

# Quality, first, last and always



Andy Groom, Managing Director of America II Europe, talks to Neil Tyler about America II's approach to distribution and the importance it attaches to the issue of quality

**W**ho hasn't had to contend with counterfeit products especially at a time when companies are confronted by complex and elaborate counterfeiting operations?

Old part numbers are being removed, the components are then remarked and passed off as new and then re-enter the supply chain. Even well established manufacturers have been caught out and have found that they have been sold counterfeit products and in the defence and medical industries, for example, the liability issues can be huge.

Manufacturers often place the blame for this problem at the door of independent distributors. But is that a fair accusation? There are plenty of reputable independents in the market who shouldn't be associated with those companies that do knowingly sell counterfeit parts or who lack the capabilities to carry out the due diligence that is required in procuring components safely.

It's a serious problem for independent distributors when a growing number of major firms are unable or unwilling to work with them because of worries over counterfeit products.

Companies need to be able to differentiate between good and bad distributors especially when the independent sector is so important when it comes to sourcing old and obsolete components or those with very long lead-times.

Founded in 1989 America II was established by its current CEO Micheal Galinski. It's a privately owned business and his vision was to create a successful quality driven distribution company that would be able to serve the integrated circuit market. It's that focus on quality that is and has remained at the heart of how the business operates.

Over twenty years on the company has become one of the largest independent distributors in the world and is currently stocking in excess of 3bn components and currently has one of the largest inventories in the world that specialises in sourcing hard-to-find and allocated components.



Andy Groom

Unlike many other independent distributors America II has proved a stable business over the years and combined with strong finances has retained the same leadership team for the last 15 years. Unlike many other independent distributors quality is seen as the key to its success and it has established a robust quality system as a result.

According to Andy Groom, the company's European Managing Director, it has looked to develop a range of different solutions to meet the various needs of its customers.

"Whatever we do the focus is always very much on quality - whether that's in terms of the product we stock or the added-value services we can provide. America II can offer a variety of different solutions or services such as line item purchasing, consignment, asset management and organising and sourcing end of life buys.

"The company is currently headquartered in north America, in St Petersburg Florida and we hold stock from over 1900 manufacturers. We've opened facilities around the world from the UK and Germany in Europe to Japan, China, Mexico and Singapore in order to meet the needs of our customer's and to provide

them with worldwide coverage. We also have a presence in a further 10 countries. The security of our supply chain is very important to us and we have over \$900m in inventory that can be shipped the same day."

The focus on quality runs through the company from top to bottom like Blackpool runs through a stick of Blackpool Rock, and to that end the company has, as an independent distributor, set a very high bar when it comes to quality control. So confident is the company in the robustness of its systems that it offers an America II ten year guarantee, which compares to an industry standard warranty on components of just one year.

In addition it has partnered with one of the leading test houses in the US, Premier Semiconductor Services, to ensure that it remains ahead of the curve when it comes to continuous innovation in both testing and quality assurance.

According to the company's Executive Vice President, Chuck Magee "Quality is and has to be at the forefront of every decision that we take as a company. The issue of quality starts at the warehouse and with the verification of the suppliers' supply chain. We need to ensure the supply chain is secure and if there are issues with components we have our own in-house test facility to deal with that. We're the first distributor to bring in an independent third party testing facility. As a result we can guarantee that all our shipments are 100 percent manufacturer specified as a result."

As Groom explains many independent distributors are encouraging greater process transparency, and inviting buyers and quality engineers to visit third party testing facilities.

"Independent distributors know that buyers are sceptical, so they need to make sure that their sourcing and testing processes are as transparent and as accessible as possible. As a result we are able to offer cast iron guarantees to back up the quality of the components we sell."

ISO 9001 and ANSI compliant the company is also CCAP-101 certified and a member of IDEA and SMITA. On staff it also has Six SIGMA Green Belt certified component engineers as well as NARTE certified ESD technicians to hand.

Groom explains that the focus on

quality requires considerable resources. "At America II the quality process begins with a visual inspection of all parts using microscopes. This inspection method helps to determine whether the parts are authentic or not, and in addition quality inspectors check to ensure that the components have been handled, stored and packaged to industry standards.

"Solvent and marking permanence is then tested. In this process inspectors are checking for black topped or remarked surfaces on the components. The next step is physical dimension verification testing which basically is measuring the component and checking it against the manufacturer's original date code specifications."

In addition to these tests the company carries out RoHS compliance testing that identifies base elements to see whether the device contains lead. The company also uses x-rays to determine the authenticity of various dies seeking out gaps or voids and looks for characteristics that are specific to certain manufacturers.

Electrical testing includes a full range of options in order to verify the source of manufacturer and additional value added tests include: IC programming, tape and real services, CCAP testing and solder ability testing.

Counterfeit components are a major problem within the independent channel, according to Groom.

"It's a problem that affects the entire supply chain."

A recent report in the US suggested that brokers were frequently a source of counterfeit components followed by independent distributors and internet suppliers. However, while it said that unauthorised distributors were a major source of counterfeit products, in part because they have more diverse purchasing and screening activities many, like America II have implemented stringent procurement, testing and auditing requirements.

As Groom says, "We feel that we're the leader in quality assurance and testing. We secure the supply chain through our strict vendor selection process and purchasing controls. And as well as our strict quality inspection of devices we are also very focused on other quality processes such as import/export compliance."