

MEMS are Mainstream – a Report from COMS 2008, held in Mexico, Sept 2008

The Commercialization of Micro and Nano Technologies Conference (COMS) 2008 was an excellent opportunity to get a good overview of worldwide activities in small technologies. The technical part of the conference was kicked-off by Frans Kampers from the University of Wageningen with an overview of driving forces and possibilities of micro and nanotechnologies in the food industry. Hereafter, Grand Old Man Steve Walsh from the University of New Mexico explained the needs and methods of roadmapping in a disruptive environment.

Strategies and barriers to commercialisation was the theme of several presentations. For instance, Jeff Hilbert from Wispry explained why it was so difficult to get a foothold in the electronics market with RF MEMS. The presentations discussing technology transfer and IP management all stressed the increasing acceptance of the new technologies and products outside the traditional micro and nano community, but mentioned also the increasing complexity of cooperation agreements and IP management. An indication that we are only at the beginning of the micro and nano revolution was the comment from one of the speakers that 80% of all innovation stems from existing knowledge! On the other hand, as James Wylde (CEO of CSM Analytical) explained, “MEMS are mainstream” now: 10 years ago, folks at COMS decided that a technology can be defined as mainstream, if you can buy it at your local RadioShack, and MEMS accelerometers are available from there now.

Two of the top three of worldwide problems, energy and food were much discussed. Scott Bryant from Mancef chaired a dedicated energy session, providing us with an overview of all aspects of energy problems and how micro and nano could help. Food was discussed in two sessions and showed especially the strength of the UK and the Netherlands in this area.

Tim Harper (CEO of Cientifica) put some realism against the overspending in nanotechnology and the underestimation of the time it cost to establish a new technology base. This was confirmed by Seamus Curran (University of Houston) who also predicted that we will see shortly a more focused and application oriented view of nanotechnology. Both agreed the future will be wet and soft, meaning that will see much more products on flexible, (bio)organic materials, working in a fluidic environment. COMS 2009 will be held in Copenhagen, organized jointly by DTU, IMEGO and Chalmers.



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