



## What Certification Fastener Suppliers Should Have if They Want to Expand Business to Europe?

by Shervin Shahidi Hamedani

With no doubt Europe is one of the major markets for fasteners in the world. Germany, France, Italy, the UK, and other countries in the EU are very interesting with good opportunities for fastener manufacturers and distributors from developing countries.

The market demand for both standard and task-specific fasteners keeps growing in this region. Suppliers and exporters have options to choose either the price competition strategy to enter the European market by supplying relatively standard fasteners in high volumes at low prices, or to concentrate on specialized fasteners with relatively higher price. However, no matter what options are pursued by suppliers, in most cases, meeting the needs of industries in Europe requires certified and quality proven products.

Certification may be mandatory to manufacturers, or used voluntarily, to contribute to placing safe products in the market. Accordingly, there are several thousand certification bodies in Europe.

Manufactured products attached with markings are everywhere in the European market, while some of them may not necessarily translate any value to a consumer. Amongst all markings, the most familiar one is the **CE marking**, *Conformité Européene*. It means European Conformity and many products require this marking before they can be traded in the Europe. The CE marking is an affirmation by the supplier that a manufactured product meets all the relevant legal needs and requirements set by the European Union. It mainly includes high safety, health, and environmental protection requirements.

 The CE marking could be named as a passport for products in the European Internal Market. Apparently, the CE marking is the best choice for manufacturers whose products become the subject of several or redundant testing and marking at national level, considering that the extra costs created by all those unnecessary testing and marking may easily cause the higher prices for consumers. In addition to the European Union, consisting of 28 countries, three other countries which are

not officially part of the European Union, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, require CE Marking. Switzerland is another non-EU member which needs CE marking for some of the manufactured products.

It is highly recommended for manufacturers to achieve CE marking for their products if they plan to expand their business to Europe; however the CE marking is not mandatory for all fasteners. Now, the question is “what fasteners must have the CE marking?”

To answer this question, it should be highlighted that the CE marking is not based on the nature of the product but on the environment and the application of the product. For instance, if a fastener is manufactured for use in construction products, electrical equipment, machinery, or medical devices, the CE marking most probably should be affixed. However, the same fasteners may not require CE marking if used for some other functions. The good example is construction industry, which is known as the key drivers for fastener market growth. Based on the construction products regulation in the EU, all construction products which are permanently incorporated in buildings and their functions have impact on the significant requirements to buildings such as fire protection, mechanical strength, and stability must have CE marking. This statement once again explains the high dependency of the CE marking on fastener applications. Accordingly, fastener suppliers must clearly be aware of those applications which require CE marking in order to avoid any failure.

The conformity assessment (CE marking), in most cases, does not require any pre-requisite certificate; however in some cases some quality systems are needed. That is, some voluntary certificates and marking systems can become de facto requirements, when in reality an apparently voluntary requirement has become effectively involuntary. The example for this statement would be ISO certificates such as ISO 9000 registration, or EN 29000

certification, which specifies that a manufacturer is well-organized and has low failure costs, is used broadly in Europe. Although this quality system is mainly on a voluntary basis as a condition of acceptance of a manufacturer's product or as a way of recognizing the manufacturer's credibility, some directives (e.g. machine directive) require use of a quality management system as part of the conformity assessment (i.e. CE marking).

There are many finishes or coating applied to fasteners to ensure corrosion resistant fasteners. This may lead fastener producers to enhance their chances by being able to do coating treatments in-house, following process certification (i.e. ISO 14001). This is for environmental management and being compliant with the EU directive on the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances.

There are some other recognized certificates which add significant value to the products in the EU market. Many of those certificates are originated from Germany and recognized by consumers throughout the EU countries. This is very important for fastener manufacturers, since Germany is the largest fastener market in Europe. Accordingly, many German originated inspection bodies currently have several laboratories all around the world to issue certificates for technical equipment. The **GS mark** (Geprüfte Sicherheit or Tested Safety) is one of those recognized certifications which is known all over Germany and EU countries. This mark delivers the message to consumers that there is a lesser risk and more assurance on products' safety, legality, and quality. Power tools is one of the examples of products which is mainly required GS marking by European distributors.



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Although a certification is typically a voluntary process, fastener suppliers who invest their money, time and effort into achieving and maintaining well recognized certificates deliver this message to the market that they do their best to supply the high quality products with the most efficient services. Moreover, fastener producers may create a competitive advantage over other rivals in the European market by taking the right insurances and producing more eco-friendly products, by focusing on the environmental trustworthiness of the products in its branding and positioning. Consumers are more and more seeking those products indicating conformity with environmental requirements. ■

#### Sources:

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EFTA Study on Certification and Marks in Europe, Consumer Research Associates Ltd

# ASME B18 Committee Releases Updated Standard to Help Improve Quality

by Christopher Williamson

Product quality isn't just the fastener producer's problem. Fastener distributors and users also have a responsibility to ensure product quality. Clearly specifying product requirements, including quality expectations, plays a very important role in the supply chain as does effectively working with producers when corrective action is needed. ASME Committee B18 published a revision of ASME B18.18, Quality Assurance for Fasteners, in June that will help address this issue. The revision makes the document much easier to understand and as a result will be put to good use in our organizations to elevate our value proposition. If used properly, the new revision of ASME B18.18 will generally improve product quality in the fastener industry.

ASME B18.18 categorizes four different plans. Category 1 is a plan for receiving inspection that may be used optionally by distributors and users alike. The Category 1 plan relies on an 8-piece dimensional inspection that covers all of the basics and a 2-piece mechanical inspection. If your organization is considering starting a receiving inspection program, the framework of this plan is a great place to start. It is also a good plan to reference in the event of a dispute.

The most widely used quality plan, by far, is Category 2. Category 2 is the producers' default when the buyer does not specify a quality plan. Using this plan, producers inspect fasteners at appropriate production intervals including machine setup, shift changes, tool changes, and at the completion of the job. The plan outlines basic production requirements regarding heat treatment, lot control, measuring equipment and more. This plan is perfect for low cost and low risk fasteners such as machine screws, tapping screws, nuts, and washers.

Category 3 is probably the most underutilized tool in a distributor's or user's arsenal. Different than Category 2, this plan must be specified by the buyer. It requires the same good practices as Category 2 with, primarily, two additional requirements. Category 3 producers must have a quality management system registered to an internationally recognized standard such as ISO 9001 or ISO/TS 16949. Additionally, the final inspection of the fasteners must