

[Commercial content in DesignCon papers](#)

[Ransom Stephens](#) - November 23, 2016

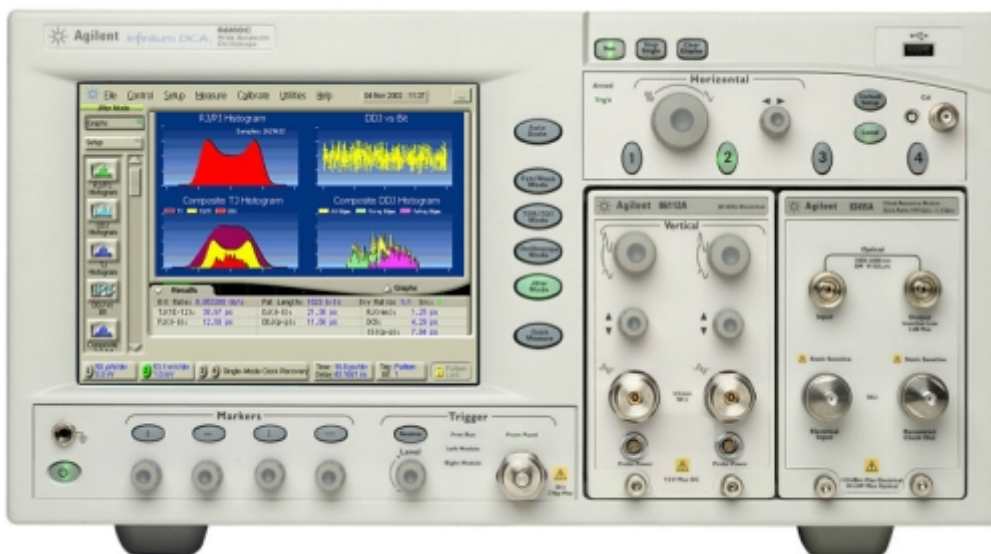
We're informed in the DesignCon [call for papers](#) that "product promotion in a paper, panel, or tutorial proposal will lead to rejection of the proposal." Actually, there is a place for commercial content; what there is no place for are commercials!

Commercial content should be restricted to how products work. Exposing new techniques in an open forum to your competition as well as your customers isn't a commercial, it's a daring feat.

Test and measurement methods are a good example. Engineers rely on their equipment, and if they don't know how measurements are made, they won't (or shouldn't) trust them. By presenting the details of a new technique in an open forum, everyone can benefit. Your customers will love the opportunity to see you defend your techniques under the scrutiny of your competition. It's better than a UFC bout.

At DesignCon 2005, when Agilent (now Keysight) introduced the [DCA-J](#) (digital communications analyzer, a.k.a., equivalent time oscilloscope with jitter analysis) with what was then a new and remarkably accurate approach to jitter analysis, I wrote three paper proposals and two were accepted. Those accepted had to do with the test setup that we used to evaluate the accuracy of the DCA-J, [The Precision Jitter Transmitter](#), and a technique I came up with for [fast measurements of total jitter](#) on BERTs (bit error ratio testers) while analyzing the DCA-J's accuracy. The rejected paper would have shown comparisons of how the DCA-J performed on common, calibrated jitter signals against the competition.

I think the referees got it right.



The jitter transmitter paper showed how to build a tool. The second paper, on the optimized BERT scan, was a new technique that eventually became a product. Exposing the technique to the criticism of competing BERT manufacturers while also educating potential customers fits perfectly in DesignCon's role.

My mistake on the third submission (aside from the reality that referees are unlikely to bless three papers with common authors in one track) was that my comparison of different techniques appeared to the referees like I planned to do a commercial. After all, had the Agilent box come up weak in the comparison, my boss would never have let me present the results in public. I should have submitted an abstract/outline for a paper concentrating on the differences in techniques rather than a comparison of results.

Submitting a paper with commercial content can be tricky because the first thing a referee looks for is a reason to ding the paper -- anything to speed up the process, right? And, commercial content is an easy one.

So, in your abstract/outline, say it outright: you want to present your techniques, patented or not, to your customers in the presence of the competition. Assure the reviewer that nothing will be held back, that your neck will be bared, and that you'll welcome criticism! Then, emphasize the educational aspects of the paper and originality of your work.

When you give your presentation, stick to the engineering, leave the marketing on the exhibit floor.

Also see:

- [DesignCon Central](#)
- [The many faces of jitter](#)
- [Jitter separation: Where science meets art](#)
- [Why Total Jitter cannot be measured on an oscilloscope](#)
- [BER test method uses real data](#)