How to properly track test capacity

There are three things you should to consider to get the most out of your ATE.

By Dan Hamling
CTO
TEAM A.T.E.

In my career as a test engineer, ATE product specialist, test equipment appraiser, and used ATE reseller, I think I can say I have seen all the possible ways known to man of codifying a tester configuration. Not only do these indiscriminately chosen ways use largely incompatible document types (e.g. Excel, Word, Acrobat, email/text, etc.), but all lack the critical elements of accuracy and precision. After all, when your test program requires the "WidgetA" option, you wouldn't want to describe it as "WidgetX" (accuracy) or not include it in the description at all (precision).
In fact, accuracy and precision are the essential elements to properly recording and tracking your test capacity and requirements. These three things will help you build this important foundation for allowing you to efficiently specify, value, match, plan, and trade your test capacity.

1. Know your tester's taxonomy
That is, know the exact names and descriptions of the options and licensing for your tester. This is not what your test engineering colleague calls them, but what the ATE original equipment manufacturer (OEM) calls them. Even this advice can be confusing when the OEM development nicknames leak into the market (e.g. Teradyne's "Miata" or HSD1000 channel board). When in doubt as to name and spelling, reference the OEM's help, user, or service documentation.

2. Include everything
I'm still surprised at how difficult it is to get the configuration and licence files produced by the tester from its owner. Though very cryptic and impossible to read by most, these files at least include very detailed information on most of the system options. These files alone, however, don't include everything. What about the tester computer model and options? The manipulator type? The docking interface? It only takes one missing connector or obscure feature licence to kill the test program and bring down the entire test cell.

3. Make the information accessible
In today's bring-your-own-device world, your configuration information should be stored where it can be accessed from anywhere. Whether at your desk on your PC or laptop, or on the road on your phone or tablet, you need to have the ability to check and modify your configurations at any time and on any device. Cloud-based storage is now mature enough to store such proprietary information reliably and securely. ■

About the author
Dan Hamling is currently CTO at TEAM A.T.E., an international dealer serving the global test and inspection equipment markets. Dan is also founder of Chip Nexus, a provider of cloud-based test capacity management software, and co-founder of The Arianna Foundation, a non-profit organisation focused on serving the children of the world.