

Buzzless Tech Trade Show Has Some Small Treasures

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NEW YORK -(Dow Jones)- The technology sector may be showing signs of a rebound, but that hasn't translated into much buzz at the TechXNY technology trade show and conference.

Attendees on the show's opening day Tuesday lamented the lack of exciting gadgets and applications, and the lightly populated floor space at the trade show, formerly known as PC Expo. Attendance is expected to fall to 30,000 people this year from 38,000 last year. "It's horrible," said Leo Stawski, a network administrator for Bloomberg LP in New York. "It seems incomplete."

Christina Condos, the show's director, countered that exhibitors are "really happy." She acknowledged that some attendees may be dissatisfied, but said, "They need to understand, the industry is in a little bit of a slump."

(This report and related background material will appear on The Wall Street Journal's Web site, WSJ.com.)

Still, some gadgets from smaller tech companies caught our eye, including a pen-shaped scanner that reads and translates typewritten text, and software for connecting conference attendees that works like online dating services. Also, in keeping with the show's focus on corporate security, two notable products were aimed at protecting companies' technology assets in and away from the home office.

SuperPen Translator

The SuperPen Translator could come in handy when you're next dining in Paris and come across an unfamiliar menu item. The penlike, handheld device scans one line of typewritten text at a time; the text then can be translated, one word at a time, into one of about 30 languages - three translation dictionaries can be stored at one time on the pen - and displayed on a screen on the device.

It runs on two AA batteries that can last for about three weeks, on average, said Paul H. Terrio, sales director for Wizcom Technologies Ltd., the Israeli maker of the pen. The company (www.wizcomtech.com) has made scanning pens since the mid-'90s, selling more than 800,000 overall, and has been making translator pens since 1997, Terrio said. Wizcom's latest model of the translator pen, launched this month, comes with several new features. Most notably, the \$200 device will read the translation of an unfamiliar word into an attached earphone. Escargot, anyone?

Peerfinder

Peerfinder aims to match up buyers and sellers at conferences and trade shows, using a model akin to popular online dating services. Attendees can register in advance or use onsite computers, submitting their e-mail address, interests and profile at www.peerfinder.com . Then the software goes to work, anonymously matching registrants with like interests via e-mail. The service protects users' privacy, but people tend to quickly send along their e-mail addresses and phone numbers to a prospective match, said Jim Larkey, vice president of marketing for Peerfinder LLC, Morristown, N.J.

The service debuted in April at TravelCom, the annual travel industry show in Fairfield, Conn., where about 20% of the show's 1,000 attendees registered, Larkey said. As of Tuesday afternoon, about 1,000 TechXNY attendees had registered, of about 30,000 people expected at

the show. "It can save you time, so you're not sitting in the lobby with the listings of exhibitors, flipping pages rapidly - which everyone does," Larkey said. The service is free at TechXNY, thanks in part to sponsorship by the show. Larkey said that at future shows, which haven't yet been lined up, a service charge may be added to the registration fee.

PC PhoneHome

For the thousands of handheld computer owners whose gadgets are stolen each year - and for their employers, whose sensitive data are at risk - there may be hope. Brigadoon Software Inc. introduced at the show PC PhoneHome for devices running on Microsoft Corp.'s (MSFT) Pocket PC operating system, and said it will roll out in three weeks a similar product for devices running on Palm Inc.'s (PALM) OS.

The company for two years has made similar software for laptop computers that currently is running on nearly 300,000 machines, said Martin Moran, vice president of Brigadoon Software (www.pcphonehome.com), of Nanuet, N.Y.

"We're batting 1.000," he bragged to attendees, meaning the company has retrieved all 83 computers that were lost.

The technology works like this: For a one-time charge of \$29.95, the user gets software that automatically sends an e-mail to a specified address every time the device is connected to the Internet (or, in the case of a handheld, when it is attached - "hot-synced" - to an Internet-connected computer). The software is hard to uninstall - "unless you're real sharp and know how to flash the BIOS," Moran said. (The BIOS, or basic input output system, is the first piece of software the computer runs when it powers up and is stored on the motherboard; "flashing" the BIOS refers to reprogramming it.)

When the device is stolen, the user notifies the police and Brigadoon Software, which then directs the device to e-mail the company as well. The e-mails contain the Internet Protocol address of the computer, which can be pinpointed to a geographic location with the cooperation of the Internet service provider. The technique requires that thieves connect the devices to the Internet. Moran said that happened by the night of the theft with 80 of the 83 stolen laptops, and he expects the recovery rate for handheld computers will be "very high."

WallBotz 500

Security threats also can hit closer to headquarters, in the form of extreme temperatures or intruders posing threats to expensive technology equipment and computer networks. WallBotz 500 is intended to address those concerns. The wall-mounted device, introduced in April, lets technology executives remotely monitor room temperature and humidity, detect chemical agents and view who is coming and going from a room. Users can set e-mail alerts if WallBotz detects certain conditions or happenings, such as someone entering the room. NetBotz Inc. (www.netbotz.com), based in Austin, Texas, bundles the device with detachable "pods," equipped with sensors and cameras, and sells the system for \$2,800.