

TIGHTEN UP ON TRACEABILITY

Charcroft's Steven Tait and Debbie Rowland assess whether the supply-chain is ready for the anti-counterfeiting trade agreement ACTA

Proposed for introduction in the first quarter of 2014, the multi-national anti-counterfeiting trade agreement (ACTA) has renewed interest in the humble certificate of conformity (CofC) as a major tool in the war against counterfeit components.

The aim of ACTA is to provide an international standard and legal framework for enforcing intellectual property rights on all types of goods, from pirate copies of the latest blockbuster film, to designer clothing, domain names and electronic components.

During its slow and sometimes controversial progress since the initial discussions in 2008, ACTA has served to focus on the importance of traceability as an anti-counterfeiting measure.

Focus on CofC

To protect themselves against the risks associated with the use of counterfeit components, more OEMs are demanding full traceability for each batch of components, even when sourcing product from franchised sources. In theory, it should be quite simple for a franchised distributor to provide a CofC for any component, but the reality can be very different.

First, the buyer must understand the different meanings of CofC, which can be an abbreviation for a certificate of conformity, a certificate of conformance or a certificate of compliance.

To ensure traceability back to the manufacturer, the most crucial CofC is the certificate of conformity or conformance. This is provided by the component manufacturer or distributor and confirms that the component meets its stated specifications and includes the date of manufacture and batch number.

The certificate of compliance, on the other hand, is typically provided by a

distributor to confirm that they have complied with the terms of the purchase order.

Getting a certificate of conformity can be a challenge, however, even from a franchised distributor, particularly if the inventory has been held for a number of years. There can also be problems with CofCs on scheduled deliveries, with some OEMs reporting that a certificate of conformity has been received with the first shipment of a scheduled order, but not with any subsequent deliveries.

This lack of traceability has resulted in a number of OEMs holding inventory which they are then unable, or unwilling, to use.

Info to hand

The issue of traceability was addressed by Charcroft in 1985 by creating an archive of hardcopy CofCs and, more recently, a digital archive.

Every certificate of conformity and certificate of compliance that Charcroft receives is scanned and archived in the digital library.

The bespoke Omnis computer system includes a flag to denote which CofC or release is required with each shipment and the archive can also be used to recall batch numbers and manufacturing dates at any time in the future.

The introduction of the anti-counterfeiting trade agreement (ACTA) will put pressure on all buyers to differentiate between CofCs. It will also mean that virtually all distributors will need to invest in processes to ensure that they can provide full traceability for each component that they sell, regardless of whether it is sold to the consumer, industrial or defence sectors.



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Manufacturer certificate of conformity