

## Five Ways to Select an Adhesive Converter That Sticks

In terms of options, services, and offerings, many adhesive converters may appear to be very much alike, making it difficult for companies to select the right one for their specific application. This article attempts to provide five key points to examine as a starting point when selecting a partner to fulfill a company's adhesive converting needs.

By Tony Liuzzo

Not all adhesive converters are created equal. If they were, it would be a simple task to pick one. Someone could simply choose his preferred vendor based on location, or price, or gut instinct.



**3M 9795** microplate seal

The fact is, each converter of pressure sensitive adhesive (PSA) and non-PSA components offers distinct competitive advantages. Some have more expertise in tape slitting while others are more proficient in complex die-cutting. Some specialize in certain industries, while others may be capable of providing product to dozens of end-user markets. Yet others are adept at providing specific products but don't truly provide "solutions."

For those charged with finding an adhesive converter partner for a business, how does one choose? While each company is different, there are certain baseline criteria that should always be examined. A converter that is able to favorably meet these parameters may not be the optimal final choice for a specific situation, but it certainly would have to be included on the "short list."

Following are five criteria that can serve as a useful litmus test for judging a converter's capabilities. An interesting aside: "price" is not one of the five. This is not to suggest that price should not be considered, but rather, it is not included as a cautionary measure, lest the reader be seduced by a low-price option. The fact is, low price is a fleeting advantage; if price were truly a valid differentiator, all a

## Five Ways to Select an Adhesive Converter That Sticks

Published on Medical Design Technology (<http://www.mdtmag.com>)

---

converter would need to do is make its prices one cent lower than its competitors, and that company would become the industry leader. It's not about price; it's about the value that a converter can provide. High value and good service are worth paying extra for; low value and poor service are not.

### 1. Think Global

An adhesive converter that can service its customers on a global basis is a critical consideration. Why? Because a global company can shepherd its customers from product concept all the way through design, production, and shipping. Many times, a company designs a product in one part of the world and manufactures it in another. The adhesive converter must possess the knowledge and the expertise to acquire the materials from, for example, the United States and get them to Asia, or anywhere else, quickly and economically. The best converters are "thinking globally to provide solutions locally."

As a greater percentage of companies go offshore for manufacturing, or as they begin to incorporate more multi-site locations, there is a corresponding need for adhesive converters that can provide a local sales and manufacturing presence combined with a global reach. By being able to integrate all of a company's locations, the successful converter can consolidate its customers' supply chain and help them gain speed to market.

It should also be noted that many customer companies are, indeed, global companies themselves. Further, the converter's raw materials suppliers are often also global. Consequently, it's advantageous for the adhesives converter to be a global company as well, in order to fit comfortably into the supply chain and act as an effective "link" between the global entities at each end of the supply chain.

The fact is, there are very few adhesives converters with the capabilities to adopt a global approach. A converter in Detroit, for example, may very well not have the worldwide reach to service the shifting customer base to Asia where an increasing volume of automotive components are being manufactured. Global converters can be found, but the search for them may require some effort.

The increasing use of disposable products, particularly in areas such as medical and biotechnology, make the need to think global even more critical. In the biotechnology area, disposables (which includes products such as latex medical disposables, syringes, needles and catheters, wound closure products, nappies, and similar hygiene products) are growing at an estimated 7% per year and represent a manufacturing potential in excess of \$80 billion in terms of cost of goods sold. Consequently, as more industries embrace disposable technologies; saving companies time, money, and resources; there is a corresponding requirement to seek out suppliers that can handle the global logistics associated with their manufacture.

### 2. Supporting the Whole Process

One of the general business trends is "margin compression" all through the supply chain. And as profit margins get sliced to the bone, it's vital that every supplier a company uses is capable of more than simply providing a quality product or service.

---

## Five Ways to Select an Adhesive Converter That Sticks

Published on Medical Design Technology (<http://www.mdtmag.com>)

---

It is equally critical that the supplier help customers squeeze every cent of cost efficiency out of their entire supply chain; adhesive converters should be no exception.

To accomplish this objective, converters must be capable of understanding and working with all aspects of their customers' operations—what M&C Specialties refers to in its own operation as “Total Process Analysis.” They need to be able to study the product they're being asked to make and analyze the flow of that product throughout the customers' total design, manufacturing, and delivery procedure, not merely their own role in the process. In doing so, the product might turn out to be more expensive to actually manufacture. However, the total operating cost may be driven down significantly as a result of the converter's proactive efforts.



**Samples of M&C capabilities**

Ultimately, the best converters are attempting to optimize their customers' processes. It's not just a matter of saying, “Here's a product from 3M that we can convert.” It's essential to look downstream at the entire operation and drive out costs in nine or ten different areas that other companies wouldn't even think about.

A corollary to supporting the whole process is being a single-source supplier. The convenience of being able to use one company for all forms of adhesive converting is obvious. But more than that, even if various companies are able to fulfill one of the converting requirements, there is the issue of certification. Some companies may have the proper certifications necessary, while others may not. Finding one company that has all the necessary certifications is far easier.

