

Need Offshore PCBs? Go Local

Domestic PCB makers have become a dynamic source for Asian-built product.

Ever thought about asking that board house right down the road from you – the one that has been providing your company with PCBs for years – for an offshore solution?

Going offshore for bare boards, while offering great benefits, can be time-consuming and maybe even overwhelming. Asking your domestic PCB vendor, who knows all your quirks and the intimate details of your boards, to provide a lower-cost option can save time and money in the following ways:

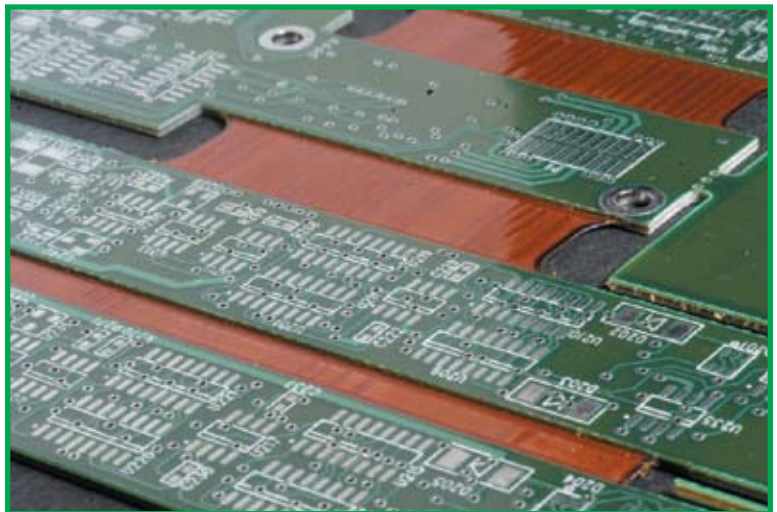
- **You don't have to qualify another vendor.** Let your domestic vendor (let's call him "Bob") prequalify potential offshore partners, screening for proper credentials such as UL and ISO certification, and checking out U.S. references. Let Bob travel to Asia, survey and inspect facilities and identify reliable vendors who can meet your needs.
- **Bob can determine which part numbers would be better produced offshore.** Not all part numbers are alike, and offshore production may not be the best solution for every part number. Bob, the one who's been building them, can identify which products are best produced overseas. He might even warehouse part numbers to help manage your inventory costs. Whether it's a KanBan or JIT program, Bob will handle it.
- **Bob takes care of the qualification order.** Many engineering (and other) questions must be correctly answered to ensure a high-quality board. Bob can take care of all the details necessary to get your orders delivered on time, in good shape and with all the required paperwork.
- **Let Bob lose sleep.** Forget about staying up until all hours of the night trying to communicate with vendors who are 12 hours ahead of you. Bob will be there to deal with the overseas vendors, handling quotes, engineering issues and scheduling challenges, as well as answering your questions. He may even take you to lunch.
- **Don't worry about quality concerns or delivery problems.** Bob will handle that, too. The local PCB partner, who has been building your part numbers for years, is the ideal go-between to handle any quality prob-

lems with an offshore manufacturer. And Bob can go gray worrying about such potential disasters as a longshoremen's strike, typhoons or customs delays, while your hair keeps its youthful color.

- **You save on bank fees.** Bob will take a check, while overseas vendors must be paid via expensive international wire transfers.

Sound too good to be true? It may surprise you to know that there are a lot of "Bobs" out there, and they come in all shapes and sizes. According to IPC, more than 35% of the value of offshore PCB orders are handled through domestic board suppliers (and this does not begin to take into consideration boards ordered through dedicated distributors). And it makes sense. The buyer/vendor relationship is one of trust, and it is easier to trust someone with whom you have a successful track record. And Bob has an incentive to assist in the procurement of offshore orders for product that would otherwise move entirely overseas.

Full disclosure: My company, a PCB broker/distributor, sells to "Bobs" all over the U.S. We are proud to say we support the domestic PCB industry by bringing together domestic and overseas vendors in a way that benefits both sides of the industry. So ask *your* Bob for an offshore solution. He just might have one already in place. ■



More than 35% of offshore PCB orders are handled by domestic suppliers.

Greg Papandrew is founder and president of Bare Board Group (bareboard.com), a distributor of offshore-manufactured circuit boards; greg@bareboard.com. His column appears quarterly.

