

## One man's trash ...



I took a consulting job with a major semiconductor-equipment-manufacturing company. There, I built various test fixtures using surplus VMEbus-card cages that the company had in the warehouse. It was great to be able to get almost the same card cage that the company was shipping in the current product. One day, I found myself requesting another card cage for a new test fixture. The guy in the warehouse told me that I had better grab any other card cages now, because they were all going to be “in the dumpster”

the following week. They needed the space in the warehouse. I protested; guys like me needed them for important company projects. I suggested that I would be interested in buying them; my real goal was to get someone to realize they were tossing out something useful. I was asked to bid on them. I didn't want them, so I put in a low bid of \$100.

Two weeks later, I had forgotten about the VMEbus-card cages. Then I got the call. A voice droned, “You are the successful bidder on lot number 13285. You have 48 hours to get the nine pallets out of the warehouse.” I felt panic, thinking, “My wife is going to

kill me. Where am I going to put these things?” I had an addition to my house that was framed and roofed but unfinished inside. I thought that I could store them there for a short time to keep them out of the rain. If nothing else, I could burn the oak pallets to heat my house.

I made a deal with my wife that I would sell them all in six weeks or drive them to the dump. I created a flyer that described the item and showed the purchase cost of all of the components and included a photo. It came to \$845 each, so I set the “sale price” at \$250. I found a trade magazine that specialized in the VMEbus. I sent a letter to every com-

pany mentioned in the magazine. It worked. The orders started flowing in. In fact, the only resistance to purchase seemed to be, “Why are you selling them so cheap?” Instead of telling them that “my wife was going to kill me if I didn't get rid of them,” I said something like “we are overstocked and eager to move them out at a low price.”

Orders for one unit were followed by orders for multiple units. I was feeling much better about my “impulse buy.” The kicker came when I got a frantic call from a purchasing agent from the same company from which I had originally obtained the nine pallets. One of the company's engineers had put in a request to purchase four units. This request represented sweet vindication for me; I sold him back those four units for 10 times what I had paid for all nine pallets!

About two years later, I got another consulting assignment at the same company. The company set me up to do my rush project development in a storage room. One day, I asked a guy about some items that were stacked against a wall, how much they were worth, and why no one was using them. That was a lot of money sitting there! I suggested the company assign someone to go around and sell off these idle assets. The guy told me a story. He had heard of a consultant who had bought about 100 pallets of surplus VMEbus-card cages and sold them for about a million dollars. I felt my face grow warm as I realized that he was talking about me, but the numbers were greatly exaggerated. I did make approximately \$20,000, but it sure did take some work, and there was the real risk that my wife would toss me out to sleep with the racks. I don't know if I had anything to do with it, but the company finally took my advice and created a department to dispose of surplus equipment in a more orderly fashion. **EDN**

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