

## Problem solvers

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As I kid, I sometimes got frustrated with what I saw as my Dad not giving me a straight answer. For instance, I would say, “Dad, I need a hammer”.

“What are you using it for?” he would say.

“There’s a finishing nail sticking out the wooden floor in my room and I need to pound it back in.” (I grew up in an very old farm house.)

“Then you need a rubber mallet, not a hammer. The hammer will put dents in the wood.”

It didn’t occur to me until years later that my father gave me straight answers all the time. The straightest way to answer that question is to ask about the purpose of the tool I requested. Just handing over a hammer or the nearest thing to it would have been only half the answer and chances are I would have had to come back with a report about the floor dents — and another request for something to remove those dents.

What is important to remember is that while the correct product is important, the supplier (Dad, in this case) needed to know about my application before he could offer up the right tool. Just because he had a lot of tools didn’t mean they were all correct for the job. He asked about the job. He questioned me about my application and then he told me what tools are available to complete the job and why. The solution to my problem involved not only the hammer, but additional support and education.

Solution is most frequently defined as “...the act of solving, or the state of being solved; the disentanglement of any intricate problem or difficult question; explanation.” The device is used as part of the solution but is not synonymous with solution. Asking a customer what they need a part for and where it is intended to go into the design and what application that final design will end up in is offering a solution. There is a lot of competition among device manufacturers. What sets competitors apart is how much attention they pay to a customer’s problem.

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I'm somewhat encouraged with what appears to be a gradual understanding by some electronics manufacturers of the importance of talking about more than just their products and then calling those products a "solution". I see more emphasis in product announcements we receive being placed on not only the new device but the kits, software and tech support available — at the time of the announcements. There is a little more of this "solution"-oriented information on the individual company web sites, as well, but it can be much better.

In the end, a product is eventually chosen for a design and we recognize that in the pages of ECN every month and, as in past years, in the December 15th issue which features the [Readers Choice Product Technology Awards](#) [1]. We are asking you to vote on the top five products in the 10 product categories that we cover that ran in the pages of ECN in a 12-month period. We have added an additional category this year — energy efficient products — that goes alongside our extended coverage of these types of products.

[Click here to vote on this years Top Products!](#) [1]

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