

Ten Tips to Choosing an Outsource Converter

Choosing a converting partner to help manufacture your products can be a difficult task. Here are 10 tips to help make the process go more smoothly.

1. Does the converter have depth and breadth of technology?

Your outsource converter should not only be able to take on your current project but should also have the capabilities to expand capacity and to draw in additional technologies as your product line grows. They should have a deep bench of engineers skilled in different practices, and the capital, technological expertise, and industry knowledge to design best-in-class processes. They should also provide clean, bright facilities equipped with cleanrooms and the ability to control the environment for temperature, humidity, and light.

2. Does the converter have geographical reach?

Converters should have multiple plants that can produce your product where it makes sense – near your customers, or perhaps near where the material is produced – in order to reduce freight costs and leadtimes, and to be responsive to your customers' needs. Multiple plants also provide the requirement to have a built-in disaster recovery plan, another of your customers' concerns.

3. Does the converter think in terms of value or price?

Many converters think that offering the lowest price is the way to win jobs. The best think in terms of providing the largest end-to-end value: incorporating yield, freight, quality systems, information systems, value-added services, procurement, and many other services that save customers money and hassle over the long haul. And they are able to demonstrate this in hard dollars.

4. Does the converter provide best-in-class quality systems?

Almost everyone is registered to ISO-9001—that's the price of admission. The best converters are also registered to industry specific standards, such as ISO 13485 (medical) and AS-9100 (aerospace), and are at least compliant with others (GMP). They are also prepared to adopt their customers' best practices because it builds a stronger business. The best converters do not have cost-wasting "inspectors." Instead, they build robust processes that ensure quality products at the point of production. They will take the time to sit down with you and prepare detailed, rev-controlled specifications, and insure air-tight traceability from end-to end.

5. Does the converter respond to you?

Everyone says they return their phone calls and emails quickly. Do they? When things need to happen fast, the last thing the customer needs is to be waiting on an answer. On the longer-term projects, does the converter keep you informed along the way, or do you feel like you're always chasing them?

6. Does the converter listen to you?

When you describe your goals and objectives, is the converter really listening, and do their actions prove it?

7. Does the converter add value?

Converters should offer a very wide variety of roll-to-roll processes, including slitting/rewinding, sheeting, spooling, printing, coating, laminating, die-cutting, corona-treating, punching and perfining. Converters should also offer to source and procure substrates and packaging, essential to managing a supply chain that may have many partners. And they must have the ability to design and commercialize assembly processes so that they can provide you with a turnkey product.

8. Does the converter demonstrate continuous improvement and gainsharing?

Outsource manufacturers of all kinds need to prove that they can continuously improve their processes by working with customers and other members of the supply chain. They should be able to quantify gains in productivity and quality. Most importantly, they should be able to work with customers to identify and eliminate wastes and share the savings.

9. Does the converter have best-in-class information systems?

Converters, because of the varied nature of their work, need to have customized systems written by in-house converting experts, not canned off-the-shelf systems. These systems must be compliant to the quality standards, be impervious to unintended or malicious changes, provide lockable rev controls, insure end-to-end traceability and preserve customers' security and privacy.

10. Does the converter protect your intellectual property?

CDAs are the standard price of admission. There are many other steps to be taken. Some as simple as assigning a code name to your project, and others much more sophisticated. You must feel comfortable that your converter has taken all possible steps to protect your valuable intellectual property.

Bonus Tip: Is your converter a partner? Does it feel like they have your best interests in mind?