

Quality Control: The Basics and Common Pitfalls

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- #3 Establish a clear road map with your supplier, including a quality control schedule.
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- #6 Provide clear product specifications for inspectors performing quality control.
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- #10 Don't use your sourcing agent, middleman or factory representative for your auditing and product inspections.

Tip #1

Know the risks involved in sourcing directly from Asia.



Many new buyers think of Asia as a place where they can easily source cheap products, and make money in fistfuls. While there is ample opportunity to find inexpensive products, finding the quality to match is extremely difficult.

The risks of sourcing from Asia are many. They include, but are not confined to the following:

- Poor cosmetics and functionality problems that lead to products that cannot be sold
- Hazardous materials that lead to lawsuits
- Scammers who pose as factories that will take your money and ship you nothing
- Unacceptable social conditions at factories that lead to potential unrest and lawsuits

Clearly there are risks aplenty in Asia. However being cognizant and keeping the tips below in mind will increase the likelihood of successful sourcing.

Read more on our Blog:

- [Suppliers, Hackers and Quality Control](#)
- [Do You Need a First Article Inspection?](#)

Tip #2

Understand the danger of not auditing a factory.



There are so many suppliers in China, ranging from high end manufacturers to the lowest of the low. Knowing whom you are working with is vital to succeeding. Like buying a car without doing a test drive, buying from a factory without an audit is dangerous! Doing a proper, 2-day factory audit can ensure that:

- You are working with a real, existing supplier
- Your supplier has experience making products like yours and is capable of producing the quantities you need on time
- Your supplier has the required documentation and export licensing and meets ISO 9001 standards
- Your supplier has proper QC management systems in place to fix any problems that may occur

- Your supplier has acceptable working conditions, is fair to employees, and does not employ underage workers

While doing a factory audit is no guarantee that your products will end up perfect, it is the first step towards ensuring a fruitful relationship with your future supplier.

Read more on our Blog:

- [Verifying a Chinese Business License With a Factory Audit](#)
- [Social Auditing in Chinese Factories: Reasons for non-compliance](#)

Tip #3

Establish a clear road map with your supplier, including a quality control schedule.

When first working with a new supplier, creating a road map ahead of time that clearly outlines your expectations for quality, delivery and volume is crucial. Explain every detail explicitly and do not leave anything to chance.

Buyers often assume that since their supplier makes similar products frequently, they don't need to provide much feedback. This is dead wrong! Because suppliers service multiple clients in multiple markets with multiple quality standards, as a buyer, you must be extremely detailed in your instructions with your factory- do not take any point for granted. You must be clear with your QC expectations in order to ensure positive results.

Read more on our Blog:

- [China Sourcing Lawyer: Sophie Mao](#)
- [When to do product inspections?](#)



Tip #4

Understand the cost-benefit of inspections.

Many first time buyers, in particular, think that when sourcing from China, one can just purchase products, choose a freight forwarder and then receive their products at the desired time and condition without a lot of effort. Unfortunately, this is almost always not the case. Inspecting your goods in production and before shipment is a necessary step in ensuring quality results.

But what are the main checkpoints of an inspection?

- Quantity of products and status of production
- Cosmetics of the products and their packaging
- Conformity to your pre-arranged requirements, based on the specifications sent to the inspection firm

- Tests related to your product's functionality and your country's safety regulations.

Read more on our Blog:

- [Quality inspections: a guide for importers sourcing in Asia](#)



Tip #5

Learn how QC companies select the number of random samples for inspection.

The AQL tables will help to determine the sampling size we will need to inspect according to your ordered quantity and your level of severity. You can choose Levels I, II or III, with Level III being the most stringent testing and Level I being the least. The standard level, the one used by default and by 98% of people is the Level II.

In order to find the necessary sampling size to be inspected, you must first look at the first chart and find on the left side the range of items being produced in total. For example, if you are producing 8000 items, at Level II you have the letter L, which in the second table (located on the next page) corresponds to a sample size of 200.

Lot size	General inspection levels			Special Inspection levels			
	I	II	III	S1	S2	S3	S4
2 to 8	A	A	B	A	A	A	A
9 to 15	A	B	C	A	A	A	A
16 to 25	B	C	D	A	A	B	B
26 to 50	C	D	E	A	B	B	C
51 to 90	C	E	F	B	B	C	C
91 to 150	D	F	G	B	B	C	D
151 to 280	E	G	H	B	C	D	E
281 to 500	F	H	J	B	C	D	E
501 to 1 200	G	J	K	C	C	E	F
1 201 to 3 200	H	K	L	C	D	E	G
3 201 to 10 000	J	L	M	C	D	F	G
10 001 to 35 000	K	M	N	C	D	F	H
35 001 to 150 000	L	N	P	D	E	G	J
150 001 to 500 000	M	P	Q	D	E	G	J
500 001 and over	N	Q	R	D	E	H	K

On the top of the second chart are the defect levels, ranging from 0 to 6.5. Using the standard 0/2.5/4 defect levels and a sample size of 200, we see that if you have more than 0 critical defects, 10 major defects or 14 minor defects, you should reject your shipment.

