ON THE ROAD** – The German motorhome industry has successfully campaigned for extending the Class B driver's license to include vehicles up to 4.25 tonnes (instead of the previous 3.5 tonnes). Nevertheless, due to the economic situation, many customers prefer smaller and lighter vehicles these days. This goes hand in hand with lightweight, compact bikes – such as the e-bikes from i:SY, which can be tested at Fahrrad Essen from 26 February to 1 March.

MOMENTUM FOR THE UPSWING



Full halls in sight: Most major heating manufacturers have already registered for SHK+E ESSEN. The trade fair will take place from 17–20 March 2026.



Sanitation, heating, air conditioning and electrics: SHK+E ESSEN brings together all the professionals for the first industry highlight of 2026.

■ When will the construction sector see an up-swing? SHK+E ESSEN, which will be held from 17–20 March 2026, could serve as an early indicator and driving force to answer this question. The potential for catch-up growth is undeniable – whether for new construction projects by private investors and housing associations or for the modernisation of existing buildings. According to the building report by the German Energy Agency (dena), around four million heating systems in Germany are over 30 years old, and experts estimate that eight to ten million bathrooms are in need of upgrading.

As the first industry-wide highlight of the year, SHK+E ESSEN will focus particularly on hybrid heating systems and heat pumps, cross-sector solutions and smart sanitary technology. Nearly all major heating manufacturers are among the exhibitors who have registered well in advance for this future-focused platform. “This year, we are not only renewing our heat pump portfolio completely but also taking our energy management to the next level, so we are really looking forward to 2026,” explains Dr Tillmann von Schroeter, Managing Director of Vaillant Deutschland. Burkhard Max,

Managing Director of STIEBEL ELTRON Deutschland Vertriebsgesellschaft, also conveys a positive sentiment: “For STIEBEL ELTRON, the trade fair marks an ideal start to 2026, bringing together numerous HVAC professionals with purchasing power and showcasing a growing interest in heat pumps and sustainable technologies.”

One goal: promoting cross-sector synergies

Heating and energy systems that run on electricity play a crucial role on the path to greater sustainability and energy security. For this reason, and to foster synergies from cross-sector solutions, electrical offers will be featured for the first time directly alongside heating technology in Hall 3. Offers related to mobility and tools can be found by HVAC professionals in Hall 2 and the Galeria. Halls 6, 7 and 8, in turn, will be entirely dedicated to modern bathroom fittings, sanitary installations (both in front of and behind walls), and innovative drinking water and wastewater technology. The Sanitation Hub sends a clear signal to sanitary manufacturers. Additionally, themed tours and events for architects and visitors from the Benelux countries are planned across the exhibition area.



Thomas Brückle, Head of Marketing, Geberit Vertriebs GmbH and Advisory Board Member, SHK+E ESSEN

SYSTEMATIC SUCCESS

Despite a challenging environment, Geberit reports positive results. This is thanks in large part to structured marketing. Trade fairs such as SHK+E ESSEN play a clearly defined role in this approach.

■ In many companies in southern Germany, the new year starts a few days later due to public holidays. At Geberit's German headquarters in Pfullendorf, Baden-Württemberg, this is different – at least for Marketing Director Thomas Brückle and his team. For them, the turn of the year signals the start of the main customer-engagement season. For several years now, the beginning of the second calendar

week normally sees the “NahDran Tour” (“Up-Close Tour”) kicking off – a nationwide roadshow in which the sanitary manufacturer presents its latest innovations. The tour includes 80 to 100 events, with the goal of attaining at least 12,000 customer contacts by the end of the first quarter. “The nationwide roadshow is the perfect complement to the spring trade fairs, allowing us to close gaps in customer engagement early in the year,” Brückle explains the strategy.

In this highly systematic, metrics-driven process, trade fairs in the sanitary sector – traditionally held in Germany during spring – play a clearly defined role. “First, we use them to further activate customers for our own events, because experience shows that a single approach is often not enough. Second, other strong trade fair brands attract visitors, and we see potential in this. That's why trade fairs remain an important building block in our brand communication.” In 2026, SHK+E ESSEN at Messe Essen will kick off this new season: From 17–20 March, it brings together innovative solutions in sanitation, heating, air conditioning and electrics – introducing several new features in the

upcoming edition. One of these is the Sanitation Hub, an inspiration area that sets daily thematic focuses in close coordination with the industry. Additionally, themed tours and events for architects and visitors from the Benelux countries are planned across the exhibition area. Among the big industry names present, alongside Geberit, is Hansgrohe, for example. “Especially in challenging times, it’s important for us to demonstrate our presence, actively listen and work with our partners to shape the future,” says Volker Stark, Managing Director of Hansgrohe Deutschland GmbH, explaining the company’s commitment.

»It’s good and also important that SHK+E ESSEN is giving more attention to the sanitary sector.«

Thomas Brückle, Head of Marketing, Geberit Vertriebs GmbH and Advisory Board member, SHK+E ESSEN

“It’s good and also important that SHK+E ESSEN is giving more attention to the sanitary sector,” says Thomas Brückle, who serves on the fair’s Advisory Board and is valued there as a constructive, though also critical, voice. Speaking with ESSEN AFFAIRS, he doesn’t hold back. “Trade fairs have suffered since the COVID-19 pandemic,” he notes. Furthermore, politically speaking, the sanitary sector has been overshadowed by discussions around heating systems, and even if policymakers provide the long-overdue stimulus for a recovery of the construction sector, Geberit expects an upswing only from mid-2026 on.

It’s all in the right mix

For Brückle, this makes it all the more important to boldly try new ideas and give them enough time to succeed. He focuses not least on the many small control variables the trade fair team has adjusted – such as free entry tickets and greater advertising presence, especially on social media. “With these measures, we are on the right track.” Then again, even if visitor numbers have not yet reached pre-COVID-19 levels, the quality of conversations has become better: “Visitors today arrive better informed and prepared, and often bring very specific

project questions where they need our support.” The fact that guided tours are now offered not only for planners and architects but also for tradesmen and installers is the right signal, Brückle feels. And although SHK+E ESSEN recently achieved a high decision-maker rate of 72% among participants, Brückle emphasises the appeal of the event’s well-balanced mix. The most crowded areas at the exhibition stand are usually the assembly tables, “where installers can see how easy our products are to fit.” This ease of installation is becoming increasingly important amidst skilled labour shortages – an area where Geberit excels, as the figures show.

