



A testing time for contract manufacture

For a PCB assembly manufacturer of any size, investment in state-of-the-art capital equipment is a decision which requires a significant amount of time and effort on the part of the buyer, not to mention an understanding of how the machine will best be put to use upon its arrival. But what if demand is sudden, unpredictable and unlikely to be sustainable? Contract manufacture offers one way of riding the

peaks in demand, and now supplier of automatic test equipment, Teradyne, in conjunction with TSL has announced a new ATE rental initiative to address the growing need of the Electronic Manufacturing Services (EMS) sector for short-term access to test and inspection equipment. *EMP's* Jason Rayfield visited one of the scheme's first users, MEI (Mars Electronics International), to find out more.

Based in Wokingham, Berkshire, and forming part of a large international enterprise, MEI manufactures and markets electronic coin validation systems to the vending industry. The PCB division at Wokingham manufactures around 25,000 circuit board assemblies per week, with a proportion of output being outsourced to contract manufacture. It took an unusual upsurge in demand for MEI to discover the benefits of rental in its test operation, as manufacturing engineer, Phil Draper, explains:

"With the Euro currency set to come on stream in continental Europe in January 2002, we experienced an unprecedented increase in demand for our change-giving coin validators capable of handling the transition to the new currency," he states. "As a result, the demands placed on our test capacity rose. But as this level of product demand is unlikely to continue long-term, we needed a way of boosting test capacity very quickly without investing in expensive equipment which could stand idle once the transition to the Euro is completed."

As MEI had used Teradyne's Spectrum systems before, Mr Draper was familiar with their flash programming handling capability and with the company's after-sales service. The rental scheme is operated jointly with provider of support services for in-circuit and functional testing, TSL, who manufacture the test fixtures used by MEI at Wokingham. MEI took out the rental agreement with TSL, which included a conversion to purchase option.

"The scheme met our needs perfectly," says Mr Draper. "When product demand was forecast to exceed our in-house capacity, the rental scheme enabled us to provide our contract manufacturer with the correct test facilities in the shortest possible time," he adds.

The short term ATE rental program is being initiated with the Spectrum 885x and Z18xx range of board test systems, and is expected to expand to other Teradyne systems later in the year. Teradyne systems of

any configuration will be available from TSL in the UK and Ireland for immediate delivery and installations. Teradyne and TSL are deploying and putting into stock a fleet of brand new systems to the latest specification exclusively for use in the rental business.

Announcing the scheme, European sales manager for Teradyne, Rod Willis, comments: "Teradyne's own market research shows that the contract manufacturing sector is in need of a rental scheme that provides them with ATE systems on a temporary, month by month basis. TSL has pioneered this concept, and has become a recognised name in the electronics market for this type of solution. We are pleased to work with them as a business partner respond-

ing together to a direct need that our customers have highlighted."



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