

## Continuing Education

Get out and attend a few industry events. You just might learn something.



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**IT'S AMAZING WHAT** you can learn when you least expect it. Almost by accident, you may uncover the missing piece of a puzzle, or information that sends you down the road to success. The chance to learn new things, even by accident, is just one reason I attend trade shows, conferences and other industry events.

Over the past couple of years we all have learned to do more with less, to respect competition that's far away and to look over our shoulders to see who is closing in on us or no longer in business.

I need to know if there is an industry locomotive coming that might knock me down. I also need to know which members of this industry I should respect or emulate. That's why I attend industry events.

And there are a lot of such events, many taking place in the next few months. Our industry is fortunate to have several associations that sponsor a wide spectrum of opportunities to collectively meet. IPC is the best-known organization but there are others – regional, national and global in scope – that address everything from components to materials to technology. Many publications, such as the one you're reading, also have regional and national programs, conferences and exhibitions focused on the design, fabrication and assembly of PCBs.

Whenever you attend an event, from local evening technical sessions to major trade shows, you have the opportunity to learn. Seeing an old friend or making a new acquaintance provides an opportunity to ask questions and find out what is happening. Step out and have a conversation with someone or attend a seminar and you might be amazed at what you can learn. But the operative word is can.

The results may not be instantaneous. Very often the most enlightening and valuable ideas are not realized while the conversation is taking place. It is much later that the "ah ha" moment strikes and the true value of the event becomes clear. How many times have we suddenly needed information on a topic that we were talking with someone about a couple of days earlier? Meeting new people and attending seminars more often directly lead to knowing who to call when questions come up. The value of being involved in industry events is often far greater than imagined, especially when you look back on the new relationships made, not to mention what was learned.

However, it is not just industry events that can offer invaluable knowledge. Attending local chamber of commerce or regional economic development events, even visiting with neighboring companies from other industries can be worthwhile. For example, I recall a meeting several years ago of neighboring companies that led to the formation of an educational collaborative that proved highly effective and economical for my business and all of those involved. It all started with a simple comment by an attendee about the difficulty in finding prospective employees with adequate math skills. This led to a collaborative of local and state government, educational institutions and many small businesses seeking well trained employees.

What seems to separate the most successful business people from the pack is their involvement in industry and regional business organizations. Their openness to learn anywhere, in any way, enables them to have the contacts and the "heads up" knowledge to continually beat the pack. On the

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other hand, it seems that the more reclusive business people seem to be slightly behind and never able to gain the traction necessary to be highly successful industry leaders.

To people who worry about which company or continent might knock them out of business, stop to rethink what you are doing, or not doing, to control your destiny. Equally, to those who chronically sit back and say that they know enough to successfully manage their business simply by waiting for business to come via the phone, Web site or publication, stop and rethink what you are saying.

In the design and manufacture of cutting-edge product, it is increasingly important to know not only what will impact our industry, but who can be a resource for navigating these constantly changing seas. We need to take advantage of every resource possible and the season for many of our industry's major events is upon us. For many, your company's performance will never improve unless you go out and get involved. You may be amazed, not only at what you learn but at the great people who participate in our industry. **PCD&M**

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