BOSTON – Nepcon East opened today to predictably modest crowds and a surprisingly upbeat mood. Attendance was difficult to gauge. On one hand, there were ample people in the aisles. On the other, it was near impossible to know at a glance which show they were there for: Nepcon, Assembly New England or OEM New England, the latter two of which cater to distinctly different customers. A larger number of EMS companies are here than in the past, most local. Some of the companies include **Distron, Carlton Industries, Altronics** and newbie **Element Manufacturing**, which opened last year in Nashua, NH. It underscores the lack of a common, focused show for EMS firms, who are clutching at any possible place to promote themselves. One of the big names is **Hitachi OMD,** which is housed in the 164,000-sq. ft. former Lucent plant in Norman, OK, where it maintains six SMT lines and focuses on medical, storage systems, datacom and telephony products.

However, the layout makes it confusing for attendees. For example, a buyer looking for an EMS company might have to traverse seven or eight aisles and "three" exhibitions in order to visit all the possibilities. Or, they may not realize that while most of the EMS companies were clustered under the Nepcon section, a few – including **Princeton Technology** and **Arc-Tronics** – have opted to make their homes in the medical section. (Show directories are of little guidance: exhibitors notoriously inflate their products and services offering so as to generate additional traffic.) The word from most of the EMS companies is that business remains stable, despite the problems reported among the top tier players.

On the equipment side, the biggest names present include **Juki Automation, Samsung, Mydata** and **AssemblÃ©on.** Several other blue chip OEMs are here, but tucked away in their distributors' booths.

The highlight I've seen thus far is a noncontact magnetic imaging system for testing ICT from **RMD Instruments**. Called MagneticVision, it comes in benchtop and large systems and is for testing ICs to 18" x 18" PCBs. It works by taking in CAD data and using a noncontact probe as an emanator to generate current from point to point, in short, showing where current is flowing (versus traditional OCT, which shows where current is not flowing). It is reportedly capable of 100% netlist test and can be programmed to check for programmable pathways as well. The software shows a magnetic 3-D scan which plots the current direction in the x and y axes. The system has a reported current sensitivity of 10 µA, spatial resolution of 20 µm, and x-y-z stage resolution of 2.5 µm. It is the company's first foray into ICT test and should be ready in three months, RMD's Dr. Rez Karim told *Circuits Assembly.*

Did you attend Nepcon East? Share your thoughts at Mike Buetow's blog: http://circuitsassembly.com/blog/?p=171