

Those operating in high-end, low-volume markets often need greater flexibility



One size fits all?

As our industry becomes increasingly globalised, there is a danger that flexibility may be compromised by the need to fit all customer interactions into a single, worldwide IT system. This 'one size fits all' approach may work for high-volume customers, but OEMs and CEMs operating in high-end, low-volume markets often need significantly greater flexibility to meet their more specialised procurement processes.

In sectors such as rail, oil and gas exploration, avionics, and harsh industrial control the balance tips towards the need for more customer and industry-specific support and higher service levels, despite the relatively low production volumes.

A distributor's ability to respond to processes which are unique to each market and each customer can make a the difference between a streamlined procurement process and one which is fraught with errors and frustration.

Get market specific

The need to provide information which is appropriate for each market begins with the quotation process. For defence customers, for example, it may be essential to include the country of origin or other information which ensures that the OEM and CEM can document compliance with the International Traffic in Arms Regulations.

In other sectors, such as the rail or avionics industries, the IT system can prompt the sales team to ensure that the correct release or EN documentation is included with the order and that the parts have the correct status for RoHS-compliant or RoHS-exempt applications.

Adaptable procurement

A flexible IT system can also support the unique procurement procedures used by different customers. For Charcroft, this means the ability to ensure that additional contacts are automatically copied on each quotation or on all email correspondence. Other

customer-specific processes include adding the datasheet to quotations for all new parts or for any alternatives which may be offered. The system can even maintain customer-specific dictionaries that hold the customer's internal part numbers and cross-reference them to the original manufacturer part numbers.

As a further benefit, a flexible IT system can help make the quotation process faster by ensuring that the sales team knows the most important factor guiding procurement for each project or customer. This can include knowing whether the speed of response, lead-time, lowest price or the lowest minimum order quantity is the most important criterion, or whether surface-mount parts should always be supplied on a tape and reel.

The ability to add customer-specific procedures is important throughout the order shipment process. It ensures that optional additional quality checks on the devices and documentation are signed off before the shipment is released.

Naturally, this level of flexibility is not always possible when the IT system is a framework for doing business globally. For Charcroft, however, the combination of a narrow focus on UK customers operating in safety or mission-critical applications and a custom IT system enables the company to adapt its IT system to support specific industries and individual customers.

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Can distribution really be all things to all customers? Charcroft director, Debbie Rowland, suggests some OEMs and CEMs need more flexibility than others



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