

FAB S and LAB S

Filtronic's Salisbury Site Adds Capacity and Capability for Domestic Production of RF Products for Critical Communications



Filtronic is a company with a strong commitment to in-house manufacturing, and its Salisbury, Md., facility is no exception. The Filtronic site in Salisbury recently expanded production capacity to meet a growing demand for its public safety products, in addition to steady business for the range of filters and combiners it was already making, which operate up to 18 GHz. The Maryland area has a considerable pool of RF expertise, home to both the Goddard Space Flight Center and the Naval Research Center in Chesapeake Bay, as well as other local communications experts. Filtronic's site was well-placed to recruit staff to support the growth in output.

The 16,000 square-foot facility had ample space to accommodate the extra warehousing and assembly area to produce additional products. Of this floor area, 5,000 square feet is devoted to handling ESD sensitive components, all temperature-controlled. The on-site services include assembly and test, repair, equipment build up (rack, stack and commissioning) and drop-shipment.

The expansion was largely prompted by U.S. equipment manufacturers shortening supply chains to make them more resilient in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Where possible, these companies are choosing domestic suppliers for products they previously imported from or manufactured offshore. The trend for supply chain rationalization has provided a competitive advantage for Filtronic, which successfully "re-shored" from China the manufacturing of a critical communications product, helping a leading client in the public safety market meet its supply chain goals.

The need to bring critical product assembly to Salisbury from the offshore facility, to reduce equipment lead-times in the face of the changing geopolitical landscape, was a challenge requiring a rapid response from Filtronic. Using the company's technical knowhow, local knowledge and a cloud-based manufacturing execution system, Filtronic managed this complex transition smoothly and efficiently,

meeting the customer's six-month schedule.

As well as realigning its operational facilities and processes, Filtronic was able to recruit local personnel who had previous experience with public safety product assembly. Additional equipment was procured and re-allocated to quickly replicate the production line at the former facility. While doing so, it was also possible to make product and process improvements, including the workflow and logistics, which yielded a significant reduction in lead time for these critical communications products.

The transition was smooth, rapid and met the customer's quality standards, passing an extensive and rigorous customer audit, which enabled timely re-certification. Filtronic's customer met its country-of-origin targets without any drop in production.

Another recent achievement for Filtronic was successfully developing a customized tower top amplifier (TTA) system. Manufactured in Salisbury, this project exceeded the customer's expectations for both performance and time to completion, as well as reducing the order-to-shipment time by 50 percent.

Because of product obsolescence and technological advancements, Filtronic's customer needed a new domestic supplier for TTAs, as its existing supply chain was unable to meet the challenging specification. It turned to Filtronic due to its experience supplying Tower Mounted Amplifiers for commercial telecoms. The project included product enhancements, such as more consistent performance between sites and simpler installation. It was completed—from inception through product qualification—in less than six months. The new TTA meets the existing specification and delivers all the desired performance improvements, including smart redundancy. The client's goals of reducing inventory and the order-to-shipment time to two weeks—compared to the industry standard of four weeks—were also met.

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