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## Seek big break in Geneva

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Shock-absorbing stilettos, a pepper-spray watch, an anti-wrinkle tuning fork and a personal earthquake detector are all vying for a commercial break in Geneva. Creators from around the world have gathered at the 37th Geneva inventors' fair this week to show off their wacky – and perhaps useful – prototypes at the world's leading invention exhibition. Unlike the Pittsburgh Invention and New Product Exhibition (INPEX) in the United States, which was forced to cancel its June show due to the financial crisis, the Geneva fair appears in good shape. Individual private inventors have compensated a small drop in the number of institutional exhibitors, say the organisers. As in recent years, some 710 exhibitors from 45 countries are in attendance, and 72,000 visitors are expected at the annual event, which runs until Sunday. "When there is a crisis there are ideas and when there are ideas there are creations. Surprisingly we have exactly the same exhibition floor space as last year, which was a record," Gérard Sermier, chief spokesman of the fair, told swissinfo. The exhibition is seen as the ideal place for inventors to rub shoulders with manufacturers, distributors and investors. Every year more than 45 per cent of the inventions exhibited are the object of licensing contracts, which in 2008 amounted to \$40 million (SFr45.6 million). To have a reasonable chance of success, it should be possible to manufacture a new invention prototype immediately and have access to a fast distribution network, said Sermier. Health and safety Despite its reputation for gizmos and wackiness, this year there are fewer gadgets and more practical inventions on display, with a strong focus on health, safety and the environment, say the organisers. "This invention has been created for people who have lost both hands and can't operate computers like us," said Prince Chandrasena, an electrician from Sri Lanka, demonstrating his head-and-mouth-operated computer mouse that took two years to develop. "To move the cursor to the left you move your head a tiny distance to the left, and the same to move it to the right; to click on the left button you blow into the tube and you suck on the tube to click on the right button." Just down the aisle a Mercedes lorry with a strange-looking crane dominates the area occupied by the Romanian delegation. "It's an x-ray scanning machine that can scan trucks or containers," explained Emil Mieilica. "It optimises the process of cargo delivery, as you don't have to unload a truck and can verify things quickly by just looking at the pictures." His company, MB Technology, has already sold five items to the Romanian customs authorities. Algerian Mohamed Allal and his invention are likely to shake up the exhibition jury. He has built a device for the home that detects minor earthquakes and then automatically cuts off the gas and electricity. "And in the event of a gas leak, the small white box broadcasts a security message and instantly contacts emergency telephone numbers," he explained. "I'm not at all sure how my invention will be received here," said 80-year-old Eric Stucky, pointing to his personal security lift for the home, designed for getting to those high, out-of-reach places. "But Suva [the Swiss Accident Insurance Fund] convinced me I was on the right track when they told me that 6,000 people a year fall off ladders in Switzerland." Running wild Yet the serious side to developing a new product hasn't stopped people's imagination running wild. Frenchman Serge Cotaina's 007-style watch contains a disposable mini cartridge that can be filled with pepper spray or medicine. "Women carry pepper sprays in their handbags, but in 99 per cent of aggressions thieves snatch their bags. And with the watch, even if you are on the floor or up against a wall, the gas will always come out in the right direction – at 12 o'clock," he explained. Crowds of people were also hypnotised by the "Touche le Mirage" tuning fork, which Spanish beautician and acupuncturist Encarnación Mira used to carry out a "passive gym session" on volunteers' faces to iron out wrinkles. "It improves circulation, bringing extra oxygen to cells and the skin appears younger just after four 45-minute sessions," she claimed. The tuning fork, crafted out of a secret alloy and using a semi-precious stone, is a "great success" at her Madrid salon, she said. Another crowd-puller was Brazilian Milene Pontarollo and her unusual high heels, fitted with tiny shock absorbers to help soothe aching feet. "They are great for walking, dancing, shopping - even cleaning the house," she said. swissinfo, Simon Bradley in Geneva Courtesy: Swissinfo.ch