Despite a challenging market environment, the publicly listed company achieves convincing results, quarter after quarter.

Brückle currently sees “no weaknesses in Geberit’s product portfolio”, and promising innovations are also on the horizon for 2026:

from the new Renova Plan washbasin and furniture range to shower floors and drains, as well as extensions to the toilet system with products designed for both in front of and behind the wall. There is much to see – at the latest in March, in Essen.

www.shke-essen.de

Bright prospects: the new Renova Plan washbasin and furniture range from Geberit comes with a fresh new look. The sanitary manufacturer will showcase several of its 2026 product innovations at SHK+E ESSEN from 17–20 March.



THE STRAIGHT TALKER

Frank Hehl has a weakness for being direct. This is something he shares with the skilled tradespeople he represents as Executive Director of the SHK NRW Trade Association.

■ The WhatsApp message reached Frank Hehl around three o'clock in the morning. "Dad, I'm going to become an HVAC systems mechanic," wrote the older of his two sons, apparently after much thought. "I didn't recruit him," Hehl says with a smile. Even though that happens to be a key part of his role. As Executive Director of the SHK NRW Trade Association, Hehl is, among other things, the top recruiter for the HVAC trade in Germany's most populous state.

Since 1 February 2024, the 56-year-old has been steering the direction of the association, which represents 5,800 businesses. For him, it marked a shift in perspective after more than 28 years in the heating industry – though not a completely fresh start. "I've worked with the skilled trades my entire professional life," says Hehl. That was already true when, as a certified mechanical engineer, he developed boilers in close collaboration with field practitioners. The dialogue never stopped – and what Hehl came to value was the "direct manner of speaking" that he himself practices. Clarity in communication, he says, reflects the honesty and respect in the trades, and the "sense of community among companies" still occasionally gives even this industry veteran goosebumps.

Big challenges in politics

In his new role, Hehl, the son of a German studies professor, has made it his mission to "stay in touch

with how people really talk". That's why he is at the association's headquarters in Düsseldorf for only about two days a week on average, while the rest of his time is spent travelling – visiting local trade associations, promoting ideas at the grassroots level and trying to gauge public sentiment. The ability to listen is essential for that.

It's no different in the dozen or so committees in which Hehl serves. His strong political connections – reaching all the way to Berlin – were one of the reasons he was chosen for the role. After all, the challenges the industry faces are well known – but they're also formidable. Chief among them, in Hehl's view, is the interconnection between the Building Energy Act (GEG) and municipal heat planning – "the main mistake," as he calls it – because it has created a wait-and-see attitude among homeowners and investors, one that is not objectively justified, as he explains with an engineer's logic. "A heating transition needs to take place, especially since the CO₂ phase-out has had constitutional status since 2021. And 80% of this heating transition will occur locally, i.e. in boiler rooms – which in North Rhine-Westphalia alone will require the replacement of around 3.7 million fossil fuel heating systems. "We finally need to get started!"

The same applies to the investment backlog in the sanitary sector, where Hehl hopes for intelligent funding of therapeutically equipped bathrooms.

Then there's the notorious German bureaucracy, currently exemplified by the Collective Bargaining Act (*Tariftreuegesetz*), which Hehl considers unnecessary. It would be simpler to link the awarding of municipal contracts to membership in a trade association, whose member companies (in NRW, two-thirds of all businesses) already pay at least the negotiated wages. And among non-members, it is largely the same, except for a few "black sheep", because they all "compete for skilled workers". That is why recruiting apprentices is also at the top of Hehl's agenda. North Rhine-Westphalia is relatively well positioned in this regard; around 10,000 apprentices are currently "in the pipeline", and recently the number of applicants has even risen slightly. Yet there is still untapped potential, and the skilled trades must explore new avenues.

One such path is the part-time bachelor's programme in home, energy and systems technology (HEAT), which the association launched together with the University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf, offering career perspectives beyond the master craftsman level. With the help of sponsors, 32 university spots were created for the first year. But a closer look also reveals a persistent challenge. Only three of these spots are held by women. For Hehl, such numbers are unacceptable: "We can't afford to ignore more than half the population just because we are supposedly a male-dominated business."

Making it easier for women already in the profession to balance work and family life – for example, through a year of parental leave for self-employed workers – would be one approach. Another is to put role models in the spotlight. The association has planned precisely that for 2026, featuring the focus "Women in the Skilled Trades" in its apprentice lounge at SHK+E ESSEN. When it comes down to it, Frank Hehl emphasises, "A commitment from industry to the trade fair is also a commitment to supporting young talent." Hehl views the rising number of registrations for SHK+E ESSEN 2026 as evidence that companies truly benefit from taking part in the fair. He expresses this in his signature "straight talk" style: "I think word has spread that those who took part were rewarded by



Frank Hehl (56) has represented the interests of 5,800 companies as Executive Director of the SHK NRW Trade Association since 1 February 2024.

»A commitment from industry to the trade fair is also a commitment to supporting young talent.«

Frank Hehl, Executive Director of the SHK NRW Trade Association

the trades." And this is how things will continue at the next edition: "We want the 'doers' of the heating transition and everyone focused on age-appropriate bathroom renovations to meet on-site and engage in personal exchange. At the same time, we are building bridges between the analogue and digital worlds in our trade."

www.shk-nrw.de

With more than 500 hectares of cultivation area, Baumschule Ley is among Europe's leading nurseries.

A full-page photograph of a nursery. In the foreground, a worker in a green shirt is on a red scissor lift, pruning a tree with vibrant yellow autumn leaves. The ground is covered in green grass and fallen yellow leaves. In the background, rows of similar trees stretch into the distance under a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent white banner is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the text 'PLANT GOOD THINGS – AND SPREAD THE WORD'.

