

Your ANALOG/MIXED-SIGNAL DESIGN

[Editorial]

[Finding Your Niche In '06](#)

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ED Online ID #11823

[January 12, 2006](#)

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MARKET MAKEOVER

One company's recent makeover may provide a bellwether case study in how to navigate today's market currents. Endicott Interconnect (EI) is a former IBM group with 40 years of "Big Blue" heritage. Yet it's quickly evolving from a captive sales base (making wiring boards and interconnects for IBM) into a company carving a profitable niche in the open market.

Akin to the "old school" engineers who might have been restructured out of their job after 40 years, IBM jettisoned Endicott in a corporate realignment. The new company must now find opportunities to apply its formative research and manufacturing experience and yet be competitive in the global market.

I recently visited Endicott and spoke with CEO James McNamara and a panel of his key technologists. The company's first new focus is the aerospace and defense markets—satellites and other mission-critical projects—so it quickly got all the requisite certifications for these classified jobs.

Endicott's North American niche is lower-volume, higher-complexity work, maximizing the flexibility of its lines for quick runs of boards with high layer counts. At the same time, Endicott looks to expand manufacturing into low-cost regions for higher-volume assemblies and lower-complexity applications.

The company's engineering and manufacturing support services-help make it a one-stop shop for design and manufacturing, offering a deep understanding of the science behind board fabrication. Endicott also is concentrating on advances in chip packaging technologies, looking ahead to growth opportunities in telecom (high-speed packaging, reliability), medical (reliability, clean signals, longer lifespan), aerospace/defense (weight reduction, radiation exposure, reliability, and long lifespan), and true to its heritage, high-end IT (high-speed packaging, clean signals).

Additionally, the company uses its flexible lines to offer electronic manufacturing services, providing both second-level (components to boards) and first-level assembly (silicon to substrate). One shining example of this new niche: Endicott has partnered with ENSCO to manufacture Sure Scan, the new high-speed explosive detection system using fixed X-ray sources and detectors that work in-line with baggage-handling systems.