

How's that 'Spousal Unit' Working for You?

Image is everything: The time to market ourselves is at hand.



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IT LOOKS LIKE we'll have to do this ourselves. When it comes to fashioning an industry image, we can't count on outside help. We will have to develop and execute a plan that will show our customers and the world that the circuit board is a high-tech component.

I never cease to be amazed at the way board shops are treated by customers. Contract manufacturers are the self-styled "high-end"; board shops should just "shut up" and produce per CEMs' demands. They have made it clear that they lack regard for our technological capabilities. They tell us what to call our product ("cards"), and they want tell us how to price it as well: Apparently, they know how to price it properly, we don't. (This, of course, is code for controlling our margins.)

For their part, OEMs are no better. They commiserate with our vendors to decide just how we are going to build our boards and with which materials.

Many designers don't have clue as to what we do, either, although they are at a disadvantage because most have never ventured inside a shop. As such, they rely more on what they think should be producible. I submit that if a group of CEMs, OEMs, and designers were given an objective quiz on building an eight-layer board, it would fail miserably.

Overcoming these obstacles has been surprisingly difficult. For the past five years I have literally begged IPC to allow me to donate my services and work on this. I visited, sent e-mails, letters, and plans, to no avail. The consensus at IPC is that board shops are not overly concerned with their image. IPC claims it has tried many times to help shops with public relations, marketing, and presentations but it never generates interest. I have no way to dispute this yet find it hard to believe. Let's hear it from the fabricators: Is it true that you don't care about your image? That you don't care that your products are perceived as low-tech commodities? That you are happy with the perception that OEMs, contract manufacturers, and designers have? Is it true that if IPC made a legitimate effort to organize efforts to help with the public image of the PCB industry, you would not get involved?

If this is how fabricators feel, then perhaps they should resign themselves to a fate as subordinates. But it doesn't have to be that way. If you care about your image and would like to do something about it, here are some ideas:

Develop industry public service announcements. With

industry ad agencies, we could create a series of ads that display the importance of the PCB, using the slogan: *All electronics are based on PCBs*. One that comes to mind is a drawing of a group of people observing a pile of components, as one remarks: "Where's the idiot who said we didn't need printed circuit boards?"

We could educate customers with a Did You Know? campaign that provides effective, cogent facts about what it takes to build a PCB. Such ads could relate: It takes 71 separate steps to build a 14-layer blind-and-buried via board ... and a quickturn prototype shop can build it in 24 hours! How's that for high tech?

Another ad could offer a simple quiz: Ten questions about building multilayer boards. This would be a great tool for fabricators to use when selling to less-than-respectful customers. We could ask trade magazines for help in producing and placing the ads.

Those who consume boards need to know how tough they are to build. And those who don't use boards directly but who use products that contain PCBs need to know just how critical their function is. Companies that buy boards need to real-

CEMs tell us what to call our products – **AND HOW TO PRICE THEM.**

ize just how interwoven our industry is with their success.

It is time that this industry stops being the bastard child of electronics and stands up for itself.

This is a global concern. To those that do not see value in board technology, a circuit board is a circuit board regardless of where it is built. If they don't respect you and your product in Phoenix or Irvine or Boston or Chicago, they certainly won't respect it because it's built in Taipei or Shanghai.

You get the idea. We can use our resources to enhance and project our image. We have many hard-working, creative people. If we get together to develop a marketing and publicity plan, we will succeed. We don't need to wait for others to figure out how they can make a buck doing it for us.

Happy with the way things are? Happy when your product is called an interconnect device (an utterly ambiguous term tantamount to referring to a car as a "transportation device" or calling your wife a "spousal unit")? Then there's no need to call. But if you want to make the world a better place for fabricators, pick up the phone. ○

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