PLANT GOOD THINGS –
AND SPREAD THE WORD



Trees and shrubs play a vital role in mitigating the impacts of climate change. The new “Woody Arena” at IPM ESSEN will be the meeting point for this topic. In addition, the world’s leading horticultural trade fair offers international professionals many other forward-looking themes.

■ It takes some time for Christoph Dirksen to reach the far edges of Baumschule Ley, a tree nursery in Meckenheim, south-west of Bonn. After all, the nursery that Dirksen manages covers more than 500 hectares of cultivation area, making it one of the leading nurseries in Europe. That doesn’t stop Dirksen from looking beyond his own company’s figurative borders – and this will be evident at the upcoming IPM ESSEN, taking place from 27–30 January 2026. Because that’s when the “Woody Arena” will make its debut at the world’s leading horticultural trade fair.

This new format is designed as a platform for sharing knowledge, practical experience and future topics. Each day, a changing line-up of lectures, panel discussions and presentations will explore the latest trends in practice, research and breeding. Christoph Dirksen is one of the initiators of the arena. “We need to talk more about our product,” he says – but not in the form of marketing messages. “It’s about the substance.” And when it comes to trees and shrubs, that substance has, for some time now, largely meant climate change. The year 2024 was the warmest year on record worldwide, and a 2023 study by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal) showed that greening cities can be a form of public health protection. Based on data from 93 European cities, the study concluded that one-third of deaths caused by urban heat islands could be avoided if 30% of urban areas were covered with trees. But achieving that level of shade would require a massive tree-planting campaign now.



»Every year, we come back from Essen with two or three new customers.«

Christoph Dirksen, Managing Director, Baumschule Ley

The conditions for this are promising. “For the past six to eight years,” Dirksen has observed an “exponentially growing” demand from municipalities and cities, especially for climate-resilient species. The German Association of Nurseries (BdB) has compiled 65 of these “trees of the future” in a brochure. A more recent trend is the de-sealing of urban surfaces to better manage heavy rainfall events.

Spontaneous purchases on-site

According to Dirksen, more and more municipal decision makers are using IPM ESSEN to learn about products for blue-green infrastructure. The benefits are tangible: “It starts with us being added to the distribution list for the next tender after our talks at the trade fair.” The early timing of IPM also favours short-term orders for spring, whether directly in Essen or following a spontaneous visit to Meckenheim, just 80 minutes away. Whether 400 lime trees to Turkey, a major shipment of young trees to Canada – “I’ve realised that every year, we come back from Essen with two or three new customers,” Dirksen says.

30%
tree coverage
could reduce
the number
of heat-related
deaths in
cities by
one-third.

Source: Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal)



»IPM ESSEN remains very important to us.«

Leon Hünting, Sales Director, Brandkamp Jungpflanzen

→ Evergreen exhibitor with a new presentation

Brandkamp Jungpflanzen has exhibited at IPM ESSEN every year since the very first edition in 1983, and the fact that Managing Director Hubert Brandkamp, one of the trade fair's co-founders, missed the last one due to illness "still bothers him today," reports Sales Director Leon Hünting. "Because IPM is still very important to us." The company is all the more excited for the next edition, for which Brandkamp is currently developing a new presentation concept. "Since our product range is more geared toward April/May, the early trade fair date is always a challenge for us," explains Hünting.

Otherwise, continuity remains key, for the placement of the 55-square-metre stand in Young Plants Hall 2 is a familiar fixture for customers.

When will AI arrive in horticulture?

If there's still time between meetings, Leon Hünting plans to take a look at the floristry section. Hünting, who once considered studying IT before pursuing a career in horticulture, also has a personal passion for the technology area. That's where you'll also find Christoph Dirksen. Robotics is one of the topics that interests him – and he's also curious to see whether there will be any practical AI applications on display. Many things are conceivable, he says, such as improved forecasting systems. Dirksen also has a general piece of advice for visiting the fair. "You need to walk along the edges," because that's often where you can find small, young companies that may not yet have large marketing budgets, but often present the most interesting innovations.

www.ipm-essen.de





GLOBAL GREEN

Sustainability is becoming an increasingly important competitive factor in the metal packaging realm. At METPACK, literally the entire industry comes together.

■ It is primarily internationality that makes trade fairs world-leading events, and in this regard, METPACK has traditionally been at the forefront. At the last edition in 2023, over 80% of exhibitors arrived from abroad, with the figure for trade visitors only slightly lower. And nearly six months ahead of METPACK 2026, Head of Project Christina Kleinpaß reports: “It looks like we will even see some growth here.”

The fact that growth is still possible at this level is due to the fact that, in addition to the beverage and food industries, as well as pharmaceutical and cosmetics companies, “other sectors that prioritise sustainability and resource conservation are increasingly turning to metal packaging.” Participating for the first time is Röchling Industrial Ruppertsweiler, a manufacturer of plastic interlayers for sterilisation processes. “This shows how versatile and future-oriented the industry has become.”

CO₂ reduction and recycling

Another platform for innovations will be the “Talk in a Can” forum, taking place from 5–8 May 2026. This open forum brings people and markets together. The keynote speaker at the METPACK Conference will be Clarissa Odenwald, CEO of Thyssenkrupp Rasselstein. The German global player in tinplate production “is driving the transformation toward climate-neutral steel production, for example through the use of hydrogen instead of natural gas as an energy source,” notes Christina Kleinpaß.

Overall, sustainability is increasingly a decisive competitive factor in the industry. In addition to CO₂ reduction, processes to further increase the metal packaging recycling rates are central. One notable example is Uni-Alloy, which enables beverage cans and lids to be manufactured from the same alloy. Sustainability is also one of the criteria for the METPACK Innovation Award, for which applications will open in January 2026. Plenty of material for discussion, then, for industry decision makers when they meet again in Essen after three years. At the last event, decision makers accounted for 88% of attendees – a figure that will be hard to beat.

THE STARS SHINE IN CHINA, TOO

From Essen to Suzhou: Messe Essen connects two of the world's leading automotive festivals. Here, an exhibitor from the Essen Motor Show shares his experiences at the German joint stand during the GT Show.

