

Panel builders need an above standard service for standard parts

From locking systems to door hinges, the importance of achieving the right specification for standard parts in panel building is imperative. Fail to receive the right advice from your standard parts supplier, and the project could suffer design challenges or field failure.

Sarah Gray, Sales & Marketing Manager at WDS Component Parts Ltd, explains the importance of correct specification of standard parts for panel building.

When designing and installing an electrical control panel, a panel builder's focus is on speed of completion, a capable design and ongoing performance. To achieve this, careful consideration in the procurement of standard parts, such as locks and latches, must be recognised.

At best, poor selection of standard parts can result in crucial lost time by ordering the incorrect item specification. At worst, whether through corrosion or fit, it could end in field failure. Access to expertise in standard parts selection will not only save time in procurement but removes the risk of specifying the incorrect choice. This means using a supplier with the experience to advise on the correct parts for the conditions.

Confirm the specification

An experienced standard parts supplier understands which questions to ask in order to determine the optimum specification for the panel's application and environment – not a capability which a general industrial supplier can be expected to offer.

The ideal process begins with the panel builder providing their needs to the supplier, via e-mail or telephone call. At WDS - which has a long track record of assisting panel builders – advisors from the sales or the technical teams are available to talk to the panel builder and confirm the details of the application. This way, an experienced supplier can guide the panel builder through a standard parts selection process which takes all relevant factors into consideration, from dimensions and load requirements through to environment and part durability.

Standard parts used in panel building

Advice is often sought from panel builders relating to door catch and locking systems, which can involve multiple components and are relatively complex to specify. What initially seems like a simple product to specify, can often become a very complex problem. Depending on the cabinet's material composition, size and intended location, the ideal knob, handle, lock and hinge could vary wildly.

Dependent on where the panel will be located and who should have access to it will impact the type of catch or locking system needed. A magnetic catch with a finger pull may be sufficient, though if the security requirement is high, a two- or three-point locking system may be advisable. Panel builders must bare in mind that a locking system with quarter-turn lock will involve a locking rod, meaning that a cabinet with a compatible door system must be specified.

Dependent on the environmental conditions where the cabinet will be located, it's also important to consider the risk of ingress of dust particles or moisture into the lock. If the atmosphere is greasy or dusty, it could be useful to recommend a dust cover. For added protection, we might recommend that security lock covers should also be considered. Surrounding the door itself, mouldings are also available improve ingress protection, as well as reducing vibration between the door and cabinet.

A fundamental factor for safe and functional door hinges is identifying the load that they will be required to support. Often a panel builder may initially specify a hinge which doesn't have the adequate weight tolerance, in which case we advise on the safety risk. We often recommend torque hinges for use with control panels, which stiffen door and hatch openings to prevent slam closures.

Where panels are mounted in cabinets, we usually recommend adjustable levelling feet in order to angle the pad for optimum position. As with hinges, a key consideration for feet is structural weight and strength. Again, an experienced supplier will be able to advise on the tolerances required.

Relevant to all standard parts is material choice. For example, if the panel will be located in a food or pharmaceutical environment, your standard parts supplier should recommend stainless steel Type 304. Dependent on needs and the environment, other materials such as polyamide, may be equally suitable at a better cost.

The value of an experienced standard parts supplier

It's not realistic for a panel builder to conduct their own tests on the tolerances of parts required, but a standard parts supplier has the data and significant experience in testing. This is particularly the case where manufacture takes place on-site, for example at WDS' Leeds plant. Volume dependent, it's also possible for the design team to modify an existing part to manufacture to a particular specification.

Speed of delivery is always a pre-requisite for panel builders, especially for replacement parts for repair. At WDS, the majority of stock items are manufactured on-site, which gives the advantage of same-day despatch across the product range. WDS' large stock holding means that it can fulfil orders for panel builders who need a part for next day UK delivery, and worldwide delivery is also available.

Image Captions:

Image 1: Speed of delivery is always a pre-requisite for panel builders, especially for replacement parts for repair.

Image 2: Careful consideration in the procurement of standard parts, such as locks and latches, must be recognised.

About WDS

WDS are the UK's leading manufacturer of standard parts for use in machine build components, standard parts, jigs & fixtures, and consumer products. The range of products available from WDS grows daily and so has the methods available to designers and engineers for identifying, specifying and purchasing any of the 20,000+ parts currently held in stock. For example, WDS has made ordering workholding solutions cheaper and quicker by removing small order surcharges.

The WDS range covers five main divisions, Standard Parts, Machine Accessories, Spencer Franklin Hydraulic Workholding, Broaching and General & Modular Workholding.

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