



BY RICK NELSON, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Semicon West boosts solar power

Will synergies between the solar and the semiconductor industries help boost the use of solar power in North America? That scenario would seem to be a distinct possibility based on the turnout last month at Intersolar North America (www.intersolar.us), which took place, along with Semicon West (www.semiconwest.org), in San Francisco, on July 15 through 17. The reality is somewhat more complex, however.

According to Intersolar organizers, 12,000 visitors registered to attend the show, in which 210 exhibitors occupied the third floor of the Moscone Center West Hall—a relatively remote venue, compared with the more accessible and interconnected South and North halls. Despite the remoteness, Intersolar this year seemed to draw many more attendees than have the Semicon West test and production back-end exhibitors that for the past few years have occupied the West Hall upper-story exhibit space.

SEMI (Semiconductor Equipment and Materials International, www.semi.org), sponsor of Semicon West, took an early foray into the solar business last year when it invited Rhone Resch, president of the Solar Energy Industries Association (www.seia.org), to deliver a Semicon West keynote address, in which he urged attendees to get involved in the solar business. At least two traditional Semicon West exhibitors showed their support for solar this year by exhibiting in the Intersolar venue: Applied Materials showcased its technologies for creating high-efficiency photovoltaic solar panels, and KLA-Tencor highlighted its surface-metrology capabilities ap-

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plicable to solar-power applications.

In my first visit to the Intersolar North America exhibit floor, the most eye-catching displays carried prominent banners reading “Germany” and “Austria”—representing the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (www.bmwi.bund.de) and Austrian Trade (www.advantageaustria.org/us), respectively. That’s not surprising, though, considering that Intersolar’s organizer, Solar Promotion International GmbH, is based in Europe and that the governments of European countries, including Germany, offer incentives for deploying solar-power-generation capability.

Aaron Hand, executive editor for

electronic media at *Semiconductor International* (www.semiconductor.net), offers more information (see “Thin-Film Photovoltaics Capture More of the Spectrum,” *Semiconductor International*, July 1, 2008, www.semiconductor.net/article/CA6572785). He notes that the ultimate goal is lowering solar-module cost to \$1 per watt, a price at which solar energy reaches “grid parity,” when it can compete with fossil-fuel-generated power without government help.

The international emphasis at Intersolar North America suggests that North America has missed a key opportunity to capitalize on solar power, and, unfortunately, the situation is unlikely to improve, according to *EDN* Senior Editor Ann Steffora Mutschler, writing on the subject in her edn.com blog, “The Sandbox.” She writes, “Given the poor state of the economy in the United States and with the situation likely to get worse for the semiconductor industry, companies supplying to customers outside the United States may have a better likelihood of business growth. Clearly, Germany leads the world in its acceptance and implementation of solar energy, although other big solar-supporting countries, such as Spain and Italy, are working hard to catch up, as evidenced by thin-film-solar-module-equipment supplier Applied Material Inc’s many contracts in these geographies.”

So, although solar-related opportunities might be there for US companies such as Applied Materials, those opportunities will most likely lie in supplying offshore customers. Perhaps the steep rise in fossil-fuel prices in the United States, relative to Europe, will alter the equation and promote the deployment of solar-generation capability in North America—with or without government help. **EDN**

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