



**Web-based trade show called first of its kind ¶**

263 words ¶

7 September 2006 ¶

15:17 ¶

[Associated Press Newswires](#) ¶

English ¶

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ST. LOUIS (AP) -- A suburban St. Louis accounting firm has the answer to the cost of traveling to trade shows -- a Web-based virtual technology fair. ¶

Brown Smith Wallace is sponsoring the distribution industry's first Internet-based tech fair Tuesday and Wednesday at <http://www.virtualtechfair.com>. Brown Smith Wallace produces an annual software guide for the distribution industry, and its consulting group advises companies that are choosing software. ¶

The fair will bring together software vendors and buyers from warehousing and distribution firms. Buyers can browse a convention "floor" displayed on the site. They can read information and then talk to vendor representatives staffing virtual booths, using instant message chat, e-mail and Internet-based phones. ¶

At their leisure, visitors can hear educational presentations from a dozen speakers. The virtual fair even offers attendance prizes. ¶

Jeff Gusdorf, an accountant in Brown Smith Wallace's consulting group, said software vendors have sought a more cost-effective way to reach their audience. ¶

The typical vendor spends \$20,000 on a trade show, including the cost of travel, shipping for booth displays and employees to man the booth. At the virtual fair, the 25 vendors pay from \$2,500 to \$4,000 to participate. ¶

Also, Gusdorf said a virtual fair means anyone with an Internet connection can attend. Admission is free. ¶

If the virtual fair is a success, Brown Smith Wallace will offer it twice a year. The company expects 1,000 people to register. ¶

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Information from: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, <http://www.stltoday.com>. ¶