Not to be forgotten in this equation is the ability of a supplier to achieve efficient distribution, particularly as it relates to medical disposables. Distribution of these products is performed in one of two ways: direct distribution and intermediary services. While each has its benefits, distribution with intermediary services is the most commonly used distribution channel for medical devices and medical disposables, especially within the European Union (EU). Thus, a manufacturer that has strong international distribution capabilities—or connections to local companies that do—should be a prime consideration.

### 3. Quality Standards

Providing the right materials for customers' applications is only half the game; providing them at the quality standards and certification levels they require is the other. In healthcare, for example, there are various GMP standards and cleanroom

## Five Ways to Select an Adhesive Converter That Sticks

Published on Medical Design Technology (<http://www.mdtmag.com>)

---

standards all the way from design and prototyping to purchasing to packaging to boxing. The point is, each industry has various standards and guidelines that must be observed. The adhesive converter should be familiar with these standards and be prepared to meet them at every step of the manufacturing and delivery process.

The superior adhesive converter must also be sensitive to the internal quality needs of the company for whom the product is being created. Many companies have adopted various quality programs, such as Six Sigma, TQM, etc. Understanding the unique aspects of whatever quality program the customer is currently embracing—and being able to work within that framework—should be a non-negotiable qualification.

Being a single-source supplier plays a critical role in this area as well. Finding multiple converters that can all meet the quality standards a company has established can be a time-consuming, if not impossible, task. Plus, by using just one converter, a company is assured that the quality procedures are being followed in a consistent fashion;the same way every time.

### 4. Quality Suppliers

Just as the adhesive converter is trying to be an integral part of a strong supplier network for its customers, the converter needs a similarly strong supplier network of its own. Converters with strong supplier networks certainly have access to quality raw materials, as well as their suppliers' own technologically advanced processes. But they also have access to their suppliers' technical teams, their business savvy, and even their brainstorming capabilities.

The vast majority of adhesive converters can find suppliers capable of providing them with materials of at least reasonable quality. The converters that deserve serious consideration, however, are the ones whose suppliers are willing to spend extra time helping the converters solve their customers' problems—even problems that don't involve the supplier in any way.

When looking for an adhesives converter for a specific application, ask the converter what suppliers they use. Then do a little research into those companies. Find out their technological capabilities. See how financially stable they are. Check out their client list. It's not a stretch to say that one can tell a lot about converters by the company they keep.

### 5. The Spirit of Innovation

While this is perhaps the most obvious criterion, it is by no means the least important. In some ways, adhesive converters are no different than other companies. Some employ the latest technology, the latest equipment, state-of-the-art materials, and the most up-to-date processes. Whether a customer needs tape slitting, die-cutting, printing, or anything in between, some converters have clearly made the commitment—financial and otherwise—to being on the cutting edge of their industry.

## Five Ways to Select an Adhesive Converter That Sticks

Published on Medical Design Technology (<http://www.mdtmag.com>)

---



**Microplate** seal options

---

Of course, there are those at the other end of the spectrum who have not. Many converters, however, fall somewhere in the middle. They may be outstanding from a process and materials perspective but they may be using equipment that is 30 years old. What does that mean to the customer? It means that their product may be taking longer to produce than necessary. Or it may not be up to the quality standards expected. Or it may be costing a little more to manufacture than it should.

The fact is, a company can be the best adhesive converter in the world from a logistical perspective, but without good equipment, it's a second-tier player at best. Ask how old the converter's equipment is. Find out how often they upgrade their equipment. Maybe they've even introduced some new technology to the industry. The answers will help narrow down the choices measurably.

Also, don't overlook the "people" angle. Make sure the company selected has talented people who are experts in their field—not just in top management but at all levels. What's more, try to determine as best as possible the average length of employment. People who have been employed at one company for a long time tend to be more proficient at their jobs, which will ultimately be reflected in the work they perform for a customer.

### **Conclusion**

By no means are these guidelines intended to be the last word in selecting an adhesives converter; there are certainly more. In addition, a company may well have its own guidelines that might not be particularly meaningful to other companies but which are critical to that company's decision. But these five are an

## Five Ways to Select an Adhesive Converter That Sticks

Published on Medical Design Technology (<http://www.mdtmag.com>)

---

excellent jumping-off point, intended to weed out the pretenders from the contenders. After all, when it comes to adhesive converters, it's safe to say that a company wants one that will stick around for years to come.

### ONLINE

For additional information on the technologies and products discussed in this article, visit M&C Specialties Co. at [www.mcspecialties.com](http://www.mcspecialties.com) [1].

**Tony Liuzzo** is the business development manager for M&C Specialties. He can be reached at 215-322-1600, x175 or [tliuzzo@mcspecialties.com](mailto:tliuzzo@mcspecialties.com) [2].

### Source URL (retrieved on 09/17/2014 - 9:49am):

[http://www.mdtmag.com/articles/2007/08/five-ways-select-adhesive-converter-sticks?qt-recent\\_content=0](http://www.mdtmag.com/articles/2007/08/five-ways-select-adhesive-converter-sticks?qt-recent_content=0)

### Links:

[1] <http://www.mcspecialties.com>

[2] <mailto:tliuzzo@mcspecialties.com>