



Can We Talk?

Let's start working on our image – now!

Dan Beaulieu

How many of you are ready to start working on our industry's image? How many are ready to join and fight for the North American board industry? How many are ready to create and implement an industry-wide marketing and p.r. plan that will uniformly improve the way our vendors, customers,

and general public perceive us? If you feel as I do, if you are like the many whom I heard from after my past two columns, I urge you to come forward – before it is too late.

We know, now more than ever, that many of the large companies have already sold out; we cannot depend on them. We know that IPC has become a watered-down organization trying very hard to be all things to all people but in the process losing its way as an organization for the benefit of the PCB industry. Indeed, check the latest IPC member directory: vendors and customers outnumber fabricators. We no longer have an exclusive forum, a place where we can go and comfortably and privately discuss issues that concern only our industry. In fact, I think it is fair to say that we are now third-class citizens in the very organization we founded.

So, what do we do about it? First, those of us who feel likewise should get together in Orlando during the TMRC meetings in October and lay out a plan of action. I'll pay for the room and the coffee; all I ask in return is that you come with open minds and ideas flowing. We'll use the meeting to get to know one another and put together a plan focused entirely on creating a good and popular image of the PCB industry. I would particularly urge the smaller board shops – those I know feel that they have not been fairly served by IPC – to come and be heard. Don't get me wrong: employees of large

shops concerned about this issue are more than welcome, too. But this meeting should be for fabricators only: no vendors, no customers, no contract manufacturers. No offense, but we need a place of our own. In truth, I don't want to set the guidelines, nor do I want to make the call over who can come and who can't. But I feel that for a first meeting it would be better if only fabricators attended.

Here are the types of things we should determine:

- The objective of this organization.
- How we want to be perceived by the rest of the electronics industry.
- A list of our needs.
- A marketing communications plan.
- How to get more business.
- How to choose equipment and processes that we want (not those that our vendors "cram" down our throats).

We can also discuss developing courses for business issues such as:

- Working with reps.
- Getting the financing you need, when you need it.
- HR issues/recruiting
- Developing a strategic business plan.
- Running a successful PCB shop.
- Controlling cash flow.

These are just some examples of how we could help each other. IPC does a great job of producing and offering technical courses and seminars, but it lacks depth on the business side. As an aside, let me explain where I stand on a couple of issues. First, though I'm

critical of IPC and TMRC, I think we need them and feel that overall they do a good job. But I also feel that PCB shops need to make certain that we are being listened to and that our needs are being met. If enough readers are willing to develop an organization, then we should present our plan to IPC: it should have the first option to incorporate our organization into its corporate structure. Second, I believe in board houses all over the world. I think globally when it comes to our industry: We all should work toward improving the industry image, regardless of borders. My thoughts on improving the North American PCB industry are not meant to be at the expense of PCB fabricators elsewhere but rather out of concern that the North America industry will deteriorate past the point of being a global player.

I don't have all the answers: I leave the solutions to the readers. I want only to serve as motivator, facilitator, and catalyst: to help you come together in October and make things happen. If you are interested in getting together during TMRC, please let me know. I will arrange the rest. And whether two or 50, we will together explore the boundless possibilities of making our industry better. **PC FAB**

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