
A guide to selecting a Good Fit manufacturing partner

Selecting the correct manufacturing partner for your electronics outsourcing needs is fundamental to your business. To help you address the key factors in your decision making process, Speedboard has compiled a list including 10 of the most important criteria:

1. **Size:** It is critical to determine that you have selected a suitably sized partner, one that is compatible with your type of projects and total spend. They need to be able to accommodate your work now and in the future, and for you to be a valued member of their customer base.
2. **Technical capability:** Do you know your technical “must haves”? Can the CEM manufacture your product using their current skill sets and are they able to demonstrate abilities in making other products with similar complexities? Ask how they manage the integration of new work (NPI). How do they manage test requirements and address fault finding?
3. **Quality approvals:** It is a given that proficient electronic manufacturing needs to be supported by robust standards, systems & procedures, and it is equally important you know which approvals are essential to your business, e.g. is Automotive standard necessary or an expensive luxury? Undertake your own tailored audit and understand what the minimum requirements are – such as ISO approval, IPC build standard, and a solid QA foundation.
4. **Ethos and culture:** Knowing how to operate ethically and fairly is an indispensable part of any business relationship. Contract manufacturing is essentially a service industry and often the differentiator between suppliers is the people. Sharing goals and objectives, working together to tackle challenges and ultimately having the correct “can do” attitude is all part of the right work ethic.
5. **Materials management:** It is essential that your EMS provider has developed good buying power built upon strong relationships throughout the supply chain network. Buffer & consignment stocking arrangements, accurate lead-times management and precise forecasting capabilities should all be in place.
6. **Flexible scheduling:** Manufacturing your assemblies is only part of the full CEM service. Having the ability to hold stock of finished product, supplying to Kanban call off and offering a flexible approach to fluctuating demand are services that set good EMS providers apart.
7. **Price:** The unit price of an assembly is important but is only one of many measurable factors when evaluating your shortlist of EMS providers. Engaging in dialogue prior to RFQ stage will result in clearer understanding of your requirement, and will ultimately produce a more tailored quotation.

8. Product lifecycle support: Can the CEM offer complete support through the evolution and lifespan of your products? Do they have the capacity and resources to develop with you as your needs grow but also service the needs of products which become end of life, whilst still remaining focused?
9. Financials: Checking the financial stability of your supply chain should be obligatory but is often overlooked. Your chosen EMS provider must have a respectable financial history and credit rating for effective material procurement, as well as having reserves to invest in new plant and recruit staff, survive downturns, and have the financial strength to support your business.
10. Location. There is a recognisable benefit in being able to conveniently visit your manufacturing partner and have that vital meeting, deliver test equipment or collect urgent prototypes. If your shortlisted CEMs are equal in all other respects, then working with the one closest to you will add value to your relationship.

In Summary, knowing what is important to your business is essential. Understanding how and why the right manufacturing partner can bring benefits is vital; using the above 10 points as part of your supplier evaluation process will create a shortlist of compatible manufacturing companies, from which you will identify a “Good Fit” manufacturing partner.