PCB Assembly With Obsolete Parts and Hard-To-Find Components

How important is an efficient supply chain for electronics manufacturing?

Many companies take their supply chain for granted until they need an obsolete part or a hard-to-find component. Then the importance of having resourceful contract manufacturing partners becomes an incredibly valuable asset.

Almost every contract manufacturer will eventually run into parts availability issues. The method by which contract manufacturers resolve these needs show their professionalism and commitment to generating value for their clients.

Unfortunately, there is no "universal inventory list" that all buyers can use to find out who has stocks of rare and hard-to-find parts. The Internet is a useful source of information, but many contract manufacturers will simply give up on any project that requires more than a cursory Google search for parts and components sourcing.

But a reputable contract manufacturer can deliver valuable service by helping your supply chain manager find these parts. These manufacturers know with a great degree of certainty that someone, somewhere, has the part you are looking for.

What Options Do Supply Chain Managers Have?

Obsolete components are typically found in retail electronics with short product lifespans. Televisions, computers, and mobile devices have a much shorter product lifecycle than aerospace, medical, or military products. Often, more years pass between manufacturer upgrades, redesigns, or replacements for these products than the initial product's lifecycle.

If the original product does not survive the time gap between the upgrade or redesign time frame, then its components will likely become obsolete in the meantime. There are a few options that supply chain managers can take to mitigate this risk:

- **Contact the Contract Manufacturer.** When you are working with a reputable contract manufacturer, you can get hard-to-find parts sourced even on tight deadlines – but if you need hundreds of obsolete components regularly, this can be an unfeasible solution.

  Reputable contract manufacturers offer end-of-life (EOL) notifications for their components, which can represent a significant advantage in the electronics industry. Notifications give you enough lead time to generate solutions to sourcing problems without having to delay the assembly process. However, be wary of contract manufacturers that claim their parts will never go obsolete.

- **Use a Third-Party EOL Database.** Third party component databases can provide you datasheets that show the expected EOL values of your components. In particular, this solution can help you identify hard-to-find components with limited cross-references and those that are nearing the end of their product lifecycle.

  These databases can also help you determine which components are out of regulatory compliance, and give you ample time for determining a strategy for addressing compliance-related issues before they get in the way of getting products to market.

  Power Design Services is able to source hard-to-find components for clients that need contract manufacturing services provided for obsolete products or electronics that rely on parts that may not always be readily available.

  Rely on our sourcing team to find obsolete parts and difficult components for your electronic products and benefit from our network of trusted parts distributors and manufacturers.

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