SERVICE BRIEF

Selecting and Qualifying the Right EMS Partner

Why EMS qualification should be structured carefully – and how EMS Strategy Group can support you

EMS Strategy Group | October 22, 2026 | Service Brief 3

When discussing the selection and qualification of a new EMS partner, timeframes of 15 to 18 months are sometimes mentioned for complex projects. It is important, however, to distinguish between the actual qualification of an EMS partner and a complete manufacturing transition involving product transfer and series production ramp-up.

15 to 18 months is not a typical timeframe for the qualification of an EMS partner alone. A straightforward or clearly defined qualification process can be completed considerably faster. The overall process becomes longer when it also involves taking over an existing production setup, reviewing extensive technical documentation, establishing or qualifying new material sources, transferring test concepts, and bringing several product variants into stable series production.

The calendar time of such a project therefore consists of active work phases as well as periods between individual steps. Not every phase requires the continuous full-time involvement of the employees concerned. What matters is that the necessary steps are carried out in the right sequence and that the process does not become unnecessarily delayed between phases.

1. Why Calendar Time Still Matters

The Challenge

Because actual working time does not correspond to the total calendar time, the effort involved in such a project can easily be underestimated. At the same time, the desire to make a quick decision can result in important steps being shortened or postponed until too late in the process.

A reliable selection requires more than comparing quotations and certificates. Depending on the product and application, factors such as technical capabilities, quality systems, production capacity, inspection and testing capabilities, material sourcing and the suitability of the actual production site may all need to be assessed.

Our Approach

We structure the process from the outset into clearly defined phases, from requirements definition and initial screening through RFQ and technical evaluation to audit, selection and, where required, product qualification and transfer.

This makes it possible to identify which steps depend on each other, which can be handled in parallel and where waiting periods actually occur.

2. What a Thorough Qualification Process Helps Prevent

The Challenge

If important steps in the selection and qualification process are shortened, problems may only become visible after the decision has been made or during the production ramp-up.

These may include technical requirements that have not been fully reviewed, missing manufacturing or testing capabilities, unclear material availability, incomplete production documentation or an insufficiently prepared transfer of manufacturing knowledge.

When an existing production operation is being transferred, the process is considerably more extensive than simply providing a BOM. Production and quality documentation, inspection requirements, test equipment, process knowledge and existing deviations may all need to be taken into account and re-established with the new partner.

Our Approach

We evaluate an EMS partner not only on the basis of existing certifications, but also on its suitability for the specific product and intended manufacturing scope.

Depending on the project, this can include technical capabilities, quality, capacity, material and supply-chain considerations, as well as the requirements for prototype, pilot and series production.

3. Why the Process Can Easily Lose Momentum Internally

The Challenge

The selection and qualification of an EMS partner is normally not the responsibility of a single department. Procurement, engineering, quality, production and, where applicable, other functions need to provide information, evaluate requirements and make decisions.

This does not mean that a company cannot manage the process itself. Many companies do so successfully. The challenge is that the employees involved are often also responsible for ongoing operations, customer projects and other operational tasks.

Longer periods can also occur between RFQs, follow-up questions, audits, technical clarification, prototype production or further approvals. If no one actively coordinates the overall process during these periods, decisions and next steps can be unnecessarily delayed.

In addition, internal knowledge of genuinely suitable EMS providers can vary considerably within a company. Certifications and publicly available company information provide important background, but they do not replace a practical assessment of whether a manufacturer is a suitable fit for the specific product, volume and requirements.

Our Approach

EMS Strategy Group supports the OEM in coordinating and structuring the overall process.

We contribute market knowledge, help narrow down the pool of potentially suitable EMS partners and support the technical and operational evaluation. At the same time, we keep track of open issues, next steps and dependencies throughout the process.

The decision on the EMS partner remains with the customer. We provide the preparation, evaluation and coordination required to support a well-founded decision.

4. When Selection Becomes a Manufacturing Transfer

The Challenge

Selecting a new EMS partner is not the same as successfully transferring production.

When existing products are to be transferred, technical documentation, manufacturing knowledge, material supply, inspection and testing processes, as well as tools and fixtures where applicable, must also be transferred or established with the new partner.

Only prototype or pilot production followed by a controlled series-production ramp-up will ultimately show whether the assumptions made during the selection process work under real production conditions.

Our Approach

For a manufacturing transition, we consider partner selection and production transfer as one connected process.

The requirements of the subsequent transfer are already taken into account during the EMS selection. This helps identify critical issues at an early stage, before they can delay the series-production ramp-up.

Depending on the product and starting situation, such a transfer can take several months. The actual timeframe depends in particular on product complexity, the scope of the production being transferred, material supply, testing requirements and the level of qualification required.

Why EMS Strategy Group

EMS Strategy Group supports OEMs in selecting, evaluating and, where required, transferring production to a new EMS partner.

Our team has extensive international experience in electronics manufacturing. Several team members have built and managed their own EMS businesses or held responsible positions in establishing, operating and developing EMS manufacturing operations. This experience ranges from day-to-day manufacturing and quality processes to international cooperation with manufacturing partners and the implementation of production transfers.

EMS Strategy Group has no proprietary EMS manufacturing capacity and does not sell manufacturing services. This allows us to remain independent of any specific EMS provider or production location.

Our role is to identify suitable partners, assess their actual suitability for the specific project and provide structured support throughout the selection, relocation or transfer process. This is not simply about selecting an EMS based on capacity and price, but about determining whether the partner can meet the OEM's requirements under the specific technical, organizational and commercial conditions.

Talk to Us About Your Project

Are you looking for a new EMS partner, planning to replace an existing manufacturer or considering the transfer of an ongoing electronics manufacturing operation?

We can discuss your current situation, the requirements for a future EMS partner and the expected scope of the selection or transfer process.

About the EMS Strategy Group

EMS Strategy Group supports industrial enterprises in the strategic and operational advancement of their electronics manufacturing. Our core expertise lies in the strategic relocation of manufacturing volumes, the selection of qualified EMS partners, the establishment of new production capacities, and the expansion of existing manufacturing structures.

Furthermore, we design resilient supply chain frameworks, conduct comprehensive risk assessments, and guide dual-sourcing strategies, with operational support through to a successful series production ramp-up.

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