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Machine learning, big data find promise in cloud

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Apple Buys Former Semiconductor Manufacturing Plant in San Jose for $18.2 Million

Apple has purchased a former semiconductor manufacturing plant in North San Jose for $18.2 million, according to the Silicon Valley Business Journal.

The 70,000 square foot building was formerly used by Maxim Integrated as a manufacturing plant for semiconductors. Interestingly enough, Apple's purchase of the plant makes it neighbors with Samsung Semiconductor.

It remains unclear what Apple has planned for the facility for, but it likely won't involve any large-scale manufacturing. Experts believe that the purchase doesn't signal a push into chip manufacturing, but does suggest that Apple needs more "heavy R&D" space. The description of the plant from the listing agent's marketing material indicates that it is" "Well suited for prototype, pilot, and low-volume manufacturing, this facility is capable of producing a wide array of products at multiple technology nodes ranging from 600nm to 90nm, with the bulk of production from 350nm to 180nm."

Cypress sells Bloomington wafer fab

Cypress Semiconductor has retained ATREG, a specialist vendor of wafer fabs and other technology assets, to assist the company in selling its 200mm wafer fab in Bloomington, Minnesota.

Cypress has operated the fab since it acquired it from Control Data VTC in 1990.

The automotive-qualified fab has a clean room floor space of 80,000 square feet and is capable of 16,700 wafer starts per month, according to ATREG. The sales agent adds that there is the possibility of a multi-year supply contract back to Cypress and to license process IP for the company.

The fab is currently being used by Cypress Foundry Solutions and operates at manufacturing nodes between 0.35µ and 90nm.

Machine learning, big data find promise in cloud

Nervana Systems is close to rolling out a microprocessor aimed at big data analytics that embodies the company's efforts to speed up deep neural networks in hardware for various recognition tasks. The company believes it has an edge with a novel processor it hopes to have up and running in its own cloud service late in 2016. Engineers at the startup are racing to develop and accelerate algorithms that find patterns in today's flood of digital data.

Nervana competes with giants such as Intel and Nvidia whose processors run most of today's algorithms for training neural nets. Web giants are also in the hunt, snapping up the best researchers in machine learning. Among the leaders, Google is said to be working on an accelerator chip of its own.

ZigBee ratifies solution for IoT apps

The ZigBee Alliance has approved ZigBee 3.0, opening new doors for improved communication and interoperability between products used in applications ranging from connected home, intelligent buildings and smart cities to connected lighting, energy efficiency and other applications.

A non-profit association of companies, the ZigBee Alliance creates open, global standards that define the Internet of Things (IoT) for use in consumer, commercial and industrial applications.

Helping to lead the standards groups to collaborate with the ZigBee Alliance on fulfilling this vision for the IoT is the EnOcean Alliance. The two groups will work together to combine the benefits of EnOcean Equipment Profiles (EEPs) already widely adopted in the sub-one GHz frequency with the newly ratified ZigBee 3.0 solution in the worldwide 2.4GHz frequency band.

Apple devices drive growth in force sensing display tech

According to the latest report from IHS Inc., Apple's use of Force Touch technology in the Apple Watch and 3D Touch in the iPhone 6S line is driving growth in force sensing and other touch-panel enhancements in mobile devices. In fact, other brands and IC makers are in the neighbourhood to develop their own force sensing solutions, mainly for high-end and mid-range smartphones due to the high cost, added the market research firm.

In 2016, force sensing module shipments are expected to grow 317 per cent to reach 461 million units in 2016. Nearly one quarter (24 per cent) of new smartphones shipped will include the technology, stated IHS.