



BY PAUL RAKO, TECHNICAL EDITOR

## Why tout a demo board nobody can buy?

**R**ecently, my buddy Dave was trying to make a remote-control airplane that would transmit high-definition video to the operator on the ground. Because he wanted to use the video in real time to control the plane, he needed a system with minimal latency. This requirement caused Dave to consider systems that transmit uncompressed video.

Dave had been exploring a lot of technologies, and one that caught his eye was a chip set from Amimon. The chip set transmits high-definition video as a 40-MHz-wide signal in the 5.8-GHz ISM (industrial/scientific/medical) band. The company targets this chip set for use in consumer electronics because every TV and output device, including DVD players and set-top boxes, can handle uncompressed video.

Amimon's Web site lists not only the chip set, but also both a module and a demo board. Dave contacted the company regarding the price of the demo board, but the company refused to provide it. I then wrote to the company and asked the price. The company's public-relations agency responded: "There is no set pricing for the development kits; it depends on vendor needs." Dave needed a free one but realized that he couldn't qualify for a free sample because he was just at the hobby stage.

Weeks later, Dave e-mailed me. "I got an e-mail reply from Amimon," he wrote, stating that he had received the same response as the one I had received. "They asked 'What would be the cooperation model with Amimon?' Huh? There must be some supersecret marketing-indoctrination cult ... that



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screws up people's minds so completely that they cannot speak in plain English. Put the darned development kit on Digi-Key for \$800, and I'll buy it!" He went on to point out that many companies, including National Semiconductor, Linear Technology, Fairchild, Texas Instruments, and Analog Devices, all put their demo boards up

for sale through distributors such as Digi-Key. "I'm dreaming of a day," he continued, "when 'call for pricing' and 'contact your local rep' will be banned from industrial suppliers' Web sites."

I believe that all this turmoil probably derives from the fact that marketing types and engineers speak different languages. Marketing types are dying to talk to people, go to lunch, and network. Engineers, on the other hand, want to crawl into a corner with some hardware and be alone. Industrial suppliers Digi-Key, Mouser, Newark, and Jameco have made things a lot better than they were a decade ago, though, when most manufacturers insisted that you contact the factory for samples, and the big distributors only wanted to sell you a reel of 4000 parts.

The marketing types are trying to uncover the next high-volume-sales opportunity so that they can schmooze with you and beat their competitors. When engineers are producing prototypes, however, they have neither the time nor the inclination for all this socializing. The last system board I designed, a point-of-sale terminal, had 100 parts and 20 ICs. If every manufacturer had required me to call and undergo qualification just to get two bucks' worth of samples, it would have taken a month. With only two months to design and build the whole product, this approach would have been unfeasible.

How about you? Do you hate the fact that manufacturers won't give you a price and don't sell small quantities through distribution? Sound off at EDN's Web site, [www.edn.com/081002ed](http://www.edn.com/081002ed).**EDN**

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