

The Obsolescence Tools Minefield

A Guide to Availability Monitoring

*Do you need a way of
analysing the
obsolescence risk on your
products?*

*Do you want to prioritise
redesign and support
effort?*

*Are you considering
investing in obsolescence
management tools?*

*Do you want to
understand the tool
output and how to
interpret what you
should do next?*

**If so, you need to read
this brief industry
guide**



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Scope

There is a wide range of business information software tools available, of which component availability monitoring tools represent one category. The purpose of this booklet is to review the potential benefits of using, and the issues to be considered when selecting, a component availability monitoring tool. Software tools of this type are often referred to by various other names including obsolescence management tools.

While there are a wide variety of component availability monitoring tools and services available, there are an even wider variety of component information software tools. Since this is a booklet in the Component Obsolescence Group's Minefield series, we have therefore limited the scope of this booklet to the range of component availability monitoring tools and services, whether this includes current or forecasted availability monitoring information or both.

The information provided in this booklet has been compiled in good faith and as objectively as possible. The market for component availability monitoring tools is developing all the time and the contents of this booklet may rapidly become out of date and/or inaccurate. The authors accept no liability for any consequences arising from the material in this booklet, either in its use in the selection of tool or service providers or in its representation of those providers.

This booklet is intended to be read in its entirety but can also be used as a reference using its contents list. Since it can be used as a reference, there are several instances of content that are repeated in order to provide a complete response to a specific query.

Note that the terms 'component' and 'part' are used in this booklet and are interchangeable in almost all contexts, taken to mean a component or device type, part number or part function.

About the Authors

Ian Blackman is a past Chairman of COG and a current member of the Publications and Standardisation Group. He has worked with many others in defining the international standards covering obsolescence management and has written or co-written several of the COG guidance booklets and many articles in the UK and international press on obsolescence matters. He has worked in the aerospace and defence industry for over thirty years in various procurement management, supplier development, component engineering and obsolescence strategy roles within the BAE Systems and Selex Galileo and their previous identities. He has lead several teams involved in obsolescence studies and has wide experience of commercial and bespoke internally developed tools. Ian has always been a advocate and practitioner of efficient tool integration.

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Executive brief

As a busy executive you may have a short time to assess the possible business case for an investment in obsolescence tools. This brief should help you to ask the right questions and support an informed decision.

The bulk of this note is constructed from the key messages breakout boxes embedded in the full booklet. You may want to encourage other members of your team to read the full booklet – or you may want to use it as a guide to the language and process that obsolescence professionals use in analysing designs. I am sure you are already aware of the risks that obsolescence presents to your continued manufacturing and support businesses. In some industries the successful demonstration of obsolescence management principles is a key element in being awarded new contracts.

Having adequate tools and a robust process certainly help you assess the sustainability of a product. You do not need detailed technical knowledge to understand this brief or indeed the full document. So here are the key messages.

- 1) There is no linear relationship between product age and obsolescence risk. Older designs are not necessarily harder to support than modern ones. Such generalisations are dangerous and the technologies used in each

product need to be understood to compare two products accurately.

- 2) The more complete a study the better the risk assessment. To use an automotive analogy, an MOT is good but a full service is better!
- 3) Tools only provide suggested resolutions not guarantees. There is no substitute for experience. Whatever output you get from the tools may need further work before it can be assessed as a good strategy for that product.
- 4) Obsolescence predictions are just a guide and show trends rather than absolute data. Use the outputs as guidance to make design changes, investments in new designs and continue to review the trends regularly
- 5) The choice of the right tool is a balance between the capability sought and the finance available to secure it. Tool capabilities vary greatly and your assessment needs to consider your internal capability and experience to complement the reports.
- 6) It is vital to retain experienced engineers that are familiar with key products and understand their key features in some depth

If you prefer to outsource this need it is important to recognise the set up time involved but the benefits can still be considerable

- 7) Providers are unwilling to disclose the methodology behind their forecasting and, to a degree, this is immaterial. A recipe is only useful if you want to replicate the meal but if you just want to eat it, the end result is all that counts. The quality of the predictions and suggested alternatives must be trusted and exceptions checked out.
- 8) It is vitally important to conduct regular analyses and to take further actions as they are required. Component and legislative changes are dynamic and regular planned reviews are very important

A few last questions to ask those requiring funding for obsolescence management tools or services.

- 1) has the comparison between internal capability and outsourcing been undertaken?
- 2) What degree of coverage does the new tool/solution provide?
- 3) Who will be managing the process of obsolescence reporting?
- 4) Where in your business processes is the obsolescence process defined – it is important that you are seen to be behind your obsolescence initiatives
- 5) How will we pass on our requirements to the supply chain?

We hope this booklet supports your assessment and awareness of the obsolescence discipline within your business

Content

Statement of Use	1	Which product grades and specifications are covered?	23
About the Authors	2	What environmental compliance data is included?	23
Executive brief	3	How frequently is component status checked and how accurate is the database?	24
Contents	5	Who manages the component database?	25
1.0 The need for tools	6	Is the provider capable of handling hierarchical BOMs?	25
2.0 Background	8	Does the provider supply LTBs and PCNs?	26
3.0 Process	10	Does the provider offer life cycle forecasting?	27
4.0 Different types of tools	10	Is parametric searching enabled?	27
On-line tool or outsourced service?	11	Does the provider include data sheets as part of the package?	28
Independent or in-house tool?	12	Does the database include stock levels?	28
What functionality do I need from the tool or service?	13	Is data downloadable from and / or to other databases?	28
5.0 How they work	13	What technical support is provided?	29
6.0 Selecting the right tool	16	8.0 Using the outputs	29
Purpose – why and where do I want it?	16	9.0 Acquisition costs	31
Operation - How easy is it to use?	17	What will these tools cost?	31
Scope - What do I want to use it for?	17	Does the tool enable data and solution sharing?	32
Capability - What do I want it to do?	18	Business Decisions	33
Cost - How much is this really going to cost me?	18	Tool Integration	33
Integrity - How accurate is the product?	19	11.0 Acknowledgements	33
7.0 The decision process	20		
Which product families are covered?	21		
Can in-house part numbering systems and preferences be handled?	22		

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