

How Farnell is supporting customers & the supply chain in the fight against COVID-19

*The coronavirus (COVID-19) global health crisis has had a huge impact on the way businesses operate and how they interact with customers. As **Simon Meadmore, Global Head of IP&E (interconnects, passives & electromechanical) at electronic components distributor, Farnell** tells us, one of the biggest changes has been in the way that distributors manage supply and demand criteria to ensure vital products are delivered as quickly as possible to those who need them most.*

As a global distributor with a strong commitment to its supply chain and customers, Farnell recently launched several new initiatives to provide increased support to customers. This includes customers working in essential industries and the health sector, to small business owners and large global manufacturers who have refocused their operations to increase production of medical products and other essential items to help control the spread of the COVID-19.

These critical products include testing kits, ventilators, power supplies and much more. While demand in some sectors, such as the automotive industry, has reduced, the need for electronic components and personal protective equipment (PPE) has increased significantly.

The flexibility to adapt and refocus priorities have been identified as crucial requirements for businesses looking to continue operating throughout the duration of this crisis. That is why Farnell quickly realigned its activities to



support global efforts to boost the production of medical equipment and ensure sustainable supply. Not only is Farnell well placed to meet the strong demand for electronic components commonly used in medical equipment, but it is also able to lend its expertise to the production of PPE.

Dedicated staff

Every company has needed to make changes in these unprecedented times and the support of staff has been vital in achieving this. Many Farnell employees

have adjusted to working from home, while warehouse team members have made outstanding contributions to overall supply efforts by going into work to ensure urgent medical orders are shipped out.

The extra support provided to customers has proved to be essential, as supply chains experience unusually high demand for components for medical equipment across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and North America. At the same time, manufacturers in China are gearing up to meet increasing

Farnell has quickly realigned its activities to support global efforts to boost the production of medical equipment & ensure sustainable supply.

demands for orders across several industries. However, continuous adaptability must become the new normal as it is virtually impossible to predict how individual markets will be affected in the short and long term.

For example, the challenges that the Italian market faced at the beginning of March quickly spread across Europe, which meant that some of Farnell's biggest customers were affected by quarantined zones. Nevertheless, there have been no delivery problems to date, medical orders are effectively being prioritised, and technical teams have continued to provide critical support and guidance to customers throughout the crisis.

Satisfying demand for medical equipment

Farnell has a longstanding commitment to build a comprehensive portfolio of the world's leading suppliers. This ensures customers have access to the depth and breadth of inventory required, even in the event of a crisis – and demand for electronic components used in medical equipment threatens to outweigh supply. Farnell's sales, product and warehouse teams are working closely to support new and existing customers who need to ramp up production of medical equipment.

Similarly, Farnell has taken advantage of the strength of its relationships with key suppliers to ensure stock levels are maintained, and orders of medical equipment are prioritised. Among the products being made available within extremely tight timeframes are COVID-19 testing kits, non-contact viral temperature monitoring instruments, PPE for paramedics, and power cords and power solutions for hospitals. Of course, it's not only essential to keep respirators, ventilators and other equipment fully operational, but it is equally important to ensure power supplies for equipment, such as medical alert tools, are treated as a top priority.

Fast-track products with distributor support

Farnell is providing essential support for manufacturers of medical equipment across Europe during the COVID-19 crisis. A key example of this is Farnell's continuing work



with a coalition of businesses, backed by the UK government, to repurpose the production capabilities of manufacturers. This not only achieved a tenfold increase in the production of existing ventilators, but it has enabled businesses to design, prototype and manufacture new ventilators. Farnell is working closely with a combination of new and existing customers to increase the availability of power supplies and components for manufacture.

Additionally, Farnell is using its Raspberry Pi microcomputer and Multicomp private label product range to support one of the largest companies in Italy, tasked with producing the first 1,000 pieces of a new open-source pulmonary mechanical ventilator, called Milano Ventilatore Meccanico. This is an international research project involving more than 20 scientific organisations, including the University of Milan-Bicocca. The device operates using just oxygen (or medical air) and electricity.

Farnell is also supporting customers in Holland via Project Open Air, a global volunteer movement connecting people with critical projects to aid the provision of equipment, supplies and services to hospitals. Farnell has helped boost the supply of ventilators and respiratory masks, as well as devices that help police carry out contactless checking of identity documents, and home monitors to measure at-risk individuals' temperature, heart rate, blood and oxygen levels.

Manufacturers & suppliers must continue to operate at maximum efficiency if the demands of the medical sector are to be met and this crisis is to be tackled head-on.

Supporting PPE production

As the global shortage of PPE becomes increasingly apparent, volunteers and manufacturers are working closely to produce a range of protective materials that frontline workers can use. To support these efforts, from local heroes to well-known global manufacturers, Farnell has invested about \$50,000 worth of 3D printing equipment and consumables to help produce visors, ear defenders and 3D printed components for respirators and ventilators. In the UK, Farnell has donated 3D printers and printing filaments to selected volunteer groups, including a pop-up manufacturing plant in the home of an element14 community member. Printers are operating continuously to supply PPE to hospitals across the country, with a new manufacturing hub launched specifically to support the UK's first Nightingale field hospital.

Looking further afield, Farnell gifted filaments in Poland to ensure healthcare workers in Wroclaw hospitals had access to the number of visors required. Farnell's efforts in Poland are also helping to boost the production of respirator components. In addition to this, Farnell donated printers and filaments to the De Paul University in the United States, which is working to meet the exponential demand for PPE in Chicago.

Staying safe

These are certainly challenging times, but many companies recognise the need to pull out all the stops to support customers during this crisis. It is not business as usual, of course, and there have been some significant changes to markets across the globe. However, manufacturers and suppliers must continue to operate at maximum efficiency if the demands of the medical sector are to be met and this crisis is to be tackled head-on.

For Farnell, the safety of staff and its supplier network is paramount. It has been with great consideration and planning that Farnell has been able to secure the operation of its supply chain and help satisfy the healthcare sector's substantially increased demands for medical supplies and PPE. Farnell urges everyone to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic and to make every effort to reduce risks to their health. At some stage, the world will move beyond this situation, but right now the priority must be to ensure supply outstrips demand because many thousands of lives could depend on it.