Case Study

A systems approach to reducing time and cost in project launch

Project launch is typically the most costly phase of any outsourcing project. Both the customer and electronics manufacturing services (EMS) provider have a learning curve. There are both known costs such as non-recurring engineering (NRE) and tooling, and costs driven by unanticipated issues. Tight deadlines, stretched resources and communication overload can make it easy to miss open action items. A defined process for project launch can help improve efficiency, but typically the quality of project launch is dependent on the expertise of the EMS provider’s program manager and project team.

These challenges motivated Firstronic to develop a proprietary system to manage critical EMS processes including project launch. ProManage is a relational database that automates many of the day-to-day tasks and monitoring activities that otherwise consume a large share of program management time. Any member of the team can log on to the system and find out exactly what open action items they have on any project 24/7. Team members are emailed as new tasks are assigned and the system is preprogrammed in each of the processes it manages to assign standard tasks as the project progresses. The program manager has the time to better evaluate project trends and look at longer term project issues instead of getting bogged down in day-to-day tactical tasks.

The team that developed ProManage created four basic project launch templates.
which are customized to meet specific cus-
tomer requirements:

• Engineering (for customers with
design requirements)
• Prototyping
• New product launch (applies to
both transfer of new and existing
product)
• Older assembly review (for prod-
ucts that haven’t been produced in
at least a year).

Each template automates approximately
90% of the project launch plan and the
remaining items are added by the program
manager. The customer reviews the pro-
posed plan and modifications are made.
The plan is then launched to all relevant
parties and the system sends specific action
items to each participant.

If a deadline is missed, the system auto-
matically escalates that series of activities
to a supervisor for resolution. This ensures
that bottlenecks are immediately addressed
before they impact additional action items.
Additionally, the system creates full docu-
mentation and post-mortem history to
allow for process improvement.

This level of automation addresses a
number of issues that can create inefficien-
cies in project launch:

• Lack of project launch process
standardization.
• Real-time visibility into project
status and issues—team members
can access the system 24/7 to check
the status of the project issues they
are tracking.
• Learning curves associated with
new employees—employees simply
follow a roadmap.
• Project management vacation or
travel schedules—the program
manager can delegate to a team
member with the assurance the
system is tracking all activities.
• Communication overload—action
item assignments are only sent to
the responsible participant(s).
• Resource constraints—ProManage
is a force multiplier that can enable
a single program manager to do the
work of four-to-five people.
• Detailed project history to sup-
port product qualification reviews,
regulatory recordkeeping require-
ments or process improvement ini-
tiatives.

However, truly efficient project launch
is a team effort. While a system such as
ProManage can help ensure that no project
slippage goes unnoticed, there are a num-
ber of ways that customers can help streamline
the process as well. These include:

• Authorize the long lead-time mate-
rials recommended by the EMS
provider.
• Adopt design for manufacturabil-
ity/testability (DFM/DFT) recom-
mandations whenever possible.
• Expand the approved vendor list
(AVL) to include multiple sources.
• Share any known quality issues on
existing product.
• Provide a solid test specification.
• Provide clear packaging and logis-
tics requirements.
• Forecast as accurately as possible
and listen to the EMS provider’s
recommendations in that area as
well.

Supply chains compete against supply
chains. Issues caught in the initial stages
of a project are much less costly to fix than
issues found in the field. Combining a sys-
tems approach, such as the one outlined
above, with a focus on eliminating poten-
tial quality and supply chain issues before
they occur, reduces time, cuts cost and
results in superior quality.

Firstronic LLC (www.firstronic.com) pro-
vides advanced electronics manufactur-
ing services and optimized supply chain
solutions for the electronics industry.
Headquartered in Grand Rapids, MI,
Firstronic has a 35,000 square foot facility,
state-of-the-art equipment and a seasoned
management team with an average tenure
of 20 years. For more information, contact:
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