

AHTD Springs Into Action for 2017

By: Chris Popp - [Diequa Corporation](#)

That's Bonita Springs, FL, the location of the Spring Meeting of the Association of High Technology Distribution (AHTD) held from May 3-6, 2017 at the beautiful Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort. Yes, that is a lot of "springs."

Spring is about renewal. After a few months of winter doldrums and the fits and starts of the New Year, it was an appropriate time to take stock of what's been done so far in 2017 and re-tune what needs to be done for success going forward. There was no better place to do that than at the first of the association's semi-annual conferences. There were 285 members, including 65 first timers, who took full advantage during the week.

The AHTD is a trade association of distributors of high technology components and systems, automation solution providers, and the manufacturers that supply the products and services that are used within the automation and motion control industry. For over 30 years the association has worked to increase the productivity, profitability, and market share of their members through a wide variety of programs and services.

Among other resources, the AHTD holds two major meetings a year, located in different geographic regions. The purpose of the meetings is to provide networking opportunities, education in operational best practices, and introductions to new technologies. This meeting satisfied these areas in abundance.

While the financial end of the association is supported by a professional management company, the nuts and bolts of the operation are in the hands of the membership. An elected executive committee and board of directors oversee several member-filled committees who are responsible for the planning and execution of the various programs and services.

Those committees kicked off the meeting on Wednesday afternoon with strategy and planning sessions. The assembled committees were Membership, Promotion, Program, and Manufacturer Advisory. A variety of topics were discussed in each with action plans established. Volunteering for these committees is an excellent way for members to get involved in the organization.

The first networking event was the First Timers Orientation and Reception. This is where newcomers get introduced to the executive committee and get advised on how best to take advantage of the conference. Several veteran members were on hand to get the new members started and make them feel comfortable.

The first general networking event followed. The Opening Welcome Reception is a 90-minute block that provides the opportunity for old acquaintances to be renewed and new relationships to be established. The camaraderie among many longtime members and the anticipation among the uninitiated was apparent. Beverages and an outstanding selection of appetizers were strategically placed around and down the waterfall deck of the hotel.



Thursday started bright and early with a group breakfast. Members arrived in time to introduce themselves to other attendees prior to the general sessions. It was clear those in attendance were serious about taking advantage of each networking opportunity.



The educational program started promptly at 8:00 a.m. Noted national speaker, Scott Stratten of Un-Marketing, presented his take on “The Age of Disruption” where everything seems to have changed yet nothing is really different. He believes that, with regard to business relationships, trust, connection, consistency, and service will always be more important than the latest interactive technology. His reasoning was both compelling and entertaining.

The morning continued with a second general session. David Burkus, author and Professor of Management at Oral Roberts University, shared his presentation: “Under New Management... Where The Future Of Work Is Heading.” He feels many of today’s fundamental management practices are counterproductive. He purports that team talent is related to individual performance, with good employee fit a precursor to success. Professor Burkus also believes the most intrinsic motivator is progress and that managers should identify what is holding employees back and eliminate the barriers.

An outdoor luncheon provided the backdrop for discussions on the morning’s revelations and preparation for the afternoon breakout sessions. Three topics were on tap with only two blocks of time scheduled. That meant attendees had to pick and choose the most appropriate for their interests.

Michael Siegel, Managing Director of alliantgroup, presented “The Largest Tax Break Distributors and Manufacturers Are Missing Out On.” He explained how the Research & Development Tax Credit applied to our members and how changes in the tax code expanded the potential for this savings. It turns out its much more applicable than most realized.

Frank Hurtte, Founding Partner of River Heights Consulting, shared the philosophy of his “The Distributors’ Fee-Based Manifesto” which outlines a path for additional revenue streams from valued added services that are either presently given away or not yet provided. Attendees broke into several roundtable discussions to identify potential opportunities and pitfalls. Ideas were then shared with the entire session. The insights gained showed real potential for revenue opportunities.



