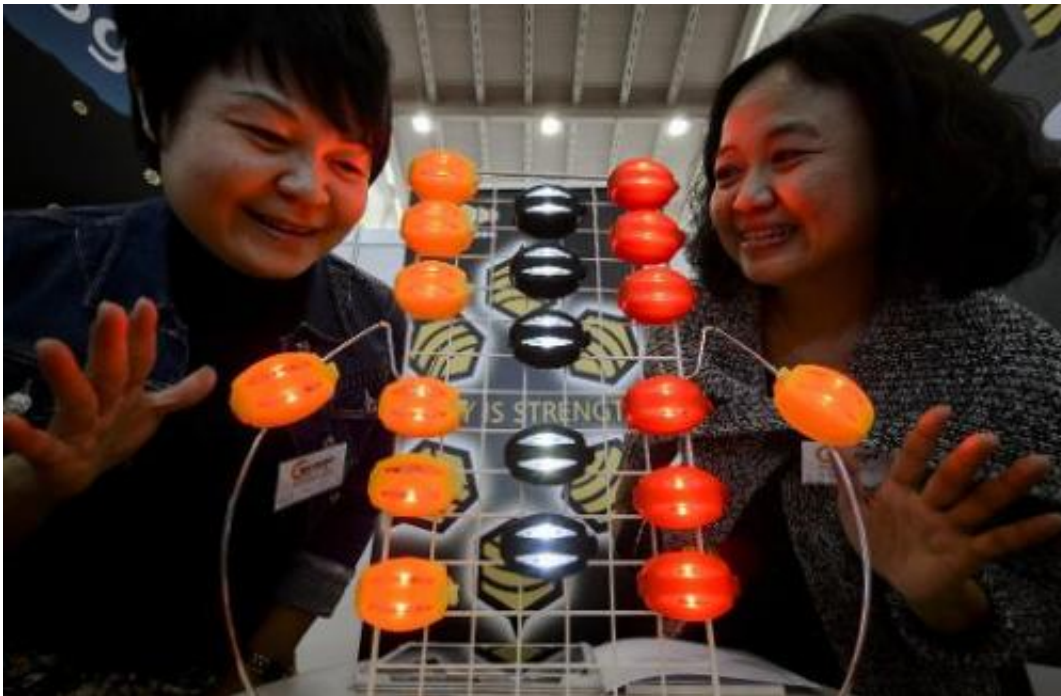


Geneva fair showcases all the inventions you need, and more

April 3 2014, by Jonathan Fowler



Two Taiwanese exhibitors present their creation during the opening day of the International Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva, on April 2, 2014

His eyes hidden by sunglasses, the soft-spoken African gestured at the model camel on his table, its hump hidden by a mysterious contraption topped with a windmill.

"I'm the only Chadian with five patented inventions to his name," Oumar Ayoubaye said proudly, before pitching his low-tech, camel-borne [air](#)

[conditioning unit](#) which he says could revolutionise desert life.

"It's an extra flat aircon unit that's energy independent. It's destined for nomads or tourists who travel by camel, or even by elephant," Ayoubaye told AFP.

"On top of that, it helps go easy on the water, because it keeps the camel's hump cool. And when a camel has a cool hump, it can go for 17 days without a drink".

Tucked in amongst corporate and university research staff at the International Exhibition of Inventions in Geneva, lone players like Ayoubaye are what gives the annual show its feel.

"I would say that the best inventions are those created by people who in fact are active in another field. They bring a fresh, new, original approach," said Jean-Luc Vincent, the fair's founder.

Billed as the biggest showcase of its kind worldwide, the event's 42nd edition kicked off Wednesday and ends Sunday.

It has drawn a record 790 exhibitors from 45 countries.

The inventions, all of which must be patented to go on show, range from the never-knew-you-needed-it to ultra-practical, and span the spectrum from low-tech to super sophisticated.

For those in the innovation business, Geneva is a potential goldmine.

Breakout successes from past editions include above-stage displays to translate operas, mobile scanners for shipping containers, and inflatable neck pillows for travellers.

The hunt for investors

Exhibitors pay an event fee of up to 1,200 Swiss francs (980 euros, \$1,360).

That can be a good investment if the fair helps them make the leap to market by sealing a licensing contract—industrialists and distributors feature heavily among the 60,000 visitors.



An exhibitor presents an electric folding scooter, created by French inventor Fabrice Marion, during the opening day of the International Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva, on April 2, 2014

Nearly half of inventions on show at previous editions have found a licensee, and the total value of licences negotiated last year topped 55 million Swiss francs, organisers said.

According to Vincent, the fast pace of innovation now incites companies to buy inventions rather than develop them in-house as they hunt for the next big thing.

And globalisation means companies interested in an idea may no longer be on an inventor's doorstep, but in fact on the other side of the planet.

With innovation a weathervane of the shifting centre of the global economy, over half of Geneva's exhibitors now hail from Asia and the Middle East.

Most of the rest are from Europe, and just a handful from Africa.

In a twist of fate, Ayoubbaye's [invention](#) can be traced back to a savage beating by thieves.

He was taken to Saudi Arabia for treatment. Gazing at an air conditioner from his hospital bed, he dreamed of ways to keep cool while on the move back in his arid homeland.



Swiss inventor Rene Wuttig presents a foldable protection against rain and bad weather for bicycles and e-bikes, during the opening day of the International Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva, on April 2, 2014

The solution was inspired by traditional clay containers that allow water to seep out, creating humidity and cooling the air, which is spread by a simple windmill-driven fan but could also be solar-powered.

"There are no greenhouse gases from this," said Ayoubaye, insisting that once he finds investors "this could be on the market within four months."

His other inventions include a cracker for soapberry tree nuts—an ultra-hard source of cooking oil in northern Africa—as well as a simple mechanical hand for the disabled and a cooker with a safety lock.

'It changed my life'

The passion that drives inventors was clear at the fair.



Taiwan's Yin Yueh Macherel (L) and Hsiang-Chi Wu present a creation, adjustable massage insoles, during the opening day of the International Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva, on April 2, 2014

In the case of Frenchwoman Françoise Goubron, the seed was planted when she survived breast cancer in 2007 and bone cancer in 2011.

"I lost my hair, and there I was in the south of France, in a wig. It was 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) in the shade, and my scalp was dripping," she told AFP.

From that experience was born her "Clim'Hair", a skullcap made of organic cotton which, when discreetly moistened in a cafe bathroom and worn under a wig, keeps the head cool for up to six hours.

"When you have chemotherapy, you spend eight hairless months. This is something that's stupidly simple, but it changed my life," the 59-year-old said.

Another inventor from Goubron's generation was Spaniard Domingo Cifo, 64, a former B-team midfielder with Catalan football powerhouses Barcelona.

His idea for effort-increasing detachable weights on training shoes—which he called PowerInstep—came during treatment after a career-ending injury three decades ago.



Young inventors from Beijing, China, (from L) Fan Xiyu, Li Peize and Wang Yifan present their creation during the opening day of the International

Exhibition of Inventions of Geneva, on April 2, 2014

"I kept putting it aside, but now I've retired I think it's the right time to do this," Cifo told AFP.

The Geneva fair also helps youngsters cut their teeth.

A group from 101 Middle School in Beijing showed off their "Intelligent New Green Plant Louver Curtain"—a combination of window-blind, air purifier and plant feature.

"Pollution is very high, so we wanted to help our country to have better, cleaner air, without the high costs of machines," said Li Peize, 12.

"We invented it at school over around three months. The other students went home and we'd stay into the evenings to get it right," he said.

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