

APEC talk-fest emphasises innovation

"The Christchurch Press" March 11, 2004 Michael Herman

The fifth Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Research and Development Leaders Forum kicked off yesterday with a meeting on ways to advance science and technology through policy development.

But while the policy makers were talking up a storm, more than 30 of New Zealand's high-tech elite were putting the finishing touches to their exhibits at the Innovation Showcase in the Christchurch Convention Centre.

The showcase, which features "smart innovations" from New Zealand and the APEC region, has been strongly supported by the information and communication technology sector (ICT).

Tait Electronics, New Zealand's largest electronics company, **EDAC Electronics, which specialises in remote monitoring and control equipment**, and the HIT Lab NZ, which creates new ways for humans to interact with computers, were among the high-tech leaders with exhibition stands at the Showcase.

Andy Ballagh, a product marketing manager at award-winning Christchurch company Pulse Data, said the event was a good way to meet prospective clients and partners from other parts of the world.

Ballagh said he would consider the showcase a success if it yielded at least three new networking opportunities at a governmental level in the APEC markets for their products for the visually impaired. Most of the company's products were exported to North America, but it saw Asia as a key growth market, he said.

"We have just started selling into the region in the last 18 months and it's growing on a monthly basis. There's big potential," said Ballagh.

Research, Science and Technology Minister Pete Hodgson said the showcase was an opportunity to stimulate new business for organisations from the biotechnology, ICT, creative and niche marketing sectors.

APEC represents 2.5 billion people across 21 economic jurisdictions, with a combined gross domestic product of \$27.8 trillion. The region accounts for 47 per cent of world trade.