

FINAL APPROACH |

Management in harmony

Nigel Wallis, chairman of Component Obsolescence Group (COG) explains how 'best practice' obsolescence management helps to ensure that engineering, supply chain and marketing departments work harmoniously within defined obsolescence strategies.



Nigel Wallis: chairman of COG

COG is a special interest group of like-minded professionals from all levels of the supply chain and across all industries and relevant government agencies concerned with addressing and mitigating the effects of obsolescence. It is a not for profit organisation that is managed by its members, and is also a member of the UK Electronics Alliance.

COG was formed in 1997 in response to the increasing number of obsolescence issues that the aerospace and defence industries were facing due to the technology explosion in the commercial arena.

Our members have access to presentations given by experts from across several industries at quarterly meetings, held over two days. Our members tell us that a particularly useful activity is the networking dinner held after the first day's session, which presents an invaluable opportunity to discuss obsolescence issues in an informal environment. COG membership is also by site rather than an individual basis, which provides flexibility on delegate selection. In addition, there are regular workshops (which non-COG members can attend) and also a bi-annual International Conference.

Whilst COG is of great benefit to people working in engineering and the supply chain, it also actively seeks managerial engagement as well. Joined-up obsolescence management is only possible with the top down support and the understanding of senior management.

Over the years we've seen increasing numbers of organisations formulating obsolescence strategies. Whilst of course it's often possible to be reactive and source items from the grey market, there are no guarantees you'll find what you need – or if you do, that it's the genuine article. The problem is that obsolescence management – whether it is with a dedicated team, a software tool or both – does not deliver savings – only cost avoidance. And as a recent COG workshop demonstrated, measuring the effectiveness (and therefore cost) of an obsolescence management strategy is very difficult. But

the true cost of being unable to replace an item and therefore delaying shipments, or even having to redesign/re-qualify a system, can be disastrous.

COG is the only trade association specifically dealing with obsolescence in the UK. Its Publications and Standardisation Group was instrumental in the creation of Obsolescence Standards DEF STAN 0071, BS7000 pt 5 and IEC 62402. It has also published several guidance booklets, and new titles are added regularly.

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A consistently high attendance at quarterly meetings is evidence that the information imparted is useful to our members, and cost avoidance through information sharing – either formally or informally – is commonplace.

Looking forward to the coming year, I foresee several challenges facing the aerospace industry. Firstly, the rate of obsolescence will continue to increase, driven in part by the increasing adoption of COTS devices. In addition, it appears that finding fit, form, functional replacements for obsolete items is becoming increasingly difficult, and of course there's the ever present and real threat of counterfeit components.

Perhaps most concerning of all are the rumours that aerospace's current 'exemption' from RoHS legislation will be removed. If this happens, not only will there be another period of widespread obsolescence, but the industry will have to adopt new manufacturing processes and procedures. I can see that being extremely problematic. |

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