■ Suzhou and Essen are 8,767 kilometres apart as the crow flies. Yet instead of differences, Luca Felshart found common ground during his recent visit to China. “The enthusiasm for cars, the openness and the emotionality are all the same,” said the editor from E-Mags Media. The two fairs he’s referring to are both top-tier events in the global automotive scene: the Essen Motor Show and the GT Show. Each attracts around 200,000 fans annually,



Luca Felshart (2nd from right) of E-Mags Media at the German Pavilion during the GT Show 2025.

and both demonstrate that sport and custom vehicles can captivate audiences regardless of the type of drive.

Messe Essen serves as the bridge between the birthplace of the automobile and the world's largest car market. Since 2024, it has been organising the "German Pavilion" at the GT Show, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. While the exact German line-up for the next edition was still undecided at the time of publication, the response so far underscores the value of this strategic collaboration. The partnership is set to continue at least until 2028, much to the delight of the German Association of Automotive Tuners (VDAT). "The clear, visible and measurable successes of our member companies in 2025 give us the drive and motivation to carry this project forward," said outgoing VDAT Managing Director Harald Schmidtke and his successor Dirk Kreidenweiß in unison, on the occasion of the new edition of the German joint stand from 27–29 March 2026.

"We think globally"

At E-Mags Media, the date has long been inscribed on the calendar. For the company, close contact with China represents the next step in a success story that began back in 2009 with the launch of an online magazine for Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts. Today, the site www.mercedes-fans.de attracts over one million visitors per month. This led to the idea of connecting Mercedes owners in the real world. Today, the festival "Schöne Sterne" ("Beautiful Stars"), set against the picturesque backdrop of the LWL-Museum Henrichshütte in Hattingen, is Europe's largest Mercedes festival, welcoming 15,000 guests from 18 countries. In recent years, two streetwear brands have also been added, "to engage younger fans with the brand," explains Luca Felshart. The heart of this "LeBENZgefühl" (the title of one of the collections) is the Mercedes FanWorld at the Essen Motor Show spread over 600 square metres, it will once again bring together a dozen or so exceptional vehicles this year.

"But we definitely think globally," Felshart continues, and it was only natural to make the leap to China for the second time since 2019. That bold move was rewarded in multiple ways. First, conversations provided first-hand insights into the



interest of the "extremely young audience". One key takeaway: "The 'Made in Germany' label is still highly valued in China as a mark of quality." The premium trade fair stand "conveyed this perfectly". In addition, it was possible to establish contacts with potential Chinese industrial partners – for example, from the textile production sector. Last but certainly not least, the German joint stand allowed for valuable interaction with other German exhibitors – personal encounters that lay the groundwork for deeper connections back in Essen.

The sense of community was strengthened even further by the supporting programme organised by Messe Essen, which in March included a visit to a delivery factory of the manufacturer NIO. "Such exclusive insights are priceless," Felshart emphasises. Overall, he says, the Messe Essen team did "a sensational job" – from "perfect organisation" to a "warm and welcoming atmosphere", which created the right environment for meaningful conversations. "You really feel you're in the best hands there."

The nucleus of "LeBENZgefühl": the Mercedes FanWorld in Hall 3 of the Essen Motor Show.



In conversation:
Deborah Kather (Team
Leader Digital Media) and
Tom Kraayvanger (Team
Leader Press) at the Messe
Essen Press Centre.

»WE NEED TO ACT MORE AND MORE QUICKLY«

The copy deadline was yesterday, and English makes some things easier: Deborah Kather and Tom Kraayvanger explain how the teams in Messe Essen's Press & Digital Media Department are managing the ongoing shift in communication.

ESSEN AFFAIRS: There's a lot of talk about the media transformation. How has your role changed in recent years?

TOM KRAAYVANGER: In general, you could say we've moved from reactive information providers to topic managers and strategic communicators. A major driver of this change is digitalisation, which in press work has become most visible in the increasingly 24/7 cycle. The classic editorial deadline is becoming less and less relevant, so we need to act more and more quickly. That can be challenging, for example, if we receive a detailed question to a

technical topic over the weekend with a one- or two-hour deadline.

Digitalisation also means more complexity due to an ever-growing number of channels, especially in social media.

DEBORAH KATHER: What makes social media particularly complex is monitoring. On the one hand, automated systems aren't yet fully mature, and platforms such as LinkedIn, which require an account, cannot track. On the other hand, at large trade shows, we're tagged, i.e. mentioned in posts,

practically every minute by guests or companies, and it keeps us fully occupied interacting with our community.

KRAAYVANGER: Of course, in press work there are also more channels, each with its own dynamics and target audiences. A daily newspaper, for instance, always has an online presence, which in terms of reach is now sometimes more important than the print edition. Added to that are our own social media channels or web TV. In this context, images – especially moving images or video – are becoming increasingly important for our content creation.

Just how connected does press work have to be these days?

KRAAYVANGER: Our teams work very closely together, and because we sit near each other on two floors in Messehaus Ost, most of our coordination happens on the fly. That's a good thing, because, for example, we sometimes send out a traditional press release and it immediately sparks discussions on social media.

How does your approach differ depending on the trade show?

KATHER: One challenge on social media is how to address exhibitors. We always try to communicate without using the formal "Sie" in German, because we naturally address our followers informally, and while we don't want to come across as stiff with exhibitors, we still need to maintain a more professional tone. This is easier on LinkedIn as we communicate in English there, which doesn't make this distinction (*laughs*).

How do you decide which online platform to use?

KATHER: It depends on the content, target audience and type of interaction. For example, we're considering launching a TikTok channel for the Essen Motor Show. TikTok would give us the chance to reach a different audience. But there are practical challenges: As a municipal company, we can't use every piece of music for copyright reasons, meaning we can't simply follow every TikTok trend.

Do you each have a personal event highlight?

KRAAYVANGER: For me, it was the first trade shows we held under almost normal conditions after the

pandemic. At the time, we all wondered whether trade shows would still have the same relevance as before. The interest from exhibitors, visitors and the media was truly overwhelming and very rewarding.

