

Essen, February 19, 2026

Trade fair for sanitation, heating, air conditioning, and electrics

Startup@SHK+E ESSEN 2026: Innovations, AI, and fresh ideas for the skilled trades

Young companies showcase forward-looking solutions

From March 17 to 20, 2026, SHK+E ESSEN will be focusing on the innovative strength of young companies: In the Startup@SHK+E ESSEN area in Hall 1 of Messe Essen, up-and-coming companies will be showcasing their latest products, services, and business ideas for the sanitary, heating, air conditioning, and electrical industries. The partner is VdZ – Wirtschaftsvereinigung Gebäude und Energie (Building and Energy Trade Association), which is making its mark with its expertise, particularly in future-oriented topics relating to energy efficiency and building technology. The Startup Area will focus on a topic that will increasingly shape the industry: artificial intelligence.

Whether it's streamlining office processes, automated invoicing, or intelligent IT applications, the solutions presented aim to make craft businesses more efficient and free up valuable time in their day-to-day work. At the same time, innovative approaches to home and building technology, AI integration into existing systems, and smart energy management tools are also being presented.

Digital impulses for the skilled trades

Digitalization offers enormous potential, especially in times of skilled labor shortages and increasing documentation and administration requirements. Visitors to the neighboring SHK+E Expert Stage can look forward to an accompanying stage program with selected specialist presentations and discussion panels. Thematic focal points include:

- Relieving the burden on skilled trades through AI and digitalization
- Innovative heat pump and PVT solutions



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- IT security and digital business models in skilled trades
- Increased efficiency and time management in heating installation
- Consumption optimization and intelligent building services concepts

The combination of startup pitches and expert input creates an ideal platform for inspiration, exchange, and concrete ideas for your own business.

"The Startup Area demonstrates the significant innovative potential within the industry. We see enormous potential, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence, to significantly reduce the workload in the trade and make it fit for the future," says Torben Brinkmann, project manager at SHK+E ESSEN. "Together with the VdZ, we bring young, creative companies together with decision-makers and practitioners – this creates real added value for everyone involved."

Networking in an inspiring atmosphere

In addition to the trade fair activities, the VdZ Lounge, located directly next to the start-up area, invites visitors to engage in informal discussions and networking. At the end of the first day of the trade fair, an innovation meeting provides additional space for exchange between young companies, craft businesses, industry, and associations.

Further information: www.shke-essen.de