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Services, tools target design engineers

By Gina Roos
[EE Times](#)
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Despite a weak demand cycle of more than two years, semiconductor distributors haven't forgotten that design engineers are still asked to get their product to market faster. Distributors have responded by continuing to roll out new services and hardware and software tools to make designers' jobs easier.

And while distributors aren't ignoring the needs of procurement professionals, there has been a decided focus on what engineers need to help them speed product to market.

Why? Particularly when orders are tight, a key way of reaching customers, especially for more complex devices, is through the engineering staff. By targeting those design engineers early in the design cycle, and giving them the tools and information they need to get designs done faster and more efficiently, there is a pretty good chance of getting a print position on the bill of materials, and remaining on it.

A few ways distributors are reaching engineers early in the design cycle is by offering new development kits. The kits are especially useful for designers who are new to a technology, since they help them get up to speed quickly.

For example, Arrow Electronics and Altera last month launched the

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availability of the MAX 7000 quick-start development kit as a low-cost entry into Altera's MAX 7000 series of complex programmable -logic devices (CPLDs). The kit is for digital designers who are new to the product family or those who simply want to implement general-purpose PLD designs.

For more complex designs, other distributors are going one step further by offering workshops as well as new development kits. For example, Insight Memec has begun offering a series of Embedded Processor Solutions Workshops as a hands-on course to familiarize engineers with Xilinx's new Embedded Development software kit.

The focus of the workshops will be on designing with Xilinx's latest technologies, including the embedded PowerPC in the Virtex-II Pro FPGA family and the MicroBlaze soft-processor core for the Spartan-IIe FPGA family. The new kits include the Memec Design Virtex-II Pro PowerPC development kit and the Spartan-IIe MicroBlaze development kit. Workshops will take place from early March to May. For more information on the workshops, call (888) 488-4133, ext. 995, or visit www.insight.na.memec.com/embedded_workshops.

In other cases, distributors have opted to beef up their design services to help customers who have tight engineering resources. For instance, Avnet Electronics Marketing has signed up two new design partners for its Avnet Design Service Provider Program. SMTc Corp. and Paragon Innovations Inc. will lend their expertise in areas including embedded system design, digital signal processing, power electronics and communications.

I'd expect more of the same from distributors as they continue to focus on service-oriented programs that in many cases target second- and third-tier companies over the next year.

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