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TEL to enter maskless litho business

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SAN JOSE, Calif. -- Japanese equipment giant Tokyo Electron Ltd. (TEL) is quietly making an entry into the maskless lithography business.

In recent times, TEL (Tokyo) entered into an agreement with Multibeam Systems Inc. (Santa Clara, Calif.), a developer of multi-beam maskless lithography technology, sources said.

It was originally believed that Multibeam would field a standalone multi-beam tool. But instead, the company formed a partnership with TEL, they said.

TEL will become the systems integrator for Multibeam's technology. TEL will market and sell a tool based on Multibeam's technology. TEL will provide the wafer handling gear, stages and systems. Multibeam will provide the engine and multi-beam technology.

Multibeam is devising a system with 88 beams, based on a high-current, shaped-beam technology. Geared for the 32-nm node and beyond, the technology is supposed to process five to 10 wafers an hour.

It is unclear when TEL will offer a tool based on the technology. TEL itself has dabbled in direct-write, but those efforts have been a flop. Several years ago, Toshiba, TEL, Ebara and DNS formed a joint venture tentatively named E-Beam Corp. That e-beam effort reportedly failed.

Advantest, KLA-Tencor, IMS, Mapper and others are developing maskless tools, which promises to lower the cost of ownership in lithography by eliminating the photomask in IC production.

Many maskless vendors are still struggling to devise their tools due to the complexity of the technology.

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