

[<<< Back](#) | [Print](#)

Linear Targets Analog Expert Shortage

By Ed Sperling -- 10/17/2005

Electronic News

Linear Technology today took the covers off a new line of pre-built power supply modules, looking to capitalize on the growing shortage of analog engineers around the globe.

While universities around the world -- most notably in China -- continue to churn out engineers, few are specializing in analog. Most companies believe it takes a decade or more of experience to create strong analog expertise, making those engineers highly valued for a variety of tasks. And with analog becoming increasingly important as an interface to the digital world, those engineers are increasingly in short supply.

“Power expertise is limited,” said Eddie Beville, design manager at Linear. “And with time-to-market pressures, there are not necessarily the resources on staff to design high-performance power modules. These are high-density, high-performance and thermally efficient. You can pick and place it like any IC and drop it on a board.”

Linear isn't alone in this approach. International Rectifier, Philips, Tyco and Artesyn Technologies, among others, sell power modules. There are debates among the companies about which one has the more complete solution, but the strategy is roughly the same -- just because you can build it yourself doesn't mean it's the best use of your resources.

“This is a game of leapfrog,” said Jeff Shepard, president of the Darnell Group. “How Linear is the latest to the market and they have the highest performance. How long they stay there is the question. This is a market where you are constantly obsoleting your own product. If you don't, your customer will do it for you.”

Linear's first product is a 10-amp DC/DC power supply in a surface-mount package, which is aimed at the networking, communications and base-station market. Shepard said the product will fit in well in multi-voltage settings, such as a Cisco router or EMC storage device.

“The biggest challenge for Linear is this is a new market segment,” he noted. “It's a different sell to a different person within a customer company.”

[<<< Back](#) | [Print](#)

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The advertisement is a rectangular graphic with a dark blue background. At the top left, the IPC logo is in a white oval. To its right, the text 'PRINTED CIRCUITS EXPO' is written in white, with a stylized circuit board icon. Further right, the SMEMA COUNCIL logo is in red, and 'APEX' is written in large, bold, red letters. Below these, the text 'and the DESIGNERS SUMMIT' is in white. Underneath, 'IPC Printed Circuits Expo®, APEX®, and the Designers Summit' is written in white, followed by 'February 8-10, 2006' in white. At the bottom, a white bar contains the word 'REGISTER' in red.

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