High On Altium

M. Simon

I have been looking for some new board layout software for a while. I do love the ExpressPCB [1] interface but it kind of locks you into one board making company, not counting the delightful but limited FAR Circuits [2]. A few days ago an ad for Altium [3] flashed across my screen. It caught my eye. So I went to their site to watch a video of it in action [4] and was wowed. Some people I'm working with on projects say they like it. So I have one reason to try it right there. But now I have another.

I signed up for the free trial and was anxious to get started. Well, I figure it couldn't hurt to give them a call and see how long the process takes. I reached a nice gentleman (dang I'm bad with names) who found my name in his database within minutes of my entering it. He said it normally takes 24 to 48 hours, but because I was so anxious he said they would try to see if they couldn't get things moving a little faster. Excellent. So I called the office in my area [5]. Just to see what they were up to. I got Maureen Stevens on the line and she was quite apologetic that she had sent the material to the wrong e-mail address (already?) and was glad I had called (so soon?) so she could get it right. The Force Is With Me.

Immediately I checked my e-mail and sure enough Maureen of Altium had sent me two e-mails. One was a generic how to get started and the other was a personal note thanking me for my interest. Start to finish about ten minutes - plus the recovery from their mistake (thanks to my input) was as close to instantaneous as you can get when operating on a person to person basis. Very nice Maureen and (I didn't catch you name). And until the end of this whole process none of the people involved had any idea I wrote for **ECN**. I got their normal process which was outstanding. So I'm high on **Altium**. Which brings up some history.

I got into computer CAD through Orcad and Tango. I was never much of a Protel fan. And **Altium** is a son of Protel. But this software looks really good. Nothing like the old Protel. I guess I'll have to stop writing for a while and play around.

I got a little lost at the site while trying to download the software but found that if you hit the **Download Now** button on the software page [6] you get sorted out

right nicely. Register first though. The download is about half a gig. Well it looks like it is going to be a while. Nope. They seem to have some heavy servers on line, so it took less than five minutes. I'm really liking this experience more and more.

Update: I have been into it for a few hours now and I'm having the usual difficulties. Entering a new universe is never easy. There are all kinds of new rules to learn even if the underlying laws are the same as you are used to from your old universe. But I know it will be smooth sailing once I get going because, despite their extensive parts library they have a relatively easy method [7] for entering new parts. I have a couple of small boards in mind to start. I will report back when I have made some progress.

I do have one minor quibble about the learning process. I'm a text fellow (you hadn't noticed?), but the learning process provided by **Altium** seems mainly video oriented. They have quite a few videos up on YouTube - Altium [8]. Fifteen so far this month alone. So I'm going to be learning a new way to learn. No worries. I like learning.

M. Simon's e-mail can be found on the sidebar at Space-Time Productions [9].

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