

Bridging the PCB Gap

There's no turning back from global sourcing. Our newest columnist explains the ins and outs of working with bare board distributors.



**GREG
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THE BUSINESS WORLD has gone global, and there is no stopping it. It seems amazing (and contradictory) how so-called American cars are made in Canada, or Japanese cars are assembled in the U.S. The term “no boundaries” has never been more accurate than it is today. Consumers, including buyers of PCBs, are going wherever they must to find the best value – and for the purchase of bare printed circuit boards, that means offshore.

Whether you are a North American-based PCB fabricator or a buyer for a domestic OEM or CEM operation, partnering with an offshore bare board manufacturer is becoming a necessity to meet the expanding demands of your customers. This column, drawing from my 12 years of PCB knowledge and experience, is intended to help you navigate what can be treacherous offshore waters to achieve not only customer satisfaction but, more importantly, improve your company's bottom line. I have sold PCBs domestically and internationally, serving in roles ranging from sales clerk to national sales manager. In recent years, just by using offshore partners, I took one company from shipments around \$1 million every six months to shipping over a \$1 million *every* month. Over a year ago, I founded my own company, the Bare Board Group, a fast-growing, offshore PCB distribution company based in the U.S. and with offices in Taiwan.

Sometimes the topics of this column will be basic, but the basics are very important. For example, not understanding the basic purchasing terms “FOB” and “Landed” can affect your profit – if there is any profit left!

I will also explore topics related to the various tactical and strategic planning needs required when partnering with an offshore PCB manufacturer. And, admittedly, sometimes topics will be subjective, such as when I discuss the pros

and cons of buying boards directly from Asia, and when it is more appropriate to use a distributor.

Some of the other topics this column will cover:

- How a U.S. company will get stronger by using offshore partners.
- How to convince customers that you can handle their offshore needs.
- How to make customers comfortable with your offshore vendors.
- How to market offshore capabilities.
- How to qualify a vendor, including a set of tools to use when conducting a formal evaluation of potential bare board partners.
- Everything you need to know about Customs and duties.
- Determining what volumes to build in your plant and what to import.
- Finding the right broker/distributor as partner.
- When to use a broker/distributor and when to go direct.
- When to act as a rep and when to act as a broker/distributor.

I encourage readers to suggest topics that are pertinent to specific needs. Remember, the role of this column is to be your resource, your expert when it comes to bridging the PCB gap with an offshore vendor. I urge you to ask questions, and I promise answers as soon as possible. Because this column is presented online, it will be very easy to create this kind of stimulating discussion with interactive give and take between the reader and myself.

I am dedicated to helping you to develop an effective, rewarding and profitable offshore PCB sourcing relationship. I look forward to hearing from you! **PCD&M**

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