KATHER: For me, three events always stand out because they are so different. First, the Essen Motor Show, even though I'm not a car person. But the enthusiasm of the fans and the presentation in the halls – that gets me every year. A few weeks later, at IPM ESSEN, it's a completely different atmosphere: a sea of blossoms in January. And then a high-tech show such as SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN is again very different. Even as a non-expert, you can see how much an industry can change in four years and how relevant joining technology is to our everyday lives.

The Press & Digital Media teams consist of 11 employees – pictured here with Division Head Daniela Mühlen (back row, 3rd from right).



PRESS WORK AT MESSE ESSEN AND ITS TEAM

- The Press & Digital Media Department at Messe Essen, with 11 staff members, manages ten in-house events and 14 websites
- The social media portfolio includes seven LinkedIn pages, four Instagram channels and two Facebook channels
- The strongest social media brand is the Essen Motor Show, with a total of roughly 400,000 followers
- In 2024, 2,876 media representatives were accredited for in-house events. Including guest events, this number rose to approximately 4,000
- Messe Essen was mentioned in 5,766 media articles in 2024
- Including the corporate brand, Messe Essen reached an audience of approximately 1.65 billion in 2024 (excluding social media)

Care influencer
Florence Harzheim,
a.k.a. frau_praxisanlei-
terin (pictured right),
at ALTENPFLEGE
2024 in Essen.



Welding
influencer Igor Welder
collaborated this year
with SCHWEISSEN &
SCHNEIDEN.

DIGITAL, BUT REAL

More and more trade fairs are cooperating with influencers. The goals are always the same: reach and relevance. The lines between B2B and B2C are increasingly blurring.

■ In 2001, American psychologist and economist Robert Cialdini published the book “Influence: Science and Practice”. It became a bestseller, but the full accuracy of Cialdini’s principles of persuasion only became clear years later. Many of the traits Cialdini identified as crucial for influencing people – such as authority, trustworthiness and dedication – became sales drivers in social media and gave rise to a new profession: the influencer.

What is common in the B2C sector is now becoming increasingly accepted in B2B as well. Trade fairs reflect this trend. Few major events want to miss out on the publicity boost that comes from influencers and content creators. In the new marketing and communications concept for ALTENPFLEGE, for example, influencers “hold an important position,” reports press officer Christian Wild. “The goal is to raise further awareness of the fair – especially among target groups that are difficult to reach through traditional media. By collaborating with authentic multipliers, we want to draw attention to ALTENPFLEGE and open new perspectives on care, innovation and social participation.” To this end, in April 2026 there will be “a dedicated networking

area, or blogger lounge, for the first time. This exclusive area will be made available to content creators and media partners, offering a space for exchange, interviews and live content – directly from the fair.”

Crazy and successful

But is it really that simple to embed serious brand messages in entertaining snippets? For Igor Heidebrecht, better known in the welding world as Igor Welder, this question no longer arises. Just a few years ago, companies would have rejected collaborations with him because his show seemed “too crazy”. “Today they come knocking at my door because I’m crazy, but also because I focus on the right things.” These include reaching a generation that grew up with influencers and expects action and moving images. “To promote the welding profession, we need to connect with the general public.” That’s why Igor Welder’s YouTube channel features projects like welding entire cars together – and why, at his latest appearance at SCHWEISSEN & SCHNEIDEN, he created a welded gorilla live at the stand. For the production of his YouTube and

Thousands follow
welding influencer Igor
Welder on social
media platforms:

156.000+
INSTAGRAM
FOLLOWERS

188.000+
YOUTUBE
SUBSCRIBERS

Instagram videos, where he has 188,000 and 156,000 followers respectively, Igor Welder even built his own workshop two years ago.

The “Heizungsbauer aus Leidenschaft” (“Passionate Heating Engineers”), or HZBAL for short, show that success is possible even with an organisation that is almost entirely volunteer-run. What began in 2012 with the Facebook group of a vocational school class of HVAC plant mechanics has grown into what is probably the world’s largest HVAC group on Facebook today – with over 27,000 members. In addition to the Facebook group and an Instagram channel, they now manage the podcasts “Feuerfest und wasserdicht” (“Fireproof and Watertight”) and “Nice to Know”, as well as the “SHK heroes” app. The content offered through the app even includes online courses for apprentices. Since this content targets vocational schools, partner selection is handled very carefully. “There should be added value,” emphasises Timo Kannegießer, the only full-time staff member at HZBAL. He recognizes the needs of the target audience at the intersection of work and leisure. “Of course, professional relevance is essential, but since the community usually only interacts online, there’s also a strong desire to occasionally meet face-to-face.” The collaboration with Messe Essen at the upcoming SHK+E ESSEN aims to celebrate the community. Planned activities include a trade fair rally to exhibitors, at the end of which participants will receive a high-quality base caps with the HZBAL logo, as well as an evening event with snacks and drinks.

27.000+

FACEBOOK
MEMBERS

...make up the
“Passionate Heating
Engineers” group



»We want the proper reach«

It’s not always about reaching as many visitors as possible, but reaching the right ones. IPM ESSEN is one such example. Whenever Deborah Kather and her colleagues from Messe Essen’s Digital Media team communicate about the world’s leading trade fair for the green industry on social media, hobby gardeners always ask the same question: “Can I come too?” The answer is always: no. As attractive as IPM is to hobby gardeners, its character as a business platform is clear. For social media communication, this means: “We want reach, but the proper reach.”

With the 2026 Content Creator Day, which connects industry influencers and exhibitors via speed dating, the organisers are navigating a delicate balance. “Although IPM’s target audience is not end consumers, there is naturally a fluid transition among the followers of content creators.” This also represents an opportunity, emphasises Michael Perry, a.k.a. “Mr. Plant Geek”, one of the top influencers in the plant world. He recommends a “relaxed, but still professional” approach. And in fact, he says it’s “fantastic” that the lines between B2B and B2C are increasingly being blurred. “Because we speak to people as people, not corporate machines.”



