

Fathoming the future

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Once upon a time, if you wanted to know the future you went to a colorful character who told you your fortune by examining bird guts, tea leaves, or other obscure random pattern generator. They were called witch doctors, clairvoyants, and fortune-tellers. Today we call them business analysts.

The problem with seeing the future is not just that tomorrow is promised to no one, it is so full of variables that even the most experienced prognosticator can't keep track of them. Is company 1's success based on technology, or a good sales team? Is it their customer service, or their build quality?

I recently spent some time at an event held by Lodico and Company, attended by several editors and representatives from SynQor, Melexis, NexTek, ST Micro, and Chil Semi. We discussed current market issues as well as trends in the industry.

On the market front, everyone seems to agree that the electronics industry should be using the current downtime to evaluate new technologies and standards for inclusion in their next generation of product. Using the downtime to your advantage is the best way to increase your prospects when the money starts to flow again.

There is also a consensus that today's engineer is becoming more and more focused on the issue of finding a solution more than just finding a part that has desirable performance parameters. A part isn't really a solution unless the support structure is in place - reference designs, development kits, white papers, and an FAE that can help with the system integration issues. Without that support structure, a component will have difficulty gaining traction in the marketplace.

This demand for increased information and documentation is one of the major forces behind the rise of the internet as an engineering tool. However, most industry publications now provide extended research capabilities on their websites to serve the need for more information from their readers. In addition, manufacturers are providing more and more support materials on their websites in more easily accessible forms to address this expanding need.

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One of the trends we discussed was the increase in household “enhanced living” devices. The household medical industry opened that door for us, and the consumer will come to expect more logic, more motor functionality, and more networking capability in all household products. That retired Baby Boomer would rather live alone in their apartment than live in a facility, and a home full of powered devices makes that goal reachable for many. Mechatronics and Haptics will increase in importance as disciplines as more engineers are driven to expand the functionality of household products by adding logic, motion, and force feedback.

Where do you think the industry is going? Where do you see market opportunities? What areas of tech do you think will grow, and what areas will shrink? Let us know what you think! - alix.paultre@advantagemedia.com [1]

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