

Thousands gather in Japan for massive nanotechnology event

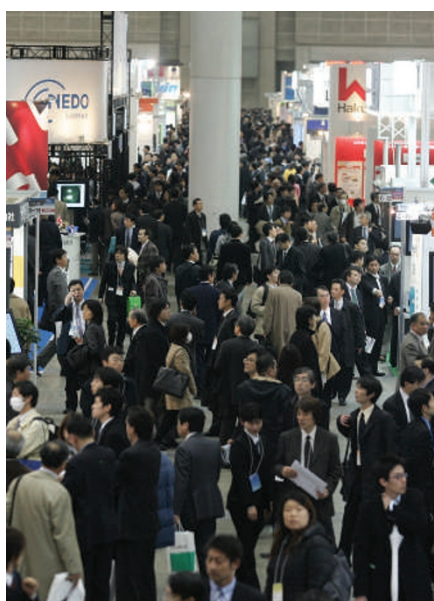
Why do hundreds of companies and tens of thousands of people attend a nanotechnology conference in Tokyo every year? **Adarsh Sandhu** finds out.

Now in its sixth year, the International Nanotechnology Exhibition and Conference in Tokyo is the biggest event in the global nanotechnology calendar. Held at the Tokyo Big Sight conference centre in February, 'nano tech 2007' attracted a record number of visitors and exhibitors from the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Around 50,000 people attended the event and 484 companies had booths, an increase of 25% on last year.

The event has also become more international in recent years, with some 167 companies from 22 countries outside Japan having a booth at 'nano tech 2007'. "Overseas exhibitors are increasing because it is difficult to envisage being involved with nanotechnology without interacting with the Japanese nanotech community," says Takahiro Matsui, secretary general of the organizing committee. "This event is a now a global brand."

In addition to exhibition booths and displays by household names such as Fujitsu, Hitachi, Toshiba and NEC, this year's event also included activities to encourage collaboration between academia and industry, notably the International Nanotechnology Business Summit; symposia on specialists topics such as nanopolymers and environmental nanotechnology; and a special lecture by Paul Chu to mark the twentieth anniversary of his discovery of a superconductor with a transition temperature above 77 K.

"We are here to show the world that exploiting nanotechnology is crucial to our future product development," said Naoki Yokoyama, general manager of Fujitsu Nanotechnology Research Center in Atsugi, just outside Tokyo. "To us nanotechnology is not a fad. We are not playing a game — we are serious." To prove his point the Fujitsu stand at the event displayed products based on InAs quantum dot lasers, carbon nanotube for



The 'nano tech 2007' event was the biggest ever, attracting around 50,000 visitors to Tokyo.

interconnects in electronic circuits and artificial antibodies for medical diagnostics.

The event attracted large delegations from throughout the Asia-Pacific region. "The quality and breadth of visitors at this event is different," said Dae-Soo Kim of Korea's Nano Technology Research Association. "They understand the technology. This is a great event to network and promote our technology." In addition to the huge Korean multinationals, Samsung and LG, there were 17 companies and 300 people in the Korean delegation.

Clive Davenport headed a delegation of 30 representatives from Australia, and says that this will increase to 50 in 2008. "We are here because Australia is part of Asia-Pacific," he explained.

"We first exhibited here in 2002 and want to continue to form partnerships for our companies. We have expertise in cosmetics, biosensors and polymer-based materials — indeed, Australian bank notes are made of plastic."

In between the large national delegations and multinational corporations, however, there is also a place for smaller outfits. Wei Zheng of Sunliky Industry — a company based in Wenzhou near Shanghai — stood at one of the smallest booths, distributing brochures about the company's polymer films, which are used for coating electronic components. "Our company is small," he said, "but this exhibition brings us many new customers. This event is well focused compared with similar exhibitions in Europe and the USA".

Of the European countries at the event, Germany had the largest exhibition, with some 300 square metres of floor space. "This is our fourth year here and we think of this exhibition as being in Asia, not Japan," said Gerd Bachmann, leader of the German delegation. "We are here to promote our expertise in optics, automobiles and electronics to an Asian audience. We will be bigger next year with 800 square metres and 60 delegates."

But in spite of his enthusiasm, Bachmann has some reservations about the event. "It needs to be more international," he argues. "We could start with more English language posters, and the inclusion of some non-Japanese members on the organizing committee would also help." In the absence of any of the major industrial players from the USA, he may have a point.

www.ics-inc.co.jp/nanotech/index.html

'nano tech 2008' takes place 13–15 February 2008.