

The Munich Hall Theory of CeBIT Goes Down

Written by Bob Snyder
21 April 2011

These are hallowed halls, these walls of the Munich Beer Hall. CeBIT's most famous place of distraction, the "Hangover Hall" behind Hall 3.

It's one experience that most CeBIT newbies carry home...along with the hangover and an appreciation of Bavarian culture (acquired, of course, via northern Hannover).

During the heyday of CeBIT, the robust woman who owns the Munich hall, her hands sporting diamonds on every finger, once explained to me she made 2 million euros per night during the show.



But it's 2011...a new and different CeBIT. It's Friday night, the last evening before CeBIT closes...and the Munich Hall...like CeBIT...is only half full.

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Instead of the usual two bands wailing away, there's only one band now and it's playing mostly popular rock. A man on stage dresses as Freddie Mercury and that brings laughs. As the lead singer screams out, "**WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS...OF THE...**"

The band stops and the singer points the microphone expectantly towards the crowd in a classic moment of audience participation...

Once upon a time the response would have shaken these Bavarian walls-- and rocked with wild crowds dancing on the tabletops, waving steins of German *pils*...because we were the champions, the champions of the IT world.

This time, this night, this CeBIT... the audience does not feel like **WORLD** champions and the band must be disappointed by the half-hearted reply. We sit up on high, in an empty second tier looking down on the half-full hall. In the old days. even the second tier was regularly packed, fully booked and crowded.

It's Friday night...we expected a packed crowd. I am sitting with a German man who has come to CeBIT more than ten times, yet this is his first visit to the Munich Hall. Two Kenyans who live in Germany have joined us. All around us are people from 90 countries...Chinese visitors enjoying the moment....a Danish company outing...Turkish executives...some Englishmen building a tower of empty Jaegermeister miniature bottles...

I look out on the crowd and I can't see anyone I know. Thirty-one years of CeBIT (OK, I started visiting when it was still a section of Hannover Messe...) and not a single familiar face.

The **Munich Hall Theory of CeBIT** goes like this: a strong Munich Hall business, where reservations are necessary, means a great CeBIT. If you stop in and there are lots of places still available, there's less attendance, less business at CeBIT. A half-empty hall is a disaster...

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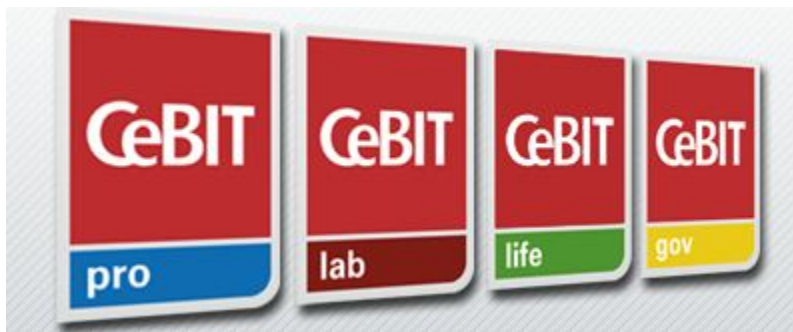
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Regardless of how tired, how exhausted the 30-year-old concept of CeBIT entertainment is, The Munich Hall, the only "fun" place on the fairgrounds, should be a barometer for CeBIT itself....

On one hand, there was also on the same Friday a free concert in Hall 19. On the other hand, there used to be a multitude of lavish stand parties in every single hall, parties that hired live bands and catered. This year we saw hardly one stand party in any of the halls and lavish would not be a description: it was more like "Come, have beer on our stand, and we'll play music from our iPad..." I think those two factors should wash each other out...and so we need to reflect further...

CeBIT once ran for 8 days and we are down to five. There is 1 million sq meters of exhibition space in Hannover Messe: we once filled all of the Fair and it still kept an active Waiting List. Now nine halls are empty: from 20-22, then 24-27, and the once-all-powerful Hall 1.

More than 4200 companies from over 70 countries participated at CeBIT 2011, including many firms which returned after a break of several years, such as Oracle, HP, Xerox, Canon, Epson and Siemens Enterprise Communications.



This year was the premiere of the new "CeBIT Showcase", four thematic clusters for **pro, gov, lab and life**.

Turkey featured as the CeBIT Partner Country this year.

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The giant CeBIT was never monolithic and is even more divided these days. The organizers prefer to say "segmented" but it is more like a fracture... It's as if someone came along and hit it with a hammer because there are no clear, evened-out layers of visible segment. Just sharp shards of an industry breaking up under stress, melted down by the heat of the crucible of the market and hammered in new shapes by competition.

You could say that each CeBIT turns out like a chain of industry clusters...yes, we are all in it together, but somehow we're still separated from one another. Being in Hall 14, for example, my CeBIT experience has little in common with exhibitors in Hall 9-- except that we are both at CeBIT. Based in Hall 14, I have as much in common with someone in Hall 2 as an Italian with a Norwegian. Sure, both are European but the two cultures are clearly different.

The average CeBIT exhibitor never actually sees CeBIT. Not in years before and not during this year. The exhibitor was once mainly pinned down by the volume of traffic and potential business in the hall. The hall where his company stand sat was based was his or her CeBIT. Perhaps an odd trip out to one hall or two on appointments, a walk down to the Press Office, and, of course, the long walk into the show each morning.

Today it is not much different except it's no longer the raw volume of traffic but the proportion of salespeople to attendees that pins the exhibit staff to the stand in their own hall. Companies cut back staff and there are no longer (in most cases) the changes in shifts (not just inside the day but companies used to rotate and send in a whole new staff during mid-CeBIT).

This year I made an effort to see each and every hall. Some halls reflect the nature of their market segment: PC Components halls were raucous, noisy and full...Auto ID was thin, business-like and so serious. Networking was less traffic (but with better connections...lol)

The IT-in-government hall, Hall 9, literally held a carnival on one day (symbolizing, no doubt, the many recent revelations of indiscretions in numerous European countries with our taxpayer's money) and was stacked wall-to-wall with visitors on the other days. You had to fight your way through the stands in Hall 9, a sight that would have driven Hall 16 exhibitors to distraction.

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