ALL-ROUNDER WITH TASTE

Aramark started its trade fair business in Germany 26 years ago in Essen. Today, the caterer is still one of Messe Essen's most important partners – successfully handling even the most specialised tasks.

■ Trade fair caterers are considered the all-rounders of their industry. Nowhere else are the tasks and customer demands as diverse. Yet the challenges that Operations Manager Robert Noack and his team faced in July were extraordinary, even by their standards. The FISU World University Games were held in the Ruhr region, with Essen at the heart of the event. For Aramark as the caterer, this meant transforming Hall 7 into a canteen and Hall 8 into a lounge area. Above all, they had to serve over 20,000 meals per day to athletes, volunteers, delegations and staff – tailored to the specific needs of the athletes, with a well-designed flow plan to minimise waiting times, and even a late dinner service until midnight. “It was an exciting challenge,” recalls Robert Noack.

The mega-event was yet another highlight in the long-standing partnership between Germany's second-largest caterer and Messe Essen. In 1999, Essen became Aramark's very first trade fair customer in Germany.

A culinary world tour

Today, Aramark operates two restaurants at Messe Essen and several snack and coffee points, it offers exhibitor stand catering on request, and provides conference catering under the “Bonne Rü” brand. This calls for the complete range of expertise that only a full-service provider can offer. It requires nearly 20 permanent staff members and around 250 temporary employees. While basic catering is always similar, the culinary selection reflects the



character of each event. For a B2B industry gathering like E-world energy & water, around 250 exhibitors use the stand catering services, including tableware, staff and menu options, from baked goods to full meals. On request, Robert Noack and his team can even arrange a DJ or a live band, “depending on the budget”. While events like the Essen Motor Show focus on hearty classics such as currywurst, international events like SPIEL showcase global flavours. “At SPIEL 2024, we had more than 50 partners on-site, whose food trucks allowed visitors to take a culinary trip around the world – from Mexico to Southeast Asia,” reports District Manager Torsten Reissig.



A distinguishing feature: The Business Club team in Hall 6 provides guests with exclusive culinary delights.

The Business Club makes a statement

They say the way to the heart is through the stomach. For a trade fair location's image, this holds true as well. Strategically applied, great taste can even serve as a differentiator from the competition. With the Business Club, opened in Hall 6 as part of the venue's 2018 modernisation, Messe Essen has created one such market highlight. Robert Noack explains: "We are proud to make this special offer available." Seasonality and regionality play a key role, and the Protocol Department at Messe Essen coordinates a custom menu for each event that

continually surprises guests. There is one challenge: The Business Club, with its 65 seats, is not open year-round but exclusively during large in-house events at Messe Essen. "That makes precise planning even more important," explains Noack.

Combating waste through food sharing

Speaking of planning, sustainability and reducing food waste are integral to Aramark's corporate philosophy. The FISU World University Games were exemplary in this regard. Thanks to a consistent reusable container concept, the event was, according to Torsten Reissig, "com-

»We are proud to make this special offer available.«

Robert Noack, Operations Manager, Aramark (pictured bottom right)

pletely plastic-free". In addition to camera-based monitoring of leftover food – which has long been standard – Aramark piloted a project with the organisation, Foodsharing. Every evening around 10 p.m., volunteers collected items such as bread, butter and brunch spreads to redistribute to stations throughout Essen.

Valuable lessons were learned: At the first event, it became clear that a larger vehicle would simplify the collaboration and provide a safer way to transport food. The Aramark team also gained insights from the pilot project, and the partnership will continue.

www.aramark.de



ESSEN LEADS THE WAY IN EDUCATION

Essen's mayor Thomas Kufen (second from left) visited the stand of system provider Goldbeck, among others, on the opening day of the first SCHULBAU Essen.

From the Schulbau trade fair to the Trade Union Congress: Messe Essen connects education stakeholders.

■ For Essen's mayor Thomas Kufen, one thing is clear: "Education creates opportunities, strengthens the community and prepares young people for an independent life. With new buildings, renovations and modern learning spaces, we are investing in the future of our children and young people." That's why the mayor was happy to be there when the school construction trade fair SCHULBAU made its debut at Messe Essen in late September: an innovative salon-and-fair format where experts demonstrate how schools can be planned, built or modernised for the future. The format is even gaining international attention, as participants from Colombia were among the guests.

700 visitors at the opening

SCHULBAU, which will return to Essen in 2027, is just one example of the many educational events through which Messe Essen is leading the way in

education. In June, around 700 experts from the school and education sector took part in the state kick-off conference for the "Startchancen" programme, which aims to support schools in North Rhine-Westphalia with a high proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Equally practice-oriented is BILDUNG DIG!TAL, which has been one of Germany's leading platforms for digital transformation in kindergartens, schools and vocational education for the past five years. The next edition of the congress is scheduled for 30 September 2026 in the Congress Center East. Additionally, from 28 to 30 May next year, Essen will host the GEW Trade Union Congress. Traditionally, around 400 delegates participate in the highest decision-making body of the Education and Science Union nationwide.

www.messe-essen.de/messe-veranstalter/referenzen/

ARTISTIC

From satire to Hollywood soundtracks: The Grugahalle's top picks.

www.grugahalle.de



DA CAPO UDO JÜRGENS | 28.01.2026

"It's just an illusion," noted a B.Z. critic after this special show, "but a damn good one." For "Da Capo Udo Jürgens" is more than a musical best-of. It's an intensely emotional journey through the singer's life's work, performed by Pepe Lienhard and his band, who accompanied the late music legend – who died in 2014 and is known for hits like "Griechischer Wein" and "Ich war noch niemals in New York" – on stages around the world for 37 years. While they play live, Jürgens appears larger-than-life on a screen – spectacular, perfectly staged in multimedia and guaranteed to give you goosebumps.



NUHR ON TOUR | 30.01.2026

Dieter Nuhr is a master of time analysis. He dissects the present, finds absurdities and contradictions everywhere, and crafts them into new punchlines. Even if the world seems to be in a questionable state, "Nuhr on Tour" makes it uproariously funny.