Of course the decision about what to do after you receive the inspection results belongs to you. Most importers will wish to discuss all inspection findings with their vendor/manufacturer in order to improve whatever possible. In case the inspection results are very close to AQL limits, it is important that you double check if the level of found defects is acceptable to you or not.

Single Sampling plans for Normal Inspection

Sample size code letter	Sample size	Acceptable Quality Limits for normal inspections																					
		0		0.1		0.15		0.25		0.4		0.65		1		1.5		2.5		4		6.5	
		Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re	Ac	Re
A	2																					0	1
B	3																				0	1	
C	5																	0	1				
D	8															0	1					1	2
E	13													0	1						1	2	3
F	20											0	1					1	2		2	3	4
G	32									0	1						1	2		2	3	4	5
H	50						0	1								1	2		2	3	4	5	6
J	80				0	1									1	2		2	3		3	4	5
K	125		0	1						1	2				2	3		3	4		4	5	6
L	200	0	1							1	2				2	3		3	4		4	5	6
M	315				1	2				2	3				3	4		4	5		5	6	7
N	500				1	2				2	3				3	4		4	5		5	6	7
P	800	1	2		2	3				3	4				4	5		5	6		6	7	8
Q	1250	2	3		3	4				4	5				5	6		6	7		7	8	9
R	2000	3	4		4	5				5	6				6	7		7	8		8	9	10

Read more on our Blog:

- Major/Minor/Critical defects: what are they?

Tip #6

Provide clear product specifications for inspectors performing quality control.

In order to perform a reliable inspection, providing thorough product specs to your supplier AND inspection team is a must! While your inspector will be experienced within your range of products, he or she will certainly not be as experienced or as specialized as you, the buyer.

Sending an accepted reference sample to your inspection company is one good way to minimize the risk of subjective details. Providing exactly the color based on Pantone code will also do the same. Leave nothing up to interpretation and make sure your instructions are exhaustive!

Read more on our Blog:

- [The QC checklist: a must for importers](#)
- [How to inspect the quality of garments?](#)



Tip #7

Avoid the common pitfalls of relying solely on a golden sample.



While a product sample is helpful to test the factory's potential capabilities, a "golden sample" is not a good guarantee from your factory. First, a sample can be interpreted in different ways. What is deemed as conforming versus non-conforming can vary greatly depending on the person. The factory will, of course, err on the side of "conforming" when in doubt, so don't expect all of the products to match the sample, unless you do quality control.

Next, a sample can give buyers a false sense of security, leading to them getting lazy and not continuing to be vigilant on their orders. Getting a positive sample result has little bearing on the quality that will be achieved in mass production.

In short, a sample is for reference, but the official standard should be called out in the written specs and inspection points.

Read more on our Blog:

- [Factory Agreement based on Golden Sample?](#)
- [How to judge color conformity during an inspection](#)

Tip #8

Research the import tests and certifications needed for your products.

Even if your supplier tells you the product complies to your country's standards, and even if they say they have product liability, if products are recalled and safety hazards are found in the destination country, as the importer of record you will be the first door the authorities and lawyers knock on. It is very unlikely they will look to China for compensation. In short, the importer is responsible regardless of what the supplier may tell you.

Beyond making sure that your products meet your visual standards, testing at a laboratory is also an important step towards delivering safe and quality goods to your customers. While, some simple testing can be done at the factory, laboratory testing can ensure that regulations, such as RoHS, REACH and EN71 etc. are being met.

The good news is that these tests are not expensive and can be organized in China on short notice.

Read more on our Blog:

- [RoHS compliance: Put the odds in your favour](#)
- [REACH Regulation & Lab Testing](#)



Tip #9

Link the quality of your order and the payment to your vendor.



If you only remember one tip, this is it.

When arranging payment terms with your supplier, they will likely try to propose the most favorable terms for them, front-loading the payment as much as possible. However, the best and safest option is to link your payment to quality acceptance.

What this means is paying the deposit up front, and then paying the balance (probably 70%) once the products pass your inspections **but before the goods ship and before your final payment is made.** This gives the factory further incentive to produce quality products, as you have clearly stated that you will not pay the balance until your standards are met.

Read more on our Blog:

- Overseas Banking fees: What you need to know
- Check quality before shipment, not after!

Tip #10

Don't use your sourcing agent, middleman or factory representative for your auditing and product inspections.

While an agent can sometimes provide useful services when arranging orders and shipment with your factory, quality control is not something that you should entrust to them. First, you have no way of knowing that they are even doing it. Especially if your factory is far away, it is very unlikely that your agent will travel to do this.

Next, if your agent actually does an inspection, in most cases they are not following proper inspection protocol. They are not randomly selecting boxes and samples, not checking the products thoroughly and can miss even severe defects.

Finally, your agent probably has a close relationship with the supplier. It is quite common for them to get paid a commission from the factory, and in these cases, it is not in the agent's best interest to find quality problems.

Read more on our Blog:

- [Sourcing from Asia & Avoiding Middlemen](#)
- [Should I choose a Local or a Western Quality Inspector?](#)

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