HARWIN

CONNECT TECHNOLOGY
WITH CONFIDENCE

CONNECTING WITH NORTH AMERICA

2026 CONNECTOR SPECIFIER AND BUYER SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to 'Connecting with North America', Harwin's annual survey of the connector market in which we explore the trends and technologies influencing this critical sector.

The latest survey provides insight from a broad cross-section of professionals involved in interconnect specification, design and procurement.

Respondents included engineers, buyers and executive management in sectors ranging from aerospace and telecoms to industrial and automotive.

As with the 2025 survey, we examined the most important applications for connectors and the technologies being chosen and the criteria for making those choices in terms of both products and suppliers.

And once again we investigated the importance of online tools and advanced technologies such as AI and 3D printing, as well as the information sources that specifiers and buyers use to make effective connector choices.

While a lot has changed in the wider world in the 12 months from our last survey, what remains clear is that connectors – and, not least, highly reliable connectors – remain absolutely fundamental to the successful design and manufacture of electronic products across electronic products across industrial systems, telecoms & data and automotive / EV.

We hope you find this year's survey of interest. As ever, should you have any questions or want to discuss any aspect of this report do not hesitate to contact us.

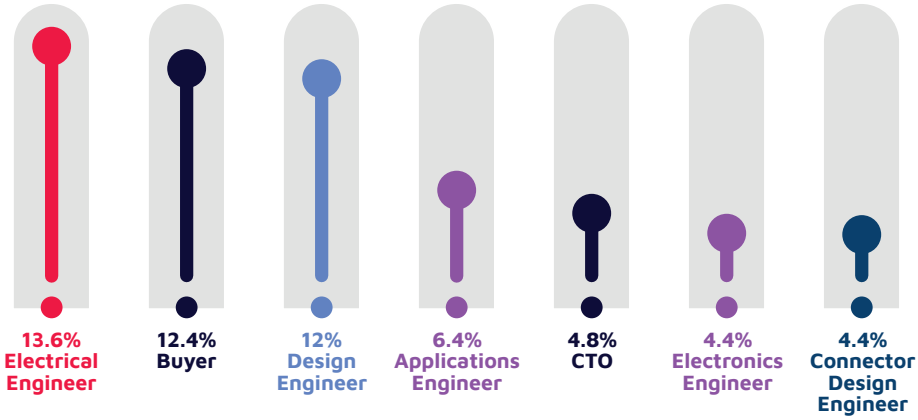
Peter Schneid, Vice President of Marketing

WHO RESPONDED?

This year's survey was conducted during April 2026 and collated and analyzed responses from North American-based professionals working across engineering, procurement and management.

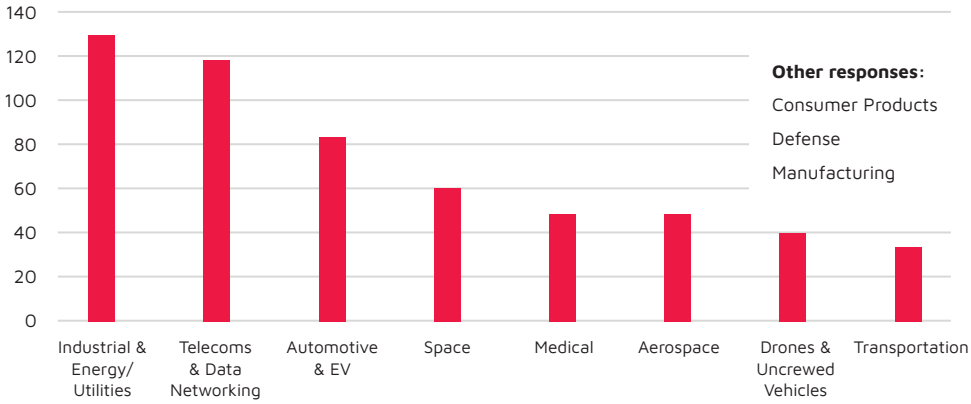
All of those who responded had connector specification or procurement within their remit, with over 60% stating it as their primary focus. 75% had been involved in the sourcing of connectors in the last six months and 90% within the last year.

TOP JOB ROLES

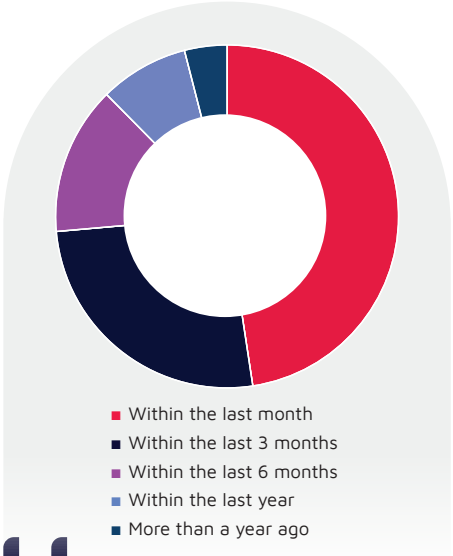


Respondents were involved in a diverse range of industries with industrial, telecoms and data networking the leading applications for connector design and specification.

