



AN718: Manufacturing Test Overview

Most customers have standard product manufacturing test flows, but some do not incorporate RF testing. This document describes the different options for integrating RF testing and characterization into your standard test flows. This application note is intended for Silicon Labs customers who are moving from the early prototype development stage to the manufacturing production environment and need assistance with manufacturing test. The specific target audience is senior manufacturing engineers and manufacturing managers who are investigating test processes for their Silicon Labs-enabled products.

This document summarizes approaches to manufacturing tests for all Silicon Labs protocols and platforms. Additional detail is provided in the following documents:

AN700.0: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EM3x Family

AN700.1: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EFR32 Family

KEY POINTS

- Manufacturing test flow
- Test definitions
- Test recommendations
- Embedded Software tools
- Regulatory and Compliance Testing

1 Manufacturing Test Flow

PCB manufacturing testing has two primary objectives: verifying components are placed properly on the boards and verifying functionality of the boards. The overall goal is to maximize test coverage while minimizing test costs.

Manufacturing testing parallels the product lifecycle in that each phase is unique and builds on the previous phase. The following figure shows the traditional product lifecycle and how the different phases of the manufacturing process align with it.

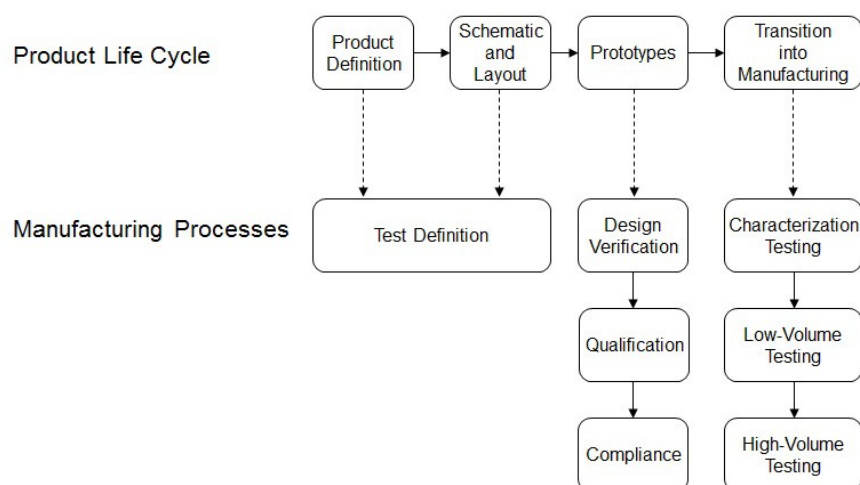


Figure 1.1. Product Lifecycle

Silicon Labs recommends four phases of testing products according to the product lifecycle. Each phase has a purpose and builds off the previous stages.

1. **Prototype:** The objective of this phase is to fully verify the design on a small number of devices.
2. **Characterization:** This phase verifies the functionality of the product.

Once the product has been fully characterized, volume testing is next. The two phases of volume manufacturing testing are low-volume and high-volume.

3. **Low-volume:** This phase contains a subset of the tests run during the characterization phase but with reduced test time and coverage.
4. **High-volume:** This phase is a much faster test, which allows for ease of test and scalability.

The objective of these manufacturing test phases is to verify that components are placed properly on the boards. The tradeoffs for these phases discussed the next sections are the type of testing, test coverage, data collection, test application, test time, and test cost.

1.1 Phase 1 - Prototype Testing

The first phase of manufacturing test involves initial prototype testing, also known as design verification/validation. This involves product that has gone through its “first build” on a new product introduction (NPI) assembly line. This phase incorporates bench tests with test equipment and usually is not automated. Prototype testing usually involves the engineering design team. Therefore it is time consuming and expensive, but it is very important in verifying the product functionality.

As part of design verification, the product should be tested over the full environmental product requirements including temperature range and voltage supply range. The product should also be subjected to certification and compliance testing, which may include FCC, ETSI, CE, and any applicable protocol-specific compliance testing. Finally, this phase includes general qualification testing, according to JEDEC standards.