Dieter Nuhr's satire is based on observation, amazement and thinking things through to their logical conclusion. He leads his audience on a highly entertaining journey through challenging times. Nuhr is a widely discussed opinion-shaper. He's a true influencer among stage performers. After his show, it feels like walking out of a session with a psychoanalyst: your problems may still exist, but you've learned to face them with a laugh.



THE MUSIC OF HANS ZIMMER & OTHERS | 28.02.2026

What do "Top Gun", "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Gladiator" all have in common? The music for these blockbusters was composed by Hans Zimmer. Born in Frankfurt am Main, Zimmer has long been one of the leading film composers of his generation. "The Music of Hans Zimmer & Others" combines some of his iconic pieces with other film music classics for a breathtaking concert experience. The Hollywood Film Orchestra & Choir will perform, accompanied by star soloists and selected film clips – plus a surprise host from one of the productions whose success owes much to Zimmer's music.

VERSENGOLD | 14.03.2026

Unbridled energy, moving lyrics and an incomparable live presence: the folk-rockers from VERSENGOLD have established themselves over two decades as one of Germany's most influential live bands. Their audience spans generations, and their concerts are experiences, full of intimacy, dynamism and musical finesse. Their new album "Eingenordet" will be released on 16 January 2026, and two months later, the band from Bremen will perform in Essen.



REINVENTION FROM THE DEPTHS

The BRYCK Startup Alliance team had good reason to celebrate in July: as one of Germany's ten official Startup Factories, it will receive federal funding through 2030.



More and more start-ups are discovering the advantages of the Ruhr region as a location, many of them with support from Essen's Economic Development Agency. As a flagship federal project, the newly founded BRYCK Startup Alliance aims to create 1,000 start-ups by 2030 – and establish a European hub for deep-tech innovation.

■ What do filters for extracting CO₂ from the atmosphere, AI-controlled strawberry cultivation and digital solutions for medical practices have in common? All these innovations were developed by start-ups from Essen. Another common factor is that companies such as Greenlyte Carbon Technologies, vGreens and docport have all benefited from the support provided by the Essen Economic Development Agency (EWG).

“Over the past six years, the number of start-ups in Essen has more than tripled,” says a pleased Andre Boschem, Managing Director of EWG. EWG has supported many of the city's 160 young companies – from assistance in drafting business plans to networking with investors. A new addition to its

service portfolio is the UPSCALER Academy, which combines support valued at more than 28,000 euros with a six- or nine-month incubation programme. The first round began in September. “Our goal is not only to provide financial support to founders but also to ensure they have the knowledge, contacts and environment they need for sustainable growth. The combination of grants, targeted workshops and individual mentoring makes the academy a true booster for business development in Essen,” says Boschem.

A deep-tech hub in the region

July 2025 brought a major boost to the entire Ruhr region. The BRYCK Startup Alliance received an

award from Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Katherina Reiche, naming it one of ten nationwide “Startup Factories” in Germany. This recognition comes with up to ten million euros in funding to establish a deep-tech centre in the Ruhr region. For Managing Director Philipp Hermann, the high-profile jury’s decision carries historic significance and global impact: “This is an opportunity to reinvent the Ruhr region – from industrial heritage to the future powerhouse of Europe. With the Startup Factory, a new industrial engine for Germany is emerging here – focused on deep-tech and driven by real regional strength.”

The alliance intends to leverage the particular strengths of the Ruhr area: Europe’s highest density of universities and the economic power of what is still one of the continent’s most important industrial regions. On the research side, key partners in the network include Ruhr University Bochum, TU Dortmund University and the University of Duisburg-Essen. On the industrial side, Initiativkreis Ruhr, consisting of over 70 leading regional companies and institutions, including Messe Essen, is actively involved. The RAG Foundation contributes through its innovation and start-up centre BRYCK, which has supported over 100 start-ups from 20 countries since 2022. Among the first projects is the

BRYCK WaterHub. This platform is unique in Europe for the implementation of new technologies in water management, and aims to combine RAG’s know-how in mine water management with the expertise and innovative dynamism of young companies.



»Our goal is not only to provide financial support but also knowledge, contacts and the right environment.«

Andre Boschem, Managing Director, Essen Economic Development Agency (EWG)

The goals of the BRYCK Startup Alliance are ambitious: 1,000 new start-ups by 2030 and 200 deep-tech scale-ups with international ambitions. To this end, the aim is to raise one billion euros in capital. By the way, BRYCK’s home is the Colosseum, a listed former industrial hall in the heart of Essen. It is a place of symbolic power, a sign that the Ruhr Innovation Lab is alive – and that structural transformation has reached a new stage.

www.startup-essen.de

www.bryckstartupalliance.com/de/

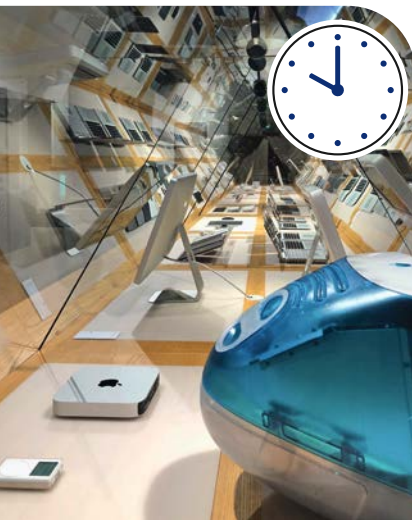
In September, the first round of the UPSCALER Academy from the Essen Economic Development Agency started.



ESSEN IN 24 HOURS

Trailblazing design, a creative church and Bavarian cosiness:

Culture in Essen has many faces.



