Del Mar Electronics Show Successfully Revives The Electronics Expo In The U.S.

by Kevin Parmenter, Contributor, Phoenix, Ariz.

It was my pleasure last month to attend a unique electronics event—the Del Mar Electronics & Design Show (DMEDS) in San Diego. While I am describing this expo as unique, I also have to say that there's something very familiar about it. The Del Mar Electronics Show is the type of broad, electronics tradeshow that was common in the U.S. years ago, but has pretty much become extinct on American soil. The Del Mar Electronics Show successfully revives the electronics expo.

For years the trend here has been a move away from the big, diverse expos of electronic components and subassemblies to more narrowly focused events, usually built around a technical conference. But the success of the recent Del Mar Electronics Show suggests that there is still a place for the big electronics trade fair in America. Perhaps the approach taken by this show's organizers will give others some clues about the "secret ingredients" required for running a successful electronics expo in the states.

So what was special about this event? First of all, from an attendee point of view, it was very low hassle. This is not a convention center tradeshow. This event is held at the Del Mar Fairgrounds and race track in a lovely and historic area. And unlike the typical "we are very proud of ourselves" convention center that gouges attendees for parking, Wi-Fi, admission, $14 hotdogs and more, this venue provides free parking, free admission, free Wi-Fi and reasonable pricing for everything. All that within a relaxing, no-hassle atmosphere. This is just a nice casual show, which seems almost from a different era—a time before everything was shoved to Asia and cost reduced with so much of the electronics business devolving into a cost-cutting frenzy.

Despite the casual atmosphere, this was a serious forum for technical business. It was great to see engineers attending and discussing their design challenges with exhibitors. And wow the exhibitors—over 1100 of the top electronics companies with good representation from power electronics companies including makers of components and power s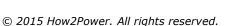upplies, plus suppliers of test and measurement gear and distributors. It was the "who's who" of the electronics industry in attendance.

I felt that I was transported back to a simpler time in the electronics industry when there were more events like this. I recall the days in the 70s and 80s of Wescon, Northcon, Southcon, Midcon, and Eastcon where we held large well-attended shows with top name exhibitors putting the latest information and products on display. The Del Mar Electronics Show was just like that, so it brought back great memories.

I would say that most of the attendance was from the technology base of customers in San Diego and others within a hundred mile radius. I have not seen anything like this provided in our industry for quite some time. I believe the reason we don't see more of this is a result of "broken thinking."

It used to be that engineers and managers at companies looked at these events as a way to keep up on the latest info. But not so nowadays.

The current thinking is…

1. If you are at a small company you can get on the Internet and find everything you need—which is fine if you want to *not use* the latest technologies in some cases.

2. If you are at a big major company you can phone someone about cooling fans or LCD displays (or whatever) and someone will fast rope from a helicopter in 15 minutes with the latest products that are not on the web yet. But then again, even at big companies there are managers who believe everything is on the web as a global buffet table of electronic products.

In either scenario the manager at the company will think it a waste of time to send their people to an event. This is flawed thinking because there will be applications support people at the events that can answer questions and both new products and applications of existing products will be on display. The people in attendance will also know what's being worked on in the back rooms and how that aligns with your time line of new product development.

Those of us who get the opportunity to travel overseas to attend conferences and tradeshows know that these benefits are recognized in other countries. Take Electronica for example. This massive trade fair draws something like 180,000 attendees and hosts thousands of booths.

Now, in Germany the engineers and all the local companies are communicating with the Electronica show staff during the event's two-year planning cycle to let them know what their needs are for products, new info and training sessions, etc. If you think about this approach, it's brilliant. The German companies and managers as well as the working engineers see this show as part of their training program every two years and it's a must-attend event.

It's a symbiotic relationship. The event organizers know that if they invest they will have an audience and the companies know that if they send their people and don't wimp out, the show organizers will make sure the event is world class for them and meets their needs—wow.

It's about common sense, something that prevailed in the time before finance people were everywhere and ruled the U.S. The demise of these shows in the U.S. is because the companies and managers have seen this as a waste of time—they don't allow their people to attend and the symbiotic relationship necessary for both to succeed breaks down.

Hopefully there will be more industry gatherings like the Del Mar Electronics Show that take us back in the right direction, enabling companies to compete globally by working together collaboratively to provide information and training to their engineers. But for this to happen, show organizers need ongoing support. They need to know that if the quarter is down a bit companies will still allow their engineers to attend rather than putting bike chains on the doors and keeping the staff inside cutting down the forest with rusty pocket knives rather than spending a day or two learning about chain saws and 2-cycle gas!

The Del Mar Electronics Show was great. The only area where I see room for improvement is in the technical conference, which should be expanded so that engineers have further incentives and opportunities to come for training. I was pleased to have presented a technical session during the week. I would sure like to see the show organizers work with the major local companies to expand participation and attendance on a wide scale as this show is so convenient and attendee friendly.

It would even be possible to run buses from major organizations in the area such as Qualcomm, HP, and Spawar to get engineers to and from the event. This is a gem and deserves to be nurtured and cultivated as it's a great service to the electronics industry in the area. Wouldn't it be nice to have shows like this in every major city with an indigenous electronics technology base?

For more information, about next year's Del Mar Electronics & Design Show, see the show website.

Editor's Note: No photos were available for this year's event. The photos shown here are from previous Del Mar Electronics & Design shows.

About The Author

Kevin Parmenter has over 20 years of experience in the electronics and semiconductor industry. Kevin is currently vice president of applications engineering in the USA for Excelsys Technologies. Previously, Kevin has served as director of Advanced Technical Marketing for Digital Power Products at Exar, and led global product applications engineering and new product definition for Freescale Semiconductors AMPD - Analog, Mixed Signal and Power Division based in Tempe, Arizona.

Prior to that, he worked for Fairchild Semiconductor in the Americas as senior director of field applications engineering and held various technical and management positions with increasing responsibility at ON Semiconductor and in the Motorola Semiconductor Products Sector. Kevin also led an applications engineering team for the start-up Primarion where he worked on high-speed electro-optical communications and digital power supply semiconductors.

Kevin serves on the board of directors of the PSMA (Power Sources Manufacturers Association) and was the general chair of APEC 2009 (the IEEE Applied Power Electronics Conference.) Kevin has also had design engineering experience in the medical electronics and military electronics fields. He holds a BSEE and BS in Business Administration, is a member of the IEEE, and holds an Amateur Extra class FCC license (call sign KG5Q) as well as an FCC Commercial Radiotelephone License.