Looking back on the year that was

Considering the tumult in the last several years, from disruptive technologies to political discord to financial meltdown and market re-adjustments, it’s kind of hard to say that 2010 was notable. Yet there are many things that mark this year that will make it a memorable one.

The first thing to consider is that 2010 represents the end of the first decade of this new century, the end of the latest *fin de siècle*, a time as full of promise as it is full of tumult. Leaving one century behind and beginning another has always been considered a pivotal time, as the old and new battle for supremacy. We’ve certainly seen our share of ideological combat, whether on the fields of politics or corridors of industry, as we strive to make our way forward to realize the future.

There will be many milestones attributed to this year, either because specific actions occurred with significant impact on our lives or because it’s convenient to use the decade as a marker for broader trends. From regulatory issues like the EU selecting a plug standard to broad industry trends like the explosion of LED-backlit LCDs and the shift from browsers to apps in the mobile domain, 2010 will stand in many people’s memory.

The past year was the topic of ECN’s latest industry discussion webcast, the Tinker’s Toolbox. Our panel talked about trends and issues from the previous year, from the continuing development of ubiquitous computing in the marketplace to the rare-earths issue in China to the ever-increasing integration of functionality at the chip level.

What we must never forget is that we can affect the change that faces us and create the future we wish to see. Technology advances and ever-increasing capabilities have given design engineers an increased ability to create more functional products more cheaply with more powerful tools both hardware- and software-based. Today’s engineer can create entire systems using readily-available reference designs, development kits, and online design tools provided freely by the component and subsystem manufacturer.

The last year and decade have underscored the importance to the USA as both a country and an industry to invest in technology development and commercialization

in order to maintain our place in the world as a source of great designs and products. We must resolve to not only continue this, but increase that activity in earnest or risk becoming marginalized by those who are more assertive and willing to take on the risks and uncertainty involved in creating the future. But if we do not work to create the future we wish to see we will have to accept the future provided to us by others.

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