10 A.M. FROM THE FIAT 500 TO THE IPAD

On the occasion of its 70th anniversary, the Red Dot Design Museum takes a look back at its history. It all began in 1955, initiated by the legendary PR chief of Krupp, Prof. Carl Hundhausen, with the first “Permanent Exhibition of Beautiful Industrial Products” at Villa Hügel, and culminated in the 2000s with the internationally renowned Red Dot Design Award. Curated by Prof. Peter Zec, the exhibits range from the 1957 Fiat Nuova 500 to Braun’s Sixtant SM 31 electric shaver and the first iPad from 2010. What unites them all: pioneering design and exceptional quality.

www.red-dot.org/de

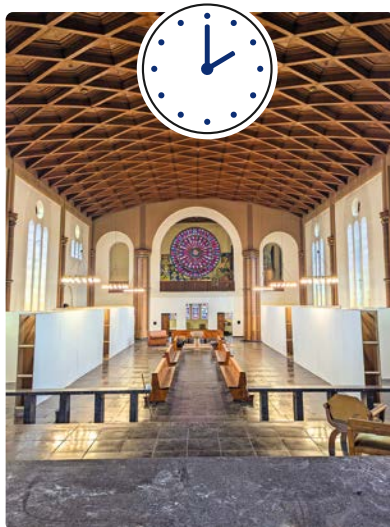


2 P.M. FROM CHURCH TO CULTURE CATHEDRAL

More and more churches are closing. One example of how new life can emerge is “Trudi”, a centre for art, culture and education housed in the former St Gertrud Church in Essen’s northern city centre.

The anchor tenant is the University of Fine Arts Essen (HBK), which used the church’s conversion to merge its Essen and Wuppertal campuses. The new concept combines a theatre stage, a large event hall, studios and workshops across 4,000 square metres, making it unique in North Rhine-Westphalia.

www.trudi.nrw



6 P.M. FROM MUNICH TO ESSEN

“In Munich there’s a Hofbräuhaus...” But not only there. In early October, the Hofbräuhaus Essen opened in the former Kaufhof building, right next to the main train station. It features 550 seats, including booths reminiscent of the Oktober-

fest and a beer garden. It is part of the new Königshof Market Hall in Essen, which houses 37 international street food stalls across 2,000 square metres. Bavarian cuisine is served in the

Hofbräuhaus, but what truly stands out is the brewery’s rich tradition that has spanned more than 400 years. The Hofbräuhaus Essen is the first of its kind in the Ruhr region.

www.hofbraeu-im-koenigshof.de



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HALLE

DATES UNTIL MAY 2026

TRADE FAIRS, CONGRESSES,
CONVENTIONS IN ESSEN

28.11.–07.12.2025

Essen Motor Show

The performance festival of the year

09.–11.01.2026

BAUMESSE

The exhibition for construction, living, renovation and energy saving

10.–11.01.2026

Hochzeitsmesse

The wedding expo with consulting and sales

13.–15.01.2026

InfraTech*

Trade fair for infrastructure

18.01.2026

ESPO new year's reception

22.01.2026

Trade fair for promotional products

27.–30.01.2026

IPM ESSEN*

The world's leading trade fair for horticulture

10.–12.02.2026

E-world energy & water*

The industry meeting point for the European energy sector

25.02.–01.03.2026

REISE + CAMPING

International travel & tourism fair, camping & caravanning

26.02.–01.03.2026

Fahrad Essen

Trade fair for bicycles, cycling, accessories and bike tourism

04.–06.03.2026

59th Essen Water Management Conference

07.03.2026

Essen Symposium 2026

17.–20.03.2026

SHK+E ESSEN*

Trade fair for sanitation, heating, air conditioning and electrics

28.–30.03.2026

European Bridal Week*

International trade fair for bridal fashion and evening wear

16.–17.04.2026

NRWGU Congress 2026

08.–12.04.2026

RETRO CLASSICS ESSEN®

Trade fair for driving culture

21.–23.04.2026

Altenpflege*

Leading trade fair for the patient care industry

05.–08.05.2026

METPACK*

International trade fair for metal packaging

12.–14.05.2026

EACR Conference 2026

"Cancer Genomics"

21.05.2026

geh.digital

Simply digital trade.

28.–30.05.2026

GEW NRW Trade Union Congress

TRADE FAIRS ABROAD

12.–15.01.2026

SteelFab

Machinery, Equipment & Tools (Sharjah)

27.–29.03.2026

GT Show (Suzhou)

10.–12.04.2026

Hortiflorepo IPM China (Beijing)

GRUGAHALLE

28.11.2025

Mario Barth – "Men Are Nothing Without Women"

29.11.2025

Essen Darts Gala 2025

30.11.2025

Philipp Fleiter – Crime From Next Door – Earwitness Tour

12.12.2025

Michael Tsokos – Phenomenon of Forensics – Fascinating Forensic Medicine 2.0

13.12.2025

Jungle Book – The Musical

20.12.2025

Knasterbart – Spirited Christmas

17.01.2026

Pink Floyd's The Wall – Live in Concert

17.01.2026

Pink Floyd's – Dark Side of the Moon

24.01.2026

Ralf Schmitz – "Schmitzchievious Ingenuity"

25.01.2026

Mami & Mini – The children's flea market in the foyer

28.01.2026

Da Capo Udo Jürgens – The original show with the Pepe Lienhard Orchestra

30.01.2026

Dieter Nuhr – Nuhr on Tour 2026

31.01.2026

Music Parade 2026

01.02.2026

Girls' clothes – in the foyer

02.02.2026

Torsten Sträter – "Switch on the Main Light" – additional date

14.02.2026

Lord of the Rings & The Hobbit – The Concert

14.02.2026

The Music of Hans Zimmer & Others – A Celebration of Film Music

21.02.2026

STUZUBI – The Training & Education Fair

22.02.2026

Mami & Mini – The children's flea market in the foyer

05.03.2026

Lisa Eckhart – I Was Somebody

07.03.2026

Paul Panzer – "Brave New World – Welcome to Hell"

08.03.2026

Girls' clothes – in the foyer

11.03.2026

Staff Meeting City of Essen

13.03.2026

Dinotastic – 5 Friends and Their Journey to the Fire Volcano

13.03.2026

SIXX PAXX – Temptation Tour 2025/2026

14.03.2026

Versengold – Eingenordest Tour 2026

15.03.2026

EMMVEE – Was That Too Harsh?

22.03.2026

Bülent Ceylan – Diktatürk

25.–26.03.2026

RWE AG – Delegates' Conference

04.04.2026

Kreator – Krushers of the World Tour 2026

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