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Choosing a partner for medical device assembly projects, whether the process is semi or fully automated, can be a difficult experience. In this article, several vendors offer tips to ensure a smooth sourcing process.

Joyce Laird

Find a Perfect Match

A reliable assembly equipment/automation partner should have experience designing and building assembly and inspection systems suited to the product you plan to manufacture. “This is especially important during new product development and launch,” says Julie Logothetis, President, US division, Kahle Automation (Summit, New Jersey, USA). “Medical and pharmaceutical companies must rely on their chosen partner’s experience to develop solutions with high process efficiencies and minimal risk to deliver the highest quality product.”

“It is also important to select a partner that matches project size,” adds Erik Poulsen, Sales and Marketing Director at Komax Systems LCF SA (La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland). “In a weak company, an engineering error can mean the difference between success and bankruptcy. Do your homework and ensure that your partner can finish the job, even if there are surprises that no one bargained on.”

Peter Dreyer, Managing Director, Alpha Plan GmbH (Radeberg, Germany), notes that a supplier versed in lean manufacturing often can accommodate projects on a tight budget. “This type of supplier builds from modular components aligned in continuous-flow production cells with minimal in-process inventory buildup,” he says.

How Much Automation Do You Really Need?

While automation can increase productivity, process control and product quality, more automation is not always better. “Automation is justified if there are no frequent and/or important product variations,” says Roberta Borsari from A Uno Tec Srl (Mirandola, Italy). “An automated system normally achieves the best productivity when product configurations are limited. Added configurations may result in excess downtime and reduced productivity,” says Borsari. “However, automation can be the right solution in case of critical assembly operations and those that are difficult to perform manually because of mechanical resistance or other factors,” she adds.

Come Prepared

“The customer should come to the supplier with a complete package,” says Onik Bogosyan, President, Onex Automation (Duarte, California, USA). “This should include a component drawing set with sample parts, including possible component variations. Define the most critical requirements of the assembly process and expect your vendor to address them in the design phase.”

Practice Foresight

Everyone can be fairly confident that the future will include some degree of change. “Providing your equipment supplier with generalised future scenarios can save time and money,” says Dreyer.

“An automation partner must have not only the ability to develop new techniques and designs to keep up with ever-changing products, but [he should] also improve the accuracy, efficiency, and speed of the manufacturing process,” says Logothetis.

Request Validation Capabilities

“An ideal automation partner will provide a standard validation package that includes, at a minimum, functional requirements and design requirements protocols as well as the installation and operational qualification protocols and all associated test procedures to test and challenge the equipment,” says Logothetis.