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American chipmaker Intel is betting big on the future of human interfacing with a hefty investment in Stockholm-based eye-tracking firm Tobii Technology.

Marcos Battisti, Intel Capital's European managing director, believes that eye-tracking could form an important part of the man-machine interface.

"Tobii is a market segment leader in eye-tracking and a leading candidate to enable the latest generation of user-interface technology", he said.

The US firm paid 143 million kronor (\$20.8 million) for a 10 percent stake, implying a valuation of more than 1 billion kronor for the 12-year-old Swedish start-up.

Tobii's eye tracking technology makes it possible for computers to know where users are looking. The eye-tracker works by sending out a pattern of infrared light that is reflected in a person's eyes, whereby one can compute the position and the angle of the glance to determine exactly where the person is looking.

Sara Hyléen, corporate marketing manager at Tobii Technology, said that its eye tracking and gaze interaction has the potential to revolutionize computer interaction much the same way touch has changed hand-held devices like smartphones and tablets.

"Tobii's ambition is to deliver the technology behind the next generation user interface", she told The Swedish Wire.

Until now, Tobii's technology has mainly been used by the advertising and healthcare industries, as ad testing tools and aids for the physically disabled. But Intel is betting that the

Eye-tracker Tobii looking to employ more staff

Written by Johan Nylander

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technology will become an integral part of ordinary consumer electronics.

The stake sale is a move to accelerate investments in product development and to take eye tracking from niche markets to mass-market applications, such as computers, computer games and cars, Sara Hyléen said.

"Funding from Intel Capital will be used for investment in the development of the company's core technology and to turn eye-tracking and eye-control into mass-market applications", she said.

"Tobii will make strategic investments in its R&D organization, recruit and develop new areas of expertise".

Are there any advantages for Tobii of being based in Stockholm?

"For Tobii is the location of its headquarters and its development team a big advantage. We have close relationships with the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), which also accounts for a large part of our recruitment base. But the region's cluster of technology-based also means that we are able to recruit highly skilled personnel with years of experience", Sara Hyléen said.

Tobii was founded in 2001 and has offices in Sweden, the US, Germany, Japan, China and Norway. Last year it had 300 employees.

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