



A Discussion on Customer Support with Beth McAllister



Beth McAllister is vice president of marketing for KLA-Tencor's Worldwide Support Organization.

Rising semiconductor production costs, coupled with the transition to 300-mm processing, are forcing chip-makers to place increasing pressure on their OEM tool vendors to maximize the performance and uptime of their equipment, while at the same time reducing their costs. Any amount of tool downtime can eat directly into a fab's profitability—especially for 300-mm manufacturing, where more than twice as much potential product is placed at risk per wafer compared to 200-mm wafers.

Yield Management Solutions recently interviewed Beth McAllister, vice president of marketing for KLA-Tencor's Worldwide Support Organization, to discuss the company's newly introduced iPartner™ program, and how its unique approach to customer service and support addresses these critical needs, while at the same time lowering costs for customer service and support.

YMS: What is so unique about iPartner compared to other customer support programs that are currently out there?

BM: With iPartner, we're providing

our customers with 7 x 24 online support at no charge, and enabling them to get additional savings on top of that. Customers get the immediate benefit of increased coverage and fast online resolution, such as increased tool uptime and reduced service costs. There isn't another OEM customer support program in the industry that comes close. Simply put, iPartner reduces our customers' costs while improving tool uptime.

Other customer support programs take a "one-cost-fits-all" approach, relying on maintaining lots of expert resources close at hand to respond to tool issues. This requires, the customer to pay for more support than is actually needed. This is extremely costly and inefficient, especially over time, since support requirements generally become less stringent as processes become more mature in the fab production cycle. iPartner empowers our customers with the ability to choose from a variety of service levels for each of their KLA-Tencor tools—with the flexibility to scale those services up or down as their needs change over time.

YMS: How is iPartner made possible?

BM: iPartner is based on our iSupport technology, which enables remote diagnosis and troubleshooting of our tools installed at the customer site. iSupport allows trained KLA-Tencor technicians at our online support center to remotely access the problem tools with the customer's permission. This helps to resolve issues that arise without requiring a KLA-Tencor engineer to first arrive onsite to diagnose the problem. In many cases, problems can be identified and corrected remotely—significantly reducing the time and resources needed to bring the tool back up and running.

iPartner leverages these capabilities to provide fast, 7x24 online response to help resolve common issues and reduce the need for more costly onsite support visits. A number of iPartner service options are offered with varying degrees of additional support to help resolve complex tool issues. Ranging from the greatest to least amount of support, these program packages are: *iPerformance*, *i724*, *iValue* and *iShare*.

YMS: How does a fab determine which of these programs is the right one for them? How do you help them make a choice?

BM: The iPartner support packages are extremely flexible, and scaled to match our customers' specific requirements. When our customers are considering which package is right for them, we recommend they ask themselves these questions:

- How complex is the tool needing support?
- How critical are the applications involved?
- Where am I in the production cycle?
- What is my level of expertise with that tool?

If, for example, a customer needs support for a 235x brightfield inspection system installed in an advanced design-rule development line, they may wish to choose our *iPerformance* package, which provides extensive on-site support, automated tool monitoring and a wide variety of other services in addition to 7x24 online access to our technical staff. If, on the other hand, a fab has a large number of a specific model of tool dedicated to a single process application, or if a tool is being used in a less critical layer application, the customer may opt for a lower-cost support package. That customer may also wish to transition to a lower-cost

package as a process becomes more mature over time, and as the customer's expertise in that application increases.

Our customers have ready access to our 25+ years of semiconductor process control experience to assist them in choosing the right support package for them, but the ultimate decision is theirs for determining how much or how little support they need. We feel this approach establishes a true partnership between our customers and us. Not only does it more cost-effectively speed the resolution of complex repair issues and make optimum use of onsite technical support, but it also reduces tool repair times—all of which lowers their tool cost of ownership.

YMS: How do the saver awards work and how can customers sign up for iPartner?

BM: The iPartner saver awards depend on the number of compatible tools a customer has in their fab, how much often customers go online and whether or not they already have an Integrated Diagnostic Monitoring (iDM) server installed. For both new and existing iSupport users, the iPartner program offers saver awards that enable customers to earn savings on their annual service contract costs by meeting online usage targets during the contract coverage period. The more they use our online product support, the more they save.

YMS: How secure is your iSupport technology? What is the danger of someone breaking into this network and disrupting fab operations?

BM: We worked closely with one of the industry's foremost security experts, to develop multiple layers of security for iSupport. Our iPartner program incorporates the latest in online security measures, including hardware firewalls, proxy servers, encryption servers to browsers, dial-back ISDNs, CHAP protocols, a physically secure on-site support center, user authentication, token cards and certificate servers. And, perhaps most importantly, the customer is in total control of secure information at all times.

YMS: Which KLA-Tencor tools are currently being supported by these programs? How soon do you expect to have all your tools covered?

BM: iPartner currently supports seven product lines, including our latest-generation brightfield, darkfield and e-beam wafer inspection systems; macro defect inspection tools; CD SEM and overlay metrology systems; unpatterned wafer inspection tools; thin-film metrology systems and reticle inspection tools.

For more information about KLA-Tencor's iPartner program, please visit www.kla-tencor.com/support web link.