ITC is cool

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■ **ITC IS COOL.** How can this be, you ask? This is the International Test Conference's 36th year, which makes it a middle-aged conference; and, as anyone who has ever been middle-aged knows, being cool at this time of life is a serious challenge. Combovers, designer sunglasses, wheel spinners, and Good Charlotte CDs aren't really options for a conference, so how can ITC be cool?

A simple answer is that coolness is a state of mind. Paradoxically, it's often easiest to be cool when you're not trying to be. ITC doesn't try to be cool, at least not in the way that, say, Macworld does. ITC tries instead to be interesting, innovative, and informative. All three of these qualities are vital for a successful conference.

"Interesting" is a given. Nobody these days can afford to be away from work for a week only to be bored. ITC offers top-quality paper presentations from test experts in industry and academia alike. Strict review standards for papers and presentations ensure high quality. There is no equivalent in the test world for the commercial presence at ITC, either.

"Innovative" is also key. Innovation is important, not only in the steady stream of new and relevant program material, such as high-frequency test, silicon debug, and test compression, but also in conference structure. The board-and-system-test track, commercial presentations, and free lunches on the exhibit floor are recent ITC structural improvements. This year introduces free exhibition passes and wireless Internet access, among other things.

Finally, ITC is informative. The conference goal is to provide attendees with useful information that they can apply right after returning from the conference. This includes the largest selection of test-related tutorials anywhere, along with lecture and application series, and panels.

BUT CONFERENCES ARE MORE than proceedings, more than talks and booths. Conferences are about people—meeting people, talking to people, learning from people. I've always found the informal meetings at conferences to be the most valuable part of the entire experience. Don't forget that at this year's ITC. When else can you sit in a tavern on Sixth Street, enjoying the barbecue and some Shiner Bock with a grad student, an apps engineer, a sales VP, and someone whose name you recognize from papers but had never met before, and talk about realistic fault behavior for circuits with transistors that are orders of magnitude smaller than a human hair operating at billions of operations per second? Cool, isn't it? And don't forget: The sales guy pays. Some things never change. ■

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