

New Model Year

It is a publishing maxim that big changes are saved for the January issue. It's a time-honored tradition – don't ask me why – but one I'll stick with here. To a degree.

Last July, upon taking over as editor of *CIRCUITS ASSEMBLY*, I assembled a list of the realities the magazine was facing. I concluded that more information is created – and needed by readers – each year than the previous one. The depressing corollary is, the total available advertising market – and by extension, the size of the magazine – has shrunk over time. (Most business-to-business publications, including this one, set their issue size based on a ratio of advertising to editorial pages.) As is true for many of our readers, the competition is relentless and unforgiving, which means nonstop pricing pressure and deflated margins. And the icing on this cake is that our biggest suppliers – the U.S. Post Office and our printers – continue to raise prices.

Then I took a look at our circulation. Broken down by process or job function, nine distinct segments emerged. I found it odd, though, that we would sometimes go months between covering certain topics, topics that are staples of electronics assembly. You can immediately see the inherent problem: If you're running AOI, you want to know *now* what's new, not wait until, say, November. Indeed, we compete for your time with a phalanx of sources of information – not to mention your actual job. If you don't get what you need from us, you'll go somewhere else.

Clearly, *CIRCUITS ASSEMBLY* needed a different model. Consider mainstream literature. Readers pay for content in other fields – sports, entertainment, news. That readers aren't plunking down \$5 to read us each month is just a smokescreen. While I doubt many would drop *Maxim* to read about dispensing, wouldn't they be best served if we packaged each issue as if they paid for it?

With that in mind, I laid out four principles for 2005:

- More breadth and variety in coverage of technologies.
- Life for good papers from tech conferences that otherwise disappear when the conference ends.
- Feature content of interest to each segment of the readership in each and every issue.
- Better (and true) integration of print and Web.

Let's explore that last point in detail. It's cliché, but the Internet has changed the way we work. At its core, the Web is the world's best index. When we want to know something, we "Google" it. Problem is, our industry is broad and shares terms with other (lower) forms of manufacturing. Type "screen printing" into any search engine and millions upon millions of hits

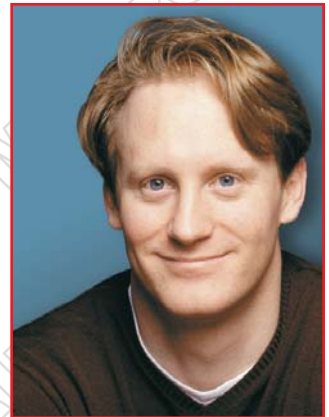
are returned. Bet you don't go through more than two screens before you give up. Publishers have wrestled with just how to marry the indexing capabilities of the Internet with the best attribute of print – its ease of use. I think we've found an answer.

Henceforth, here's what a typical issue will look like. Our monthly cover story will run at its full-length, as usual. Instead of four or five related and full-length features, however, we'll run eight to 10 mini articles of one to two pages each, discussing particular technologies, processes or products of interest. For each of these mini features, the print magazine will carry an extended synopsis and data results, while the methodology and discussion will be included in the full-length version at circuitsassembly.com. This model converges the convenience of print with the expanse of the Internet. Despite the space constraints of print, you'll have a quick and easy way of locating new, relevant info. Put another way, *CIRCUITS ASSEMBLY* becomes the Google for electronics assembly.

That's not all. To satisfy our nine reader segments, another big change will be seen in our columns: More of them, and with better distinction. Each month we'll cover the lead-free conversion; business; processing/soldering; components/packages; procurement; new equipment; test/inspection; and back-end semiconductor manufacturing or optoelectronics assembly. We also continue our interviews with leading executives.

Another thing that has troubled me is how the vast majority of papers delivered at industry trade shows during the course of the year seemingly vanish as soon as the conferences are over. Many of these papers deserve a longer shelf-life. And since each year brings more technical papers than we could ever possibly publish, starting this month we'll dedicate a page to abstracts from recent technical conferences, with links to the complete papers.

There is an ever-increasing amount of information available. Our role is to act as a filter, screening the noise from what's truly crucial. With this, our new model for a new year, we hope we do just that.



Mike Buetow

Mike Buetow, Editor-in-Chief
mbuetow@upmediagroup.com