SMTAI: Mixed Blessings

Written by Mike Buetow Friday, 19 October 2012 08:48 -

The biggest news from SMTAI this year actually came before the exhibition even began.

Just moments after the conclusion of a <u>terrific and touching keynote presentation</u>, newly elected SMTA president Bill Barthel announced that IPC would locate its semiannual technical committee meetings at SMTAI next year, effectively bringing to an end (at least for now) the annual (and competing) IPC Midwest show.

There was notable relief among exhibitors when they learned the news. While SMTAI is the larger show, with roughly twice the booths and a greater number of attendees, and is generally recognized for having a much stronger technical conference, the difference hasn't been so clear-cut as to make the decision as to which show to attend a slam-dunk. Many of those on the show floor, including quite a few conference speakers, welcomed the news as a time-saver and cost-cutter. A few exhibitors did express concern over the location, adding that the Orlando site of this year's show is the only electronics manufacturing event of any size in the Southeast US. The deal is agreed to but not yet signed, and covers only 2013, as far as we've been told. Yet it's a move of enough significance that it could make SMTAI the best *technical* event for electronics assembly in North America. (Disclosure: I'm on the technical conference program committee.)

Speaking of the conference, the program was well attended. I moderated a panel looking at what we've learned (and what we still need to figure out) about lead-free solders and materials, and as we have for the past umpteen years, co-chaired the EMS session with Sue Mucha. Some of the posters were excellent, with one from Matt Kelly of **IBM** underscoring the importance of performing DfM as early as possible in the product conception process.

The keynoter, **NASA's** Brooks Kimmel, was an inspired choice, <u>offering a very personal</u> 45-mi nute presentation relating how the agency's technology benefits not just the space program but also has made its way into everyday life.

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Many exhibitors noted the two-day show appeared slower than last couple years. A few said they had busy spurts, with a couple saying the first day was consistently busy. That was disappointing, as insofar as I could tell, there were more machines on the floor than ever, and several companies set up a full package-on-package (PoP) assembv line featuring equipment and materials by **Juki, IBL Bare Board Group** and others.

Aisles were spaced pretty tight, but still it was not unusual to look up and down and not see more than a handful of attendees walking around. I know the folks at SMTA pulled out all the stops to market the show, and I am left to wonder whether Orlando is a good venue for this type of show. That said, the registration and execution of the event were flawless.

Overheard:

Some grumbling about the new IPC SIR test, which one distinguished engineer went so far as to refer to as "garbage." A new B-52 test coupon is being studied.

DEK general manager Brian Smith said business has picked up for them in the last month.

Those looking for a test lab to investigate possible counterfeit components might consider **GD 4 Test Services** in Austin, TX.

Semblant has two new machines coming out that handle mid- and lower-volume surface finishing.

ASM (Siplace) president Jeff Timms acknowledged a "definite" onshoring trend, and added that they also see OEMs bringing production back in-house from EMS companies in Asia. He was very bullish on ASM's management, and touted the company's new operation in Manaus, Brazil, which will be fully operational in November.

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XOS has become the latest company to compete in the XRF arena, using their equipment to spot counterfeit components.