

## Stretching 'Intellectual Capital Overhead'

Written by Jenny Popp

Thursday, 08 November 2012 16:41 -

---

Established 27 years ago, the SMTA membership is an international network of professionals who build skills, share practical experience and develop solutions in electronic assembly technologies, including microsystems, emerging technologies, and related business operations. Here newly elected President Bill Barthel discusses what plans he has in store for the SMTA.

**Congratulations, Bill, on your recent election as president of the SMTA. How long have you been a member of the SMTA and what previous positions have you held? Over the years, how have you seen the organization change and grow?**

**BB:** I joined the SMTA in 1986 and, as we all know, the electronics industry has changed dramatically over that time frame. I did not become very involved in SMTA until the early 1990s when a colleague of mine at Plexus, Les Hymes, took the lead to form a chapter in Wisconsin where I served as Chapter VP Technical Programs. Since that time I attended as many events as possible, starting with (Surface Mount International) in San Jose. I was elected to the Board of Directors in 2005 and during my six years on the board, I served as chair of the Planning Committee and vice president of technical programs.

As an electronics assembly professional, I have come to appreciate how the SMTA has evolved over the years. There are a number of things that are unique about the association, each changing in their own way with time. Local chapters grow and shift as the membership changes in that region. Technical conferences have become larger, more focused and part of a regular calendar for people who need to stay abreast of the industry's latest and greatest developments. More technical content is available via the Internet. Networking opportunities continue to grow and, in my opinion, this is one of the greatest values of being a member.

In retrospect, I think what surprises me most is what has not changed. Even in the digital communications age, the value of face-to-face meetings has not diminished. Be it a local chapter, a focused technical symposium, or the SMTA International Conference, the opportunities that SMTA offers provide a vast number of contacts and a great deal of knowledge. What is even better is the collegial manner in which members treat one another within this Association. This cannot be replaced with a web meeting or PowerPoint presentation.

**In addition to leading the SMTA, we understand that you are the Manager, Manufacturing Technology Development at Plexus. Can you provide our readers with a brief background of your career experiences and explain how your qualifications make you the best fit for advancing the SMTA?**

**BB:** Armed with a chemical engineering degree from the University of Wisconsin, I began my career in printed circuit fabrication. It turned out to be a great match – a chemical background in the electronics industry! After working at two PCB companies, I joined Plexus and now have been in EMS for more than 20 years (some people have heard me say this is equivalent to over 140 human years!). My time with Plexus has been both exciting and rewarding because I get to work with a wide variety of products and OEMs. Since Plexus focuses on high-mix, high complexity, and high-reliability products, I have spent most of my time on process engineering for printed circuit assembly and branched out into related technologies. I was involved with the definition of our equipment, materials, and methods for these processes and I have an intimate

## Stretching 'Intellectual Capital Overhead'

Written by Jenny Popp

Thursday, 08 November 2012 16:41 -

---

understanding of the surface mount process. My MBA gives me an added perspective of the financial drivers of our industry as well.

As SMTA members know, technologies are constantly changing. In order to better work these changes into Plexus capabilities, I have been involved with consortia like the International Electronics Manufacturing Initiative (iNEMI) where I co-chaired Board Assembly road mapping efforts and still participate on the Technical Committee. I began to appreciate the breadth of knowledge that consortia, professional, and industry associations offer in trying to understand the vast electronics industry. I also have been a member of IPC Committees, IMAPS, ASQ, and the Universal AREA Consortium.

It is through my years of involvement with many fine organizations that I have developed a vision that better coordination of our cumulative "industry assets" would be in the best interest of all, including my company, Plexus. I believe the industry benefits from many organizations and all have an opportunity to provide something different to its members. The success of one organization does not have to come at the loss of another. Market consolidation always tests this; however, innovative, member-focused organizations like the SMTA are evolving continuously to provide more value and everyone benefits!

### **As the industry continues rebounding and companies begin reinvesting in new products and technologies, how do you see the SMTA meeting these needs? What is your growth strategy for the global organization, both in terms of membership and technology focus?**

**BB:** This is an exciting time for the SMTA, and the recent SMTA International Conference was a great illustration of the breadth of involvement SMTA has concerning new technologies as well as the growth of the industry. Technical sessions covered the gamut of challenges facing the industry from emerging technologies, lead-free soldering, and harsh environment applications to sessions dealing with business strategies and supply chain issues. The Association also supports these needs with an expanding portfolio of focused conferences like the International Wafer-Level Packaging Conference (IWLPC) and the High Reliability Cleaning & Conformal Coating Conferences. We are constantly on the lookout for new opportunities and industry professionals like SMTA's VP of technical programs Marie Cole of IBM and our technical committees are working to expand.

Exhibitors offering the latest solutions to new technologies reached a record number at SMTAI 2012, further illustrating that the SMTA is at the focal point for electronics assembly. The SMTA Board of Directors recognizes that the supplier side of the industry also is an important part of the knowledge sharing objectives on which the Association is founded. To provide added focus on this area, the board approved a new officer position, VP of exhibitions, to which industry veteran Hal Hendrickson of Nordson Dage was appointed. We recognize the importance that a strong supplier base provides to SMTA and I am confident that a leader like Hal will help our supplier membership grow as they see the value SMTA has to offer.