Phase I tradeoffs are as follows:

- Volume: First 5-50 boards
- Type of Testing: Bench test with test equipment, not necessarily automated
- Test Coverage: Full design verification
- Data Collection: Not necessarily automated but very detailed
- Test Application: Standalone application
- Test Time: Hours per device (or months for some qualification tests)
- Test Cost: Expensive

1.2 Phase II - Characterization Testing

The second phase of testing in the product lifecycle is characterization testing. The objective of this phase is to verify functionality and repeatability. During this phase, the hardware is manufactured in higher volume (on an NPI line or production assembly line). The assembled product is fully characterized with automated test programs to determine design performance and manufacturability, as well as to collect valuable test data to be used to help with setting test limits in later phases. This phase also provides yield expectations and provides valuable design for manufacturability (DFM) and design for test (DFT) feedback to the engineering design team.

Phase II tradeoffs are as follows:

- Volume: Next 500 to 1,000 boards, depending on the customer
- Type of Testing: Automated with test equipment
- Test Coverage: Full design verification
- Data Collection: Automated, datalogs
- Test Application: Standalone application or application test mode
- Test Time: 10–30 minutes per device
- Test Cost: Expensive

1.3 Phase III - Low Volume Manufacturing Testing

The third phase is low-volume manufacturing. The objective of the volume manufacturing test phases (Phases III and IV) involves the verification of component placement. During this phase, a subset of the characterization testing may be performed. Test data from the characterization stage is used to help determine which tests may be reduced or eliminated. Test time during this stage is more important than the characterization stage because volumes are increased, but is still not crucial. In addition, yield analysis should be done on a continual basis with appropriate feedback provided to the engineering design team.

Phase III tradeoffs are as follows:

- Volume: Next 1,000 boards
- Type of Testing: Automated with subset of test equipment
- Test Coverage: Subset of characterization tests
- Data Collection: Automated, datalogs
- Test Application: Standalone application or application test mode
- Test Time: 2–5 minutes per device
- Test Cost: Moderate

1.4 Phase IV - High Volume Manufacturing Testing

The fourth and final phase is high-volume manufacturing. During this phase, test time is crucial and only minimal testing may be required depending on the customer and the application. A Golden Node application (a known good device that can be used in test for repeatable measurements) can be developed to transmit and receive packets to and from a device under test (DUT) to verify basic functionality. To further reduce test time, a manufacturing library can be used to allow for a test mode within the application itself, thus avoiding multiple programming steps.

Phase IV tradeoffs are as follows:

- Volume: After 1,000 to 2,000 boards
- Type of Testing: Automated with subset of test equipment
- Test Coverage: Minimal, basic functionality
- Data Collection: Minimal data, still automated
- Test Application: Application test mode
- Test Time: Less than 1 minute per device
- Test Cost: Minimal

2 Test Definitions

Automated test is defined as a test method where test equipment and DUT are controlled by a PC. A test program on the PC controls the test equipment and DUT. The DUT is loaded with embedded software that allows the radio to be configured for particular tests.

The tests can be divided into different types of tests— RF testing, DC testing, and peripheral testing.

- RF testing is any test specific to the operation and functionality of the radio (for example, transmitting and receiving Zigbee packets).
- DC testing is any test related to the voltage and current characteristics of the device or board (for example, active and sleep currents).
- Peripheral testing is any test not specific to RF or DC, like a sensor or an external crystal.

For more details on the specific recommended tests, refer to documents *AN700.0: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EM35x* and *AN700.1: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EFR32*.

3 Test Recommendations

This section summarizes the functionality that should be tested on the hardware product, depending on the phase. These recommendations are for SoC (System-on-Chip) products. Silicon Labs also offers EFR-based modules that are pre-certified or fully certified. In such cases, the customer's end product will require limited RF testing depending on the region and its compliance to the regulatory standards. See *AN1048: Regulatory RF Module Certifications* for more information on module certifications and the required testing.

3.1 Prototype Testing

Prototype testing is necessary for all product designs. In this phase of testing, the design is verified across the full environmental product requirements, including temperature range and voltage supply range, as well as humidity range in some cases. This level of environmental testing may occur over several months, depending on the qualification requirements of the product. Certification and compliance testing may also be necessary in this phase of testing. External test houses are likely to be involved to support this testing. This phase fully verifies the design of the hardware and product that is being developed, and helps identify any design issues that need to be corrected before proceeding to the characterization testing phase.

3.2 Characterization Testing

Characterization testing is recommended for early production stages. In this phase of testing, the RF functionality (transmit and receive) should be characterized on all applicable channels or a subset of these channels, as well as at various transmit output power levels or receiver input power levels. This phase fully characterizes the hardware that is being developed, determines the tests to be executed in manufacturing test, determines the test limits of these tests, and flushes out any manufacturing or process issues that might be present.

3.3 Low-Volume Manufacturing Testing

Low-volume manufacturing testing is usually a subset of the characterization testing. A subset of the applicable channels or transmit output power levels can be tested to reduce the test time without compromising test coverage. For example, one channel/power level combination (likely mid-band at max power) can be measured for transmit and receive functionality.

The results from the characterization phase of testing help determine not only what should be tested in the manufacturing phase but also the test limits to be applied to certain tests. For example, if a particular test does not fail at all during the characterization phase, it can be omitted from the manufacturing phase altogether. Also, if it is determined that a particular test will fail all channels if it fails at all, testing can be reduced from all channels to a single channel, most likely mid-band.

3.4 High-Volume Manufacturing Testing

High-volume manufacturing testing is much simpler than characterization testing or low-volume manufacturing testing. The hardware design and manufacturing process have already been proven, so the product now just requires a quick “go/no go” transmit and receive functional test to verify operation.

4 Embedded Software Tools

The embedded software application could be a standalone test application or the customer's own application with a test mode included. Silicon Labs provides different test applications depending on the protocol being used. These applications are discussed in detail in the platform-specific Manufacturing Test Guidelines Series (*AN700.0: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EM35x* and *AN700.1: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EFR32*).

The following table summarizes the test tools provided by Silicon Labs.

Table 4-1. Software Tools Available for All Protocols and Platforms

Software Tool	Family	Protocol	Reference
NodeTest	EM35x/EFR32	Zigbee	AN1019
Manufacturing Library	EM35x/EFR32	Zigbee	AN1162
RAILtest	EFR32	Zigbee/Bluetooth LE/Proprietary/Z-Wave	UG409 AN972 INS14283
Direct Test Mode (DTM)	EFR32	Bluetooth LE	AN1046

NodeTest

The NodeTest standalone application is provided with the EmberZNet SDK (Software Development Kit). Silicon Labs recommends NodeTest for any test stage in which the customer's Zigbee application is not yet mature enough to include a test mode. NodeTest provides a serial command line interface to the Silicon Labs device. Instructions for using NodeTest are provided in *AN1019: Using the NodeTest Application*.

Manufacturing Library

Silicon Labs recommends that customers use the manufacturing library in mature applications, regardless of the testing phase. Customers without mature applications can build a simple Zigbee sample application with the manufacturing library enabled to access this functionality. The manufacturing library provides access to a test mode within the application and removes the need for multiple application bootloads or multiple programming steps within the manufacturing process. The manufacturing library is available as a configurable plugin in the EmberZNet SDK. The guidelines for enabling the manufacturing library plugin and using the manufacturing library CLI commands for manufacturing tests are provided in *AN1162: Using the Manufacturing Library for EmberZNet*.

RAILtest

The RAILtest standalone application is provided with the Flex SDK. It provides customers with a simple tool for testing the radio and the functionality of the RAIL library. For any advanced usage customers should write their own software with a custom radio configuration. RAILtest is documented in *UG409: RAILtest User's Guide*, *AN972: EFR32 RF Evaluation Guide*, and *INS14283: Bring-up/Test HW Development*.

Direct Test Mode protocol (DTM)

The DTM protocol is defined in the Bluetooth specification as a means for testing the radio performance of Bluetooth low energy products. Bluetooth-enabled Silicon Labs EFR32xG SoCs and the BGM/MGM modules support both the DTM upper and lower testers. DTM testing is described in *AN1046: Bluetooth Radio Frequency Physical Layer Evaluation*.

5 Radio Frequency Regulatory and Compliance Testing

Customers need to perform RF measurements to validate and certify the product's compliance with the regulatory rules. The level of testing depends on the Silicon Labs product. For example, the SoC/IC-level wireless components cannot be pre-certified because they do not have a fixed RF path and antenna. Customers therefore must conduct the full set of radio tests to certify their product. The test tools referenced in section 4 [Embedded Software Tools](#) should be used to validate the RF performance of the device. For more information on RF Regulatory requirements for various regions, refer to *AN1048: Regulatory RF Module Certifications*.

6 Revision History

Version 0.5: Content updated and reorganized in conjunction with the conversion of the old *AN700: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the Ember EM35x* into *AN700.0: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EM35x* and *AN700.1: Manufacturing Test Guidelines for the EFR32*, as well as the introduction of *AN1162: Using the Manufacturing Test Library for EmberZNet*.

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