Phil Allen, President of Grace Engineered Products, enlightened his audience on “What NFPA 70E Electrical Safety Really Means to Your Customers.” This Arc-Flash initiative is a change catalyst in the electrical industry and is considered the gold standard for safety. His overview offered a balance of information to help us have good conversations about safety with our customers.

After a full day of education and motivation, what many consider the highlight of the conference came next. This was the Manufacturer's Product Showcase & Reception. For two hours and forty five minutes the Distributor members were treated to a mini trade show of over 60 manufacturers and service providers, many introducing their newest developments.

Not unlike speed dating, the opportunity for Distributors to investigate new lines while partaking in one-on-one discussions to determine relevance for their business models is



unavailable to them anywhere else but at this event. Of course, this is also a boon for the Manufacturers as Product Showcase provides a highly targeted source for potential new sales channel partners, as well as the chance to catch up with many of their existing Distributors, all in one place.

If the products weren't enough, a lavish spread of hors d'oeuvres, carving stations, and libation dispensaries were placed throughout to keep the members engaged and dispersed within the spacious but cozy exhibit hall. The place was jammed the entire time.

Although the schedule after the Showcase said "dinner on your own," it's unlikely anyone had room left for a hearty meal. Besides, there was only an hour break until the traditional President's Reception. Yet another networking opportunity, President Tom Swenton and his wife, Debbie, invited all members to their suite for a few more hours of conversation and revelry.

Friday morning continued to deliver two more top-notch sessions. Brian Moran, President and Founder of "The 12 Week Year," laid out his company's namesake program. His concept is based on effective execution as the key to consistent high performance. By compressing goal time frames to 12 weeks instead of a year, and focusing on less of them, it's easier to plan, commit to, and create accountability for the most important projects that have to get done sooner rather than later.

Next up was the very popular economic review and forecast, presented annually by one the Beaulieu brothers of ITR Economics. This year, CEO Brian spent a brisk 75 minutes reviewing worldwide trends as they relate back to the North American economy, reporting the US is still #1 and will be for the foreseeable future. He finished by answering a few questions from the audience. His dry humor kept the avalanche of numbers in perspective while his insight into rising costs and advice on how to avoid a mild 2019 recession were highly informative.

After a day and a half of intense education and networking, a break was in order. The afternoon was free to wander the area or take advantage of three organized activities. The scramble golf outing was a popular choice. The local alternatives were an Everglades experience by airboat, which I heard was extremely exhilarating, and deep sea fishing, which became shallow sea fishing due to rough seas farther out. Just sitting by the pool or taking a ferry ride out to the resort's private island were other possibilities.

Everyone had to get back and ready as the final night party was scheduled for the evening. It ended up evolving into the ultimate back yard blowout. Held under the stars, the buffet held a bevy of culinary delights, a varied selection of beverages readily available, and the sweet sounds of “None Other” kept the dance floor full and hopping all night long. It was an evening most didn’t want to end.



The end of the party didn’t end the program, however. Saturday morning brought a real treat for sports fans, or perhaps sports critics would be more appropriate. The closing general session featured the most senior NFL referee, Walt Coleman, who was at the forefront of several controversial calls over his 29 years of service. Working the biggest games made that inevitable.

His presentation of gridiron memories was about attitude and how to handle high stress situations. His big message had three elements: remembering you are important to the situation, regardless the outside focus on you, you need to maintain your sense of humor, and ultimately, you should just do what is right. You’ll always be able to live with that.

And with that, the Spring 2017 AHTD Meeting came to an end. But it wasn’t really the end, only another beginning. The beginning of action plans created from the education acquired, the beginning of new relationships established, and the beginning of new ways of doing business with those relationships already long held. Yes, these meetings are more than the location, the food, and a few fun times. Those things just help absorb the important stuff a little easier.

To get these kinds of valuable benefits for you and your organization, be sure to plan on attending the AHTD Fall meeting from October 3-6, 2017 at the Omni Grove Park Inn, Asheville North Carolina.

Fall 2017 Meeting



Tuesday, October 3 - Friday, October 6, 2017
Omni Grove Park Inn, Asheville, NC