Local chapters are sponsoring more Technology Forums and Expos than ever before and we are working to develop better tools to help them grow these events and be more efficient in organizing and executing. Thanks to efforts by many as well as our VP of membership Roy Starks of Libra Industries, we are experiencing acceleration in our growth rate. The international

## Stretching 'Intellectual Capital Overhead'

Written by Jenny Popp

Thursday, 08 November 2012 16:41 -

---

community also has embraced the SMTA and we have seen expansion in Central and South America, and our Asia chapters' and events continue to get stronger. In summary, it is our strong chapter base that gives SMTA a unique ability to have a pulse on the industry and to quickly share knowledge.

**We were pleased to read about the coming together of two industry-leading organizations – the SMTA and the IPC — Association Connecting Industries to co-locate the IPC fall committee meetings with SMTA International. Can you tell us what led to this decision? How has it been received by the industry? Besides the obvious, “one-stop location,” what other benefits will this relationship bring to association members?**

**BB:** It has been a great experience working with John Mitchell and the IPC to offer this combined event. We are pleased with the level of cooperation we have with IPC but this is not necessarily a new approach. The SMTA has a longstanding policy of working with other organizations where it makes sense and coordination with IPC actually started more than six years ago with the development of our Cleaning and Conformal Coating event. We are pleased with the expansion of our relationship with IPC but should point out that we work with many other groups like MEPTEC (Medical Electronics Conference), Chip Scale Review (IWLPC), CALCE (Counterfeit Electronics) and have colocated events with iNEMI for years.

Specifically regarding the colocation of IPC Committee meetings with the SMTA International Conference and Exhibition, there were many things that lead to this decision but on a whole it was pretty obvious that it was a win for each organization and the industry as a whole. It was nice to have John Mitchell, IPC president and CEO, present at SMTAI for the announcement, and both he and I have gotten nothing but kudos for the move. With the agreement to move forward, the real work is in high gear. Both events offer numerous meetings and we want to do our best so that similar topics do not result in a schedule conflict. Additionally, we want to create opportunities for the two groups to interact and I believe the combined networking will help SMTA International be seen as an even greater event than it already is.

**In your opinion, could this be a sign of things to come? Do you foresee more combined efforts between the SMTA and the IPC? If so, how would it benefit the industry?**

**BB:** As previously mentioned, through my years of involvement with many fine organizations I have developed a vision that better coordination of our cumulative “industry assets” would be in the best interest of all. With that said, we are hopeful other opportunities with IPC will present themselves but, to be honest, we currently are focused on ensuring that the SMTAI Conference and Exhibition co-locating with the IPC Committee meetings is a rousing success in 2013. I am confident other opportunities as obvious as this coordination will be apparent in the future.

**How big a role did economics and the trend of corporations being as lean as possible play in the coming together of the two associations?**

**BB:** As a conference attendee for many years, it is an easy and obvious benefit. One trip — one time out of office — to cover an agenda that previously required nearly double the time and expense. From a personal perspective, this is a great move. Potential attendees today are faced with more options and less travel time. This was an easy decision.

**Speaking of being lean, what do you think the industry will take from this last downturn?**

## Stretching 'Intellectual Capital Overhead'

Written by Jenny Popp

Thursday, 08 November 2012 16:41 -

---

### **Do you think it has changed the way we will do business moving forward?**

**BB:** In some ways I believe current constraints will be lasting and form the “new normal.” Products that benefit from being built in a certain region will be more likely to stay there and transition costs from one region to another will diminish. This will mean more products will be developed and introduced in their destination regions. The “overhead” of “intellectual capital” for companies in electronic assembly will continue to be stretched thin. This is one reason that both my company and I support organizations like SMTA. They can bolster our ability to make the right technical decisions while dealing with fewer resources. Companies that learn that being lean does not mean reducing capabilities but that value proposition will continue to flourish will continue to succeed.

### **In today’s economy, successful companies have had to change their traditional ways of doing business. The same must hold true for industry associations. What are some examples of how the SMTA has had to think smarter to continue being a useful resource to the electronics industry?**

**BB:** There is no doubt that the SMTA is growing in this time of economic uncertainty for two main reasons:

- Volunteers. I personally have met hundreds of people during my time with SMTA who have the same experience as that which prompted me to get more involved. We all feel we get far more from the Association than what we put into it. An engaged and growing number of volunteers not only helps the SMTA achieve more at less cost but it also helps to keep us focused on what is important to our Association and the industry.

- Staff. JoAnn Stromberg, executive administrator for the SMTA, and her team are always working behind the scenes to keep the gears of this dynamic organization running. Their tireless efforts and innovations provide a great foundation for our members and the continuation of our mission. Additionally, I think it is the flexibility demonstrated by JoAnn and the staff that allow us to deal with changes quickly, efficiently, and effectively.

### **Under your leadership, what is one goal that you want the SMTA to accomplish by the beginning of 2013?**

**BB:** You can see a number of these cited in earlier points — growth of our events through partnerships like we have with IPC and our SMTA International Conference, a greater focus on our supplier member needs, and greater support and growth in our chapters around the world.

As I prepared to take the role of president, I reached out to a number of members including past presidents because I knew there was so much going on with the SMTA and I was worried I might not be focused enough to complete some objectives that I thought were critical for success. Now that I have assumed the position, I am pleasantly surprised with the progress and support that many of these key objectives have from our members. At this point, I personally do not feel the need to make them happen. The mission of the SMTA (beginning of the article) is

## Stretching 'Intellectual Capital Overhead'

Written by Jenny Popp

Thursday, 08 November 2012 16:41 -

---

being supported in so many ways that I can only hope to add to all the good things my predecessors and our wonderful volunteers have built. What a great time to be involved with the SMTA!