COMPONENTS

Bob Evans, CPMR
EK Micro
Rolling Meadows, Ill.

Changing times bring challenges ahead

The 2018 ERA National Conference concluded at the end of February. It was the largest conference in recent years for our organization. More than 300 attendees gathered in Austin on the University of Texas campus. Attendees hailed from our three constituents — manufacturers' representatives, manufacturers and distributors. The atmosphere was vibrant; the presenters were informative and thought provoking; and the conference content lived up to its title: "Tools of Our Trade — Constructing a Successful Future."

It occurred to me that if we do not "construct" our future, the future will "constrict" us.

All of us who attended the conference were exposed to valuable tools with which to forge ahead in this economy and on into the future. At the same time, however, we were offered various views on how that future might look and how our activities and roles could change. I believe in these changing times there will be many challenges ahead for all of us. Adaptation and employment of these tools may well be the difference between success and failure in the years to come, and perhaps even this year.

According to Tom Derry of the Institute for Supply Management (ISM), 2017 was a good year for manufacturing in the U.S. Among the reasons cited was the overall resurgence of the global economy; the value of the U.S. dollar abroad was a contributing factor as well. In the Winter 2018 issue of *The Representor*, ERA Industry Forecast survey results showed that more than 85 percent of respondents rated 2017 as being a good to excellent business year; over 75 percent of the replies came from manufacturers' reps. In addition, over 90 percent of the respondents believe that 2018 will be even better.

I tend to share in this optimism, but the cloud of component shortages still seems to loom over our heads. Also in that issue of *The Representor*, in my column, I recounted many industry pundits talking about the sad state of affairs as it relates to component lead times and availability. All indications are that this is not going away any time soon. While 2018 looks good on paper, I wonder what kind of impact these shortages will have on our somewhat booming economy and global manufacturing picture.

This year's conference was a great barometer of how folks in our industry are seeing the year unfold. I look forward with anticipation to EDS 2018 to see what kind of atmosphere prevails with many of the same participants, as well as many more manufacturers in attendance. See you there!

Feel free to share your comments and opinions; you can reach me at bevans@ekmicro.com.

MATERIALS, ASSEMBLY, PRODUCTION & SUPPLY

Troy Gunnin
Sun Rep
Tampa, Fla.

Celebrating technology milestones while looking to the future

On Dec. 23, 2017, we passed one of the most significant milestones in technology development. The transistor officially turned 70 years old. Wow! I'm older than the transistor. This brings to mind a comment one of my professors made: "Scientists at Bell Labs have invented a device called the transistor that may one day replace the vacuum tube." I would say that was an understatement. That development has certainly revolutionized our world as we know it.

Today, it's hard to imagine a TV with a CRT rather than a flat screen. Our phones have more computing power than a very large room-size computer using vacuum tubes. It boggles my mind to look back at what has evolved from that development and think about what lies ahead. We are on the edge of using artificial intelligence, which allows machines, equipment and robots that "think" to perform many tasks we would have thought impossible just a few short years ago. Using what has evolved from that humble transistor, we have automated, mechanized and given machines the ability to perform many functions better, faster and more efficiently that we can ourselves.

Without that development in 1947 and the evolution, or should I say revolution, that it has made in our history, we would not have the space station, Hubble Space Telescope, space travel, cell phones, the computer I'm using to write this column ... I could go on and on. It's hard to imagine life as we know it today if William Shockley, John Bardeen and Walter Brattain of AT&T Bell Laboratories had not introduced us to the transistor. What and who will introduce us to the next "transistor?"

Today we are on the cusp of just getting into our car, or an Uber or Lyft, and saying: "Take me to the office," or any place else, and the car — without a driver — will take us there. Or we will soon get into our "flying car," back it out of the garage and take off to our destination. Public transportation is exploring "driverless" buses. In fact, here in Tampa, we have some small buses in trial situations now. And look out for that driverless 18-wheeler! They are in fact being tested.

We are fortunate to be involved in this exciting industry that has and is pushing the boundaries that are moving us ahead at an amazing speed. Think about the contribution this one development has made to industries — automobiles, aircraft and space exploration — as well as the things in our business and daily lives that we now take for granted.

As reps working with factories and customers deeply involved in this fascinating and exciting industry, we have the opportunity to witness many of these advancements taking place right before our eyes. I remember the opportunity to see much of the development of the international space station. Prior to that, I was in almost daily contact with those involved in the C5A program. I was in awe of that behemoth. I'm sure we all have memories like this. I encourage you to look for and enjoy these experiences while you do your part in supplying the materials needed to bring projects to fruition.

And, I ask one more time: What will be the next "transistor?"