BOSTON -- Exhibitors at Design East here offered contrasting opinions on the first two days of the annual trade show.

While some exhibitors were pleased with their booth traffic, most agreed that the overall show felt smaller than previous years. The show was quiet when this reported walked the floor today.

The three-day show brought 103 exhibitors to the Boston area this week. The absence of major semiconductor stalwarts like **Texas Instruments** and **Amtel** as exhibitors changed the floor landscape, and others like **NXP** and **Renesas** scaled down their booths.

Screaming Circuits, Suntron and **Precision Assembly Technologies (PAT)** were among the contract electronics assemblers exhibiting. A Suntron representative told this reporter that the company has added new **Juki** placement lines to its plants in Methuen, MA, and Phoenix, and that almost all its business from the now-closed plant in Sugarland, TX, has been retained.

Screaming Circuits was one of the few assemblers to demonstrate a product innovation of its own. The firm has added direct parts procurement to its quoting and ordering software. Using an interface with Digi-Key, buyers can upload a bill of materials, and in a few seconds see the parts' availability and price. The manufacturers' part numbers and a visual image are also shown for verification purposes. For parts that are out of stock or incorrectly identified on the BoM, the user can request a manual quote. The final pricing breaks out the respective pricing of the parts, bare boards and assembly.

Marketing manager Duane Benson said the list currently tied to Digi-Key's inventory, but the agreement is not exclusive and other distributors may later be added.

Benson added that the company, which specializes in building prototypes and NPI PCBs, is on

a record sales pace this year, boosted by demand from the military and medical sectors.

PAT, another prototype specialist, was not only exhibiting for the first time at Design East, it was the first show the 12-year-old EMS company has even done. The firm operates from a 24,000 sq. ft. factory in Bohemia, NY, on Long Island. The plant has four SMT lines, and the firm's services range from design to wire and cable assembly and box build. Unlike many NPI shops, PAT has inhouse conformal coating, perhaps because it tends to concentrate on the military and medical end-markets.

First-time exhibitor **BPM Microsystems** said it is exhibiting to help teach designers to remember to add test points to the bare boards. It showed a new desktop version of the popular 2800 multisite programmer. Called the 2800 Concurrent Programming System, the bed-of-nails system handles single parts.

While several design services shops were present, surprisingly, very few CAD vendors bothered. **Mentor Graphics,** for example, which has its own embedded and open source softwar e was not present, an absence noted by several people present. One that did show was **Altium,** which said it has plans to add one million components to its Designer CAD library.

Making its debut was **Kozio's** VTOS test platform for verifying new design and debug problems in embedded hardware. VTOS picks up where JTAG structural test leaves off, and vice president of marketing Bob Potock said engineers were most interested in understanding how VTOS could fill the gap between design creation and production test.

Exhibitors diverged on whether the audience was primarily made up of software engineers or hardware designers. However, they were almost unanimous in agreeing that attendance felt light compared to previous years.

The show producers have not yet released attendance figures for the 2012 event.