Focusing on Strategic R&D

PD&D Staff

Recently, Green Plug named longtime executive Kevin Jones to the newly-created position of Chief Scientist and appointed semiconductor industry veteran Rajeev Prasad to succeed Jones as VP of Engineering. The announcement followed Green Plug's Series C investment round, from U.K.-based strategic investor Imagination Technologies Group. PD&D had the opportunity to speak with both Kevin Jones and Rajeev Prasad regarding their promotions and the direction of Green Plug.

PD&D: What spawned the creation of the Chief Scientist position?

Kevin Jones: All startups begin with a single focus. For Green Plug, that has been to produce the technology that enables programmable power control and communication to be available to market segments that couldn't be served previously. Doing so requires a particular kind of focus and organization, and that's where we've been up to this point.

As the company matures, there is a need to organize that focus to make sure that we can deliver the current technology and continue to develop technology for the future. Green Plug has reached that point and we've split the engineering/scientific function into operation and strategic R&D, with the new position of Chief Scientist being focused on the latter.

PD&D: What do you think was the motivating factor for these promotions? Anything to do with Green Plug's Series C investment round?

Kevin Jones: Yes, these events are related. Green Plug raised series C to finance our initial joint development projects and to bring our smart controller technology to related areas of power conversion and integration. My focus will be on developing new directions and technology for Green Plug and expanding our IP portfolio with new technologies and applications. Rajeev will manage product development and will ensure successful customer implementations of our licensed products.

PD&D: What do you think these promotions mean for the future of Green Plug?

Kevin Jones: Previously, Green Plug was in R&D mode. Now that we have real product deliverables, we need to apply a production discipline to our engineering activities. We also wish to push the envelope in experimenting with new ways to improve power conversion control. The Chief Scientist role was created to ensure we continue our spirit of innovation.

PD&D: How does this new position change the company's dynamic?

Kevin Jones: We feel this new role enables Green Plug to continue to experiment and prototype radically new concepts without interfering with our ability to deliver production-level solutions to our customers and partners.

PD&D: How does it affect the design process?

Rajeev Prasad: We are building configurable and customizable IP that can be targeted for a number of customers. In some of the applications, low power and die size are critical. We are using optimal design processes to achieve the power and cost targets for these applications and, at the same time, we provide the flexibility to work over a wide range of frequency and power.

PD&D: How does it affect R&D?

Kevin Jones: It means that some of [the company's] resources will always be focused on the future, allowing a separation of concerns. This is a good thing for a technology intensive company, since it avoids the classic danger of all resources being consumed by the pressures of immediate deliverables. It will enable us to explore some "high risk, high return" strategies, which wouldn't be the best idea for production engineering. We expect to be able to make better use of the academic and research communities in a more thoughtful way.

PD&D: What do you see in the future of mixed-signal technology and power products?

Rajeev Prasad: There will be increasing need for the adaptability brought by such technology in the power, and related, markets as end-users continue to push for better performing devices. The barrier has been cost and complexity.

PD&D: With an unlimited budget, what would you engineer with Green

Plug's know-how?

Rajeev Prasad: We'd expedite our existing roadmap. Green Plug, together with its partners, plans to dominate the mixed-signal controller market for programmable power conversion. We continue to build our portfolio of advance control algorithms. Beyond that, with an unlimited budget, we would expand the use of smart power supplies to solve some challenges in wireless power,battery charging, and even Smart Grid applications.

PD&D: As an engineer, what keeps you up at night?

Rajeev Prasad: While it is clear that Green Plug technology offers significant increases in flexibility, adaptability, and functionality over conventional power supply control methods, the industry is often slow to innovate. The growth in complexity and hard requirements works in our favor, however, making the switch to programmable control more obvious.

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