



## Collaboration – Distribution Style !

By Mark Tayles, VP & Canadian Area Director, Avnet Electronics Marketing

As I write this month's column, a growing percentage of us associated with the electronic design chain & supply chain, are looking forward to an invigorated 2004! It's been a long three and a half years, and its probably fitting it's an Olympic year.

If electronics contributes significant content to your company's products, chances are, your product has seen gut-wrenching change in all aspects of its environment over the past few years.

Cost-Performance metrics; price points; shortened life cycles; new competitors; bankrupt competitors; reduced design cycles; enhanced feature sets; reliability expectations...the list goes on. As historically has been the case, faster-better-cheaper, is truly the motto of the Olympics that Canadian electronic innovators compete in.

Based on this premise, and my observations over the last few years, I wanted to devote this column to a 'performance enhancing' service that's growing rapidly in use, but that you and your company might not be leveraging...yet.

How fast does your company harness the enabling IP (Intellectual Property) embodied in the latest electronic components? The fastest DSP? The very best or efficient power supply brick? The least expensive cost-per-bit memory configuration? If you're managing to lead your industry peers in each dimension of the faster-better-cheaper race, congratulations! I'd also bet that you and your company's engineering community have excelled on how to leverage the products and services of your friendly neighbourhood component distributor.

From my own observations across Canada with our Account Management & FAE (Field Application Engineers) teams, and especially over the last 3 years, there has been an explosion in demand for our engineering services. From highly technical product workshops to solution comparisons to BOM (Bill of Material) review to conceptual design help. The latter is the service our team and I find the most professionally rewarding. It's also the service most likely to have the biggest impact to the overall success of your product.

Consider this, first, a distributor FAE typically has bench design experience (all 16 of our Canadian FAEs are designers). This also ensures they're sensitive about the scarce time of your engineers.

Second, to competently recommend one device roadmap over another, our FAEs regularly attend multi-day training sessions at our suppliers. These sessions are in conjunction with our supplier's own technical teams and include advanced product information. Since each of your company's products is part of a product road-map, this ensures an FAE's recommendation has 'head-room' for the future.

Third, since it takes multiple functional blocks to build a system, our FAEs collaborate with each other on areas outside their technical expertise. Witness the rapid innovation in interconnect

& thermal management technologies, or the proliferation of wireless technology across 'non-wireless' applications (i.e. Bluetooth). This collaboration ensures recommendations are built on a system-level approach, speeding time to market, reducing cost and increasing reliability.

Finally, as a distributor representing a broad offering of suppliers across many commodities, our team can objectively compare many solutions. Increasingly, we are being invited into the conception stage of product design where we are able to recommend different ways to functionally partition the design.

It was interesting to read the findings of a recent EETimes survey entitled:

***"2003, where Design meets Distribution – What Engineers need and prefer?"***

The study mirrored my own observations in Canada and validates Avnet's technical strategy.

This comprehensive bi-annual survey of EETimes' readership, contrasted the trends over the past two years on how the engineering community is successfully leveraging electronic distribution.

Some of the findings that particularly resonated with me:

**\* The two services that jumped the most in popularity over the last 2 years?**

- \* Technology & new product education (24% jump)
- \* Application ideas (17% jump)

**\* Engineers aren't just contacting our team for detailed design help...**

- \* 25% utilize distribution for overall system specification
- \* 31% utilize distribution for conceptual design

**\* Broadline distributors were consulted most often by a wide margin**

**\* The vast majority of respondents were 'likely' & 'somewhat likely' to utilize a host of new services like**

- \* Workshops/development platforms & reference designs
- \* 94% of respondents met regularly with Account Managers and FAEs (up from 66% two years ago)
- \* 91% indicated that it was important that a distributor carries multiple lines and that they prefer working with a distributor offering multiple solutions

So with each of our companies competing in the relentless faster/better/cheaper electronic Olympics, a little 'performance enhancing service' from your friendly neighbourhood distributor might just be the competitive advantage that you and your company need for 2004. The good news is that is perfectly legal !

***Good luck in your product development and continued success within your industry.***