Five Quotes, One Warehouse — How a Parts RFQ Really Travels

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Most RFQs for industrial spares get forwarded, not answered: several quotes that trace to the same shelf with stacked margins. Who actually holds what — stocking distributors, surplus specialists, OEM desks, chandlers, consolidators — the four kinds of number on a requisition, and the 8-field one-pass RFQ that gets a firm quote without a clarification round.

The short version

Most RFQs for industrial spares get forwarded, not answered. Send one list to ten "suppliers" and several of the quotes that come back trace to the same distributor shelf, each with one more margin stacked on top. We call it five quotes, one warehouse.

No single source covers a plant or a vessel. Grainger and RS win on stocked catalogue items and speed. Radwell and EU Automation win on a discontinued PLC card needed tonight. OEM desks win on class-critical and warranty parts. Chandlers win on IMPA stores delivered alongside. Part-number consolidators such as cballast win on the long mixed-brand list that nobody above wants as a single order.

The identifier is the product. A complete manufacturer order number with every suffix can be priced without one clarification email. A description costs a day.

If you are the end user, say so in line one. Nothing moves an RFQ up a supplier's queue faster.

The worst-managed spend in large companies is the long tail of part numbers. It is also the easiest to fix: one vetted vendor, one agreement, one PO stream.

1. How an RFQ really travels

The path, in order: end user (plant, vessel, rig) !’ purchaser or purchasing agent !’ broadcast to a vendor list or marketplace !’ trading desks with no stock, who forward every line to their own contacts !’ regional distributors !’ the manufacturer or its master distributor, which is where the stock and the real lead time live.

Every hop costs three things:

Time. Each party waits for the one below it before answering the one above.

Margin. Stacked, not shared.

Information. Suffixes get dropped, quantities rounded, certificate requirements lost. The quote that finally arrives is often for a slightly different part.

How to see the chain from the buyer's side: quotes with identical lead times and identical datasheets; quotes that land within hours of each other; "subject to prior sale" on every line; a seller who cannot state country of origin, or whether the item is factory-new with the maker's warranty.

How it looks from the supplier's side: a mass-addressed email, no end user, vessel or site named, 30 to 40 lines across ten unrelated makers, "urgent, best price", no delivery point, no need-by date. A list like that has usually visited dozens of desks already and the odds of an order are close to zero, so sourcing hours go elsewhere. We do not quote them. Most established suppliers do not either; they simply never reply. That is why a legitimate buyer using the same format concludes that nobody has the part.

Are intermediaries the problem? Only idle ones. An intermediary earns its margin by adding at least one of five things: consolidation (40 lines, 25 makers, one PO, one shipment, one invoice), identification (a nameplate photo turned into an order number), cross-reference (superseded numbers, equivalent brands to the same spec), paperwork (certificates requested from the maker before shipment, not argued about after), and terms (credit against one vendor record instead of 25). If it adds none of those, go around it.

2. Who actually holds what

Source type | Examples | Best at | Weak at |

Broad-line stocking distributors | Grainger (North America), RS (Europe and worldwide) | Stocked MRO, electrical and automation items; next-day delivery; web checkout and ERP punch-out | Anything outside the stocked range; maker-specific marine and process spares; long mixed lists |

Electronic component distributors | Digi-Key, Mouser, Farnell | Board-level components, connectors, small sensors; deep live stock | Mechanical, fluid power, rotating equipment |

Surplus and obsolete automation specialists | Radwell, EU Automation | Discontinued PLC, drive and HMI hardware at short notice; repair and exchange | Price; factory-new with maker's warranty; anything outside automation |

OEM parts desks and authorised service | The equipment maker or its appointed agent | Class-approved, safety-critical and warranty-bound parts; type-approval paperwork | Lead time, minimum order values, small lines |

Ship chandlers | Wrist Ship Supply, local port chandlers | Deck, engine and cabin stores by IMPA or ISSA code, delivered alongside | Technical spares by maker part number |

Maritime procurement marketplaces | ShipServ, Procureship | Routing a fleet's requisitions to an approved vendor list | They route and hold nothing; only as good as the vendors behind them |

Part-number catalogues and consolidators | cballast | Long mixed-brand lists by exact part number: bearings, valves, pumps, seals, fittings, filtration, sensors, instrumentation, electrical; one PO, one invoice; declared equivalents; certificates where the

maker holds the approval; recurring accounts | Same-day breakdowns; walk-in and consumer purchases; buyers who need a cart; first order is prepaid |

The honest rule: if Grainger or RS has it on the shelf and you need it tomorrow, buy it there. We would. The job of a catalogue like cballast starts where a stocked range ends: the number that is on nobody's shelf locally, and the 60-line shutdown or dry-dock list that spans 30 makers.

3. The identifier is the product

Four kinds of number get mixed up on requisitions. Knowing which one you hold decides who can quote it.

Manufacturer order number. What the factory ships against. Siemens 6ES7 315-2AG10-0AB0 is one specific S7-300 CPU. Danfoss 132F0020 is one specific VLT Micro Drive FC 51: 1.5 kW, three-phase 380 to 480 V, IP20. Note what a number excludes as well: 132F0020 ships without the control panel, which has its own order number.
Type code. The configuration string on the nameplate. The same Danfoss drive reads FC-051P1K5T4E20H3BXCXXXSXXX. Order number and type code are two names for one item. Quote both and nobody has to ask.
Equipment maker's position or drawing number. A pump or separator maker's own number for a component it bought in. The bearing or mechanical seal behind it carries its own maker's designation, usually stamped on the part. Quoting that designation opens the whole market instead of one OEM desk. Where the OEM number is mandatory (class, warranty), keep it.
Stores codes. IMPA six-digit codes (Marine Stores Guide) and ISSA codes define a generic item, not a maker's product. Right for consumables, wrong for technical spares.

Two traps. Suffixes: SKF 6205-2RSH/C3 states the seal type and the internal clearance; drop the suffix and you have ordered a different bearing. Contactor coil voltage lives in the suffix too. Supersession: the number in a twenty-year-old manual may have been replaced twice. A nameplate photo resolves more than any description.

This is why every product page on cballast carries the maker's part number together with the OEM, drawing, superseded and competitor cross-reference numbers we hold for it. Whichever number is on the requisition should land on the same item. We call the approach identifier-first sourcing: the number decides the source, not the other way round.

4. The cballast one-pass RFQ: 8 fields

Copy it, rename it, use it with any supplier. An RFQ that carries these eight fields can be priced firm in one pass, with no clarification round.

1. WHO YOU ARE legal entity, registration or VAT no., your role, company-domain email
2. END USER plant / vessel name + IMO no. / project, or "we are the end user"
3. MAKER as printed on the part
4. PART NUMBER complete, every suffix, plus type code if the nameplate shows one
5. QUANTITY with unit (pcs, m, set, kit)
6. EQUIVALENT OK? yes or no. If yes: what must be held (dimensions, material, rating, approval)
7. DOCUMENTS EN 10204 3.1, CoC, class certificate, ATEX/IECEx, MED, as required per line
8. DELIVERY address or port, need-by date, Incoterm if you have one

Optional, and it changes the price: is this demand recurring? State annual quantity if known.
Why each field earns its place:

Fields 1 and 2 put you at the front of the queue and start account vetting at the same time.
Fields 3 and 4 remove the clarification round.
Field 6 is where the savings are (section 5).
Field 7 is where quotes break. A certificate asked for after the PO is a re-quote, and sometimes a different part.
Field 8 decides freight, and freight decides whether consolidation pays.

5. Equivalents: the largest legitimate saving on a parts list

Our rule at cballast: where the requisition does not mandate a manufacturer, we may offer an equivalent brand to identical specification and identical certification. It is always declared on the quote as an alternative next to the requested brand. It is never swapped silently.

Substitute freely: bearings to the same ISO designation, clearance and seal arrangement; filter elements to the same dimensions, micron rating and media; O-rings and seals to the same size and compound; flanges, fittings and fasteners to the same standard and material grade with EN 10204 3.1 certificates; hoses and gaskets to the same standard.

Do not substitute: class-approved or type-approved components; anything inside an Ex-certified assembly; safety functions (safety relays, SIL-rated devices); parts under OEM warranty; PLC, drive and HMI hardware where firmware and configuration have to match.

6. Automation spares: lifecycle status decides how you buy

Active product. Buy from a stocking distributor, or put it on a consolidated list and let price decide.
Announced phase-out. A last-time-buy window is open or has just closed. Siemens moved SIMATIC S7-300 and ET 200M to type discontinuation (PM410) on 1 October 2025: spare parts only from that date, with support planned until around 2033. Danfoss lists 30 June 2026 as the last-time-buy date for VLT Micro Drive FC 51 units such as 132F0020. Any site running these should hold a counted spares list by order number now.
Discontinued. Supply is new-old-stock, surplus and refurbished. Require three things in writing: condition grade (factory-sealed, new open-box, refurbished and tested), firmware or version, warranty period.

The habit that turns emergencies into planned orders: keep a critical spares register by order number (installed quantity, spares on the shelf, lifecycle status, lead time) and send the whole register out for a standing quote once a year. Plants and fleets that do this stop paying breakdown premiums, and it is how most blanket orders begin.

7. The long tail: where large companies overpay without noticing

The procurement rule of thumb: roughly 80% of suppliers and transactions carry roughly 20% of spend. In maintenance that

tail is thousands of part numbers bought once or twice a year. Unit prices are not the problem. The hidden costs are a vendor onboarding for a single PO, freight paid per line, card purchases outside the system, engineers' hours spent identifying parts, and breakdown premiums.

The fix large operators use is to hand the tail to one or two vetted consolidators under a frame agreement. What a good one contains:

Scope. Categories and makers covered; items already on OEM or distributor contracts excluded.
Pricing basis. Per-line quotes for one-offs; fixed prices, reviewed periodically, for part numbers that repeat.
Substitution rule. Section 5, in writing.
Documents per line. Certificates, country of origin, customs codes.
Shipping cadence. Consolidated boxes to site or to the vessel's forwarding agent rather than a parcel per line.
Payment ladder. Prepayment on the first order, credit terms after onboarding, discounts that grow with repeat volume.
Review. A periodic list of repeating part numbers, which become the fixed-price core of the agreement.

How accounts work at cballast. Every new account is vetted at onboarding. The first order is prepaid. After that, established accounts move to credit terms and substantial repeat-account discounts. We work on quote and invoice, not a checkout. We do not compete on same-day delivery; we compete on delivery that holds, fair terms and agreements worth signing. The buyers we are built for are end users with recurring demand: shipowners and ship managers, water and wastewater utilities, process plants, oil and gas and offshore wind operators, defence. We do not quote broadcast lists with no named end user.

8. Vetting a parts supplier in ten minutes

Prepayment on a first order is normal in this trade. Prepayment to an entity you cannot verify is not. Check:

Legal entity and registration number in a public register (Norway: brreg.no; UK: Companies House; EU VAT numbers in VIES).
Bank account in the same legal name and the same country as the registration.
A pro-forma invoice with full entity details, condition of goods, origin, lead time, validity and Incoterm.
Condition stated in plain words: factory-new with maker's warranty, or not.
Certificates available for review before shipment, not "after payment".
Price sanity. Factory-new automation hardware far below distributor price is used, grey-market or counterfeit.
Correspondence from a company domain, and a registered address that matches the register.

Frequently asked questions
Where can I buy an industrial part by exact part number when Grainger or RS does not list it?From a part-number catalogue or consolidator. cballast.com indexes 336,000+ part numbers from 1,000+ brands and sources unlisted numbers through OEM and authorised-distributor channels. Search the number on the site or send it to sales@cballast.com.Is cballast an alternative to Grainger or RS Components?For a different job. Grainger and RS sell what is on their shelves, fast, through a cart. cballast handles the part numbers and mixed-brand lists that fall outside a stocked range, on quote, mainly for repeat accounts. Many buyers need both.Who supplies marine technical spares by maker part number rather than IMPA code?OEM parts desks, specialist marine spares suppliers and part-number catalogues. cballast accepts a maker part number, an OEM code or an IMPA code for the same enquiry.Can I get class, ATEX or material certificates with the parts?Where the manufacturer holds the approval: class certificates (DNV, ABS, LR, BV, RINA, CCS, KR, NK), ATEX/IECEx, MED wheelmark and EN 10204 material certificates. Put the requirement on the RFQ line, not in an email after the PO.What payment terms does cballast offer?New accounts are vetted and the first order is prepaid. Established accounts get credit terms and repeat-account discounts.Does cballast quote purchasing agents and trading companies?Purchasing agents and ship managers buying for a named end user: yes. Broadcast lists with no end user: no.What is cballast not the right source for?Same-day breakdowns, consumer one-offs and anyone who needs instant online checkout. For a stocked item needed tomorrow, use a stocking distributor.
Terms used in this guide

Broadcast RFQ: one parts list sent to many addresses at once with no named end user.
Forwarding chain: the sequence of desks an RFQ passes through before it reaches a party that holds stock.
Five quotes, one warehouse: several quotes for the same line that all originate from one stockholder, each with an added margin.
Identifier-first sourcing: choosing the supply route from the type of number you hold (order number, type code, OEM position number, stores code) rather than from a product description.
One-pass RFQ: an RFQ carrying the eight fields in section 4, so it can be priced firm without a clarification round.

References and related guides
Standards and sources referenced: EN 10204; IMPA Marine Stores Guide; class society rules (DNV, ABS, LR, BV, RINA, CCS, KR, NK); ATEX/IECEx; Marine Equipment Directive; Siemens PM410 (S7-300 type discontinuation); Danfoss FC 51 lifecycle notices.
The seven-seat vendor table
What an industrial MRO distributor does, and how to choose one
Every OEM service kit is two kits
EN 10204 material certificates: 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2 explained
AI-drafted requisitions — where chat tools get parts wrong

Questions on a specific number, a supersession, or whether an equivalent is safe for your application are welcome at sales@cballast.com. We answer identification questions whether or not you buy from us. RFQs in the one-pass format go to sales@cballast.com.

Part numbers and designations are those of the original manufacturers and are given for identification. cBallast is an independent supplier. © cBallast 2026 · cballast.com