



Gadget Safari to Africa

Hi, my name is Bob, and I am a gadget junkie. I know this column will be read by my fellow gadget junkies whose job it is to support our industry and keep us all in business. Every one of the gadgets we buy has at least one PCB in it, so, as gadget junkies, we inherently consume huge quantities of PCBs. We all have the “gadget graveyard” where outdated, stupid, or broken gadgets go (as we can’t bring ourselves to throw them away). I make the gadget junkie’s pilgrimage to the Akihabara in Japan twice a year and get to

ality and convergence was supposed to reduce my gadget burden, not increase it. The disturbing fact that my 3CCD HDV video camera takes still pictures, although not good ones, forced me to bring a digital SLR. That video camera was also too big to trek with, so I had to bring a smaller 1CCD HDV camera too. My phone comes equipped with GPS capabilities but drains the battery so fast in this mode that I also needed to take a “real” GPS. I guess convergence isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

One thing that hasn’t changed much in the past 10 years is in the area of batteries

didn’t get a lot of use), digital thermometer, compass watch, and shortwave radio.

I can say that all my gadgets worked well in dusty, hot, and bouncy conditions, although the photographer/videographer could have used a little work. All in all, I estimate that I carried about 50 PCBs with me to Africa.

I took all these gadgets with me not only to support my addiction but to prove a point. Our lives today are filled with gadgets that have PCBs in them. Look around and you will find you are surrounded by them. They’re in almost everything we use daily, and these items are getting more complex. Kids today



the Consumer Electronics Show, the worldwide gathering of gadget junkies, to ogle the latest in gadgetry and plan my acquisition strategy. I am also very partial to small gadgets (e.g., an HDI proponent) and am attracted to cool gadgets like the iDog or my wireless grill thermometer, despite the fact that they have little or no practical use.

I recently went on Safari in Africa and decided to put my love of gadgets to the test. Ten years (and 50 columns) ago I wrote about my first African Safari and the gadgets I took with me, and a number of things have changed in the gadget industry since my last trip. These changes are primarily in the areas of portability, functionality, and convergence of features. Despite these “improvements,” I still ended up carrying more gadgets on this trip than on my last. In retrospect, this is a little confusing to me as all the new function-

and power storage. Unfortunately, all the new features in my gadgets have also equated to more power drain, which requires me to keep extra batteries in my pockets at all times. My suitcase was filled with batteries, chargers, and a solar array to power the chargers. This menagerie kept my assortment of gadgets’ insatiable appetite for power fed. This was definitely the most cumbersome aspect of having so many gadgets along.

I knew that I would go through work withdrawals, so I wrote much of this column using MS Word on my Windows Mobile 6-enabled phone. It has reader software that allowed me to get through a few books while on planes, trains, and automobiles. Of course, my video iPod was also in tow with a copy of *Inspector Gadget* on it.

Some of the less glamorous gadgets that I took with PCBs in them were my razor (which

don’t know what punch cards are or that the IBM PC XT, Apple 2, or Atari Pong game were, in their time, the coolest gadgets to have. Tomorrow’s kids will look at the Xbox and PlayStation and think how quaint they were, if they even remember them at all. In short, it is clear to me that the future of the PCB industry is secure, despite predictions to the contrary, as I don’t think our desire for gadgets will wane... Oh yeah, and there were some cool animals in Africa, too. ■

Bob Neves has spent the last 21 years as the chair/CTO of Microtek Laboratories, an independent test facility based in the U.S. and China. Prior to Microtek, Bob worked in quality management and engineering in PWB manufacturing. Email: bobneves@thetestlab.com