

Minimizing the risk: the benefits of a dedicated transition team

You're an Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and you've decided to outsource the production you typically perform in-house. Or perhaps your product design team is launching a new program into an Electronic Manufacturing Services (EMS) partner. How can you ensure that your product, business continuity and competitiveness are maintained as you migrate to a new manufacturing partner?

The preferred option is to partner with an EMS company with a dedicated transition model, which will focus on a seamless introduction of your product into their organization and on into the marketplace. The team will work with you to minimize any impact to your business during the transition journey to the new future state supply chain solution.

Defining Transition

Program transitions can occur at any point in a product's lifecycle. Common examples include a new product design, engineering updates to an existing product, market-driven changes, supplier changes or the need to switch manufacturing facilities, typically to deliver cost reductions. Each of these examples has its own risks, and each of the process groups and knowledge areas of the product must be in sync to ensure a successful transition.

Supply chain, materials, sourcing, engineering, facility teams, quality, compliance and logistics are just a few of the departments that must align when a transition occurs. If these different areas are not communicating and set on the same project scope and timeline, mistakes can be made, products may not be built on time and at the end of the day, money is lost. And worst of all - customer confidence deteriorates.

On Process, One Team, One Goal

Plexus Corp., an electronics design, manufacturing and aftermarket services company with more than 30 years of industry experience, has discovered that all of those risks can be mitigated by deploying a team of transition program and project specialists who focus on customer service excellence through the transition change. The members of the transition team - who are all Project Management Institute (PMI) members - act as the glue that brings each part of the team, on both the customer side and internally within Plexus, together to complete all of the project requirements by the customer's deadline.

The Plexus transition team follows a global, standardized process to guarantee each transition project is executed to the same high-level standards expected by Plexus and its customers. Using past experience, Plexus has created a rigorous and repeatable transition model that the team adheres to during every engagement with a customer.

The reason for such a strict process is simple. A member of the transition team engages during the most vulnerable time with a customer: during those instances of business change. By using prior knowledge and expertise, in addition to a

“At the end of the day, the goal is to always meet customer’s needs as soon as possible. That’s the value of our transition group. We aim to shrink down the timeline of the project and help to get the customer’s product to market as quickly as possible.”

-Tammy Miller, Transition Manager
Plexus Corp.

structured process, the transition team works to guarantee that all of the customer’s program and project requirements are met. They generally lead each program on a short-term basis, and work closely with the site teams until first article approvals are completed with the site and the customer. This model provides a site “cradle to grave” approach.

The Customer Relationship is Key

At Plexus, each transition team member has an expansive, diverse background of experiences that allows him or her to skillfully maneuver a transition with one goal in mind: customer satisfaction. Each transition manager is assigned to work with a specific customer, allowing them to essentially become an extension of the customers’ team during that engagement. That customer focus is critical, as the transition manager gains insight that strengthens the overall relationship.

According to Tammy Miller, a Transition Manager at Plexus, building trust is key to improving the interactions with the customer. “Whenever you build a relationship, you start off at a base level, and then you start to build that relationship up and up,” she said. “When a transition manager is attached to a customer base, you don’t start at that base level every time you start a new transition, which really helps. You start with a level of knowledge. The customer understands the help you can provide to them, and you become more of a guide at that point - and a mentor.”

To cultivate that vital connection, Plexus has strategically placed members of the transition team around the world. Transition managers can meet face-to-face with customers in the Americas, Europe and Asia. With the team running virtually at all times, David Strachan, Global Process Owner of Transition Management, said, “the sun never sets on transition world.”

Strachan added that the Plexus transition team - which has been in place for more than 15 years - strives to be a “safe pair of hands” for the customer. In fact, it’s right in their mission statement. Together, the 18 members of the Plexus transition staff have more than 88 combined man-years dedicated to performing transition work within Plexus.

Success in Action

This combination of experience and dedication has not gone unnoticed by customers of Plexus. A recent example of a transition success involved a Plexus-to Plexus manufacturing site transfer for SuperSonic Imagine (SSI), who required a move from a European facility to a site in the Asia Pacific region due to a shift in their product market. The transition involved qualification of a new supply chain in the new region, several product design enhancements, major test process changes, personnel training and logistics management. Despite several obstacles, Plexus was able to meet SSI’s deadline in the first quarter of 2014 and even received an award from the customer acknowledging the accomplishment.

Plexus has focused on transition excellence as a part of the value proposition for its customers. The transition management team is a differentiator for Plexus, enabling the delivery of customer service excellence as well as operational excellence. While the transition team may not be the most well known in the EMS industry, it is through their efforts that customers walk away satisfied with their engagement with Plexus as an EMS provider.