

'A Total Pb-Free Solution'

Qualitek International (qualitek.com) is known worldwide as a supplier of soldering materials and is reportedly one of the world's largest suppliers of powder. The U.S.-based company also operates manufacturing and R&D facilities in Singapore; Wirrall, England; and Shenzhen. Last fall, the longtime materials developer and supplier ventured into the arena of soldering equipment, teaming with JT Electronic Equipment Corp. of Hong Kong (jt-ele.com) to bring a pair of wave-soldering baths into North America and Europe. The company has also begun distributing a handheld x-ray lead detector.

President Phodi Han, managing director Emily Han and director of product management Tippy Wicker spoke with CIRCUITS ASSEMBLY's Mike Buetow at the company's suburban Chicago headquarters in late May.

CA: How did Qualitek decide to team with JT?

TW: When looking at SE Asian equipment makers, a handful of companies stand out. We ended up with JT because of the quality of their equipment. JT will start to make waves for the N. American market.

EH: We've done the research for the industry based on our vast experience and we only carry the China lines that we feel are quality-made equipment. We're now offering a total lead-free solution.

CA: From a technology standpoint, what's the advantage?

TW: The JT has an electromagnetic pump, no moving parts. There's nothing to break. There's just a coil. What I see happening is companies have those old machines – we still see old waves in the field – and they start leaking, and companies spend \$30,000 to \$40,000 to retrofit when they could spend \$70,000 to \$80,000 to get a brand new machine. And we take trade-ins.

JT uses all European and U.S. parts, not the cheaper Chinese parts. The support isn't difficult because we are trained on the machines. Qualitek has five applications engineers, who remain dedicated to either materials or equipment.

CA: What are the lead times for the waves? And are you building to order or stock?

EH: JT is shipping to stock at Qualitek. The lead time is currently 60 days but we expect that could go to 80 days. We feel demand will grow and we have the financial strength to be able to hold a number of machines in stock in order to maintain certain lead times.

CA: What is the extent of the relationship with JT?

TW: We are distributing for JT in Europe, India, the U.S.; basically everywhere outside of Southeast Asia. We also have relationships with other representatives. Recon, for example, sells used equipment. We educated them on the technology and they will begin selling for us. We are looking at developing a distributor network.

CA: Where are OEM/EMS buying decisions being made today?

EH: Some companies have already shifted to Asia.

TW: There is a geographical shift in where evaluations are being done. Qualifications, for example, are now in Asia. Approvals are going in reverse, as long as the EMS can prove it meets

the qualifications.

CA: Where are the machines making headway?

TW: We see lots of activity in Europe.

CA: Qualitek has also launched its own wave.

EH: The QW300 wave is a smaller wave. JT is also coming out with a different model for the North American market, which we will carry. We also have the Lead Tracer, for x-ray inspection.

CA: You are starting to resemble Cookson in its equipment days.

EH: Our core business is still manufacturing. We went into the equipment business because it's a total lead-free solution. We're looking very seriously at IC semiconductor fabrication chemicals. We see definite growth in semiconductor fabrication chemistries.

TW: Paste is a commodity. With materials for wafer bumping you can get back your return on investment. ■



Qualitek's Emily and Phodi Han (below) and Tippy Wicker



"Companies spend \$40,000 to retrofit when \$80,000 would buy a brand new machine."