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--- by *Erastos Filos, DG CONNECT, Coordinator Intelligent Manufacturing Systems/ICT for Factories of the Future.*

Following a [roundtable](#) [3] between Commission Vice-President [Neelie Kroes](#) [4], and key industrialists in March the Commission has not only launched its [Cloud Strategy](#) [5] on 27 September 2012. It also actively supports Cloud Computing by a dedicated [call for application experiments](#) [6] that aim to facilitate the uptake of Cloud-based design and simulation services by manufacturing SMEs.

Under the [Factories of the Future initiative](#) [7] the Commission offers funding via its [ICT Programme](#) [8]. The goal is to create a network of specialist centres that will work with software developers to make on-demand design and simulation services available to SMEs.



“These centres can help SMEs design products, make manufacturing lean and efficient, and to manage the product lifecycle. Rather than build a large number of prototypes they will be able to produce cheaper digital mock-ups of products”, [Max Lemke](#) [9], Deputy Head of the Complex Systems & Advanced Computing unit at DG CONNECT, told [Computer Weekly](#) [10] earlier this year.

The centres will provide advice to SMEs on how they can use supercomputers to solve business and engineering problems, and will offer the access to computing resources on a pay-as-you go basis. They will be networked together so that if a local centre does not have the solution an SME needs, advisors will be able to draw on expertise from other centres across Europe.

The activity also aims to encourage specialist software suppliers to move from expensive annual software licensing contracts, to pay-as-you-go services that smaller companies will be able to afford to use, as they need them.

Experts foresee significant productivity gains for the manufacturing industry in Europe through the use of Cloud-based services and SMEs are key stakeholders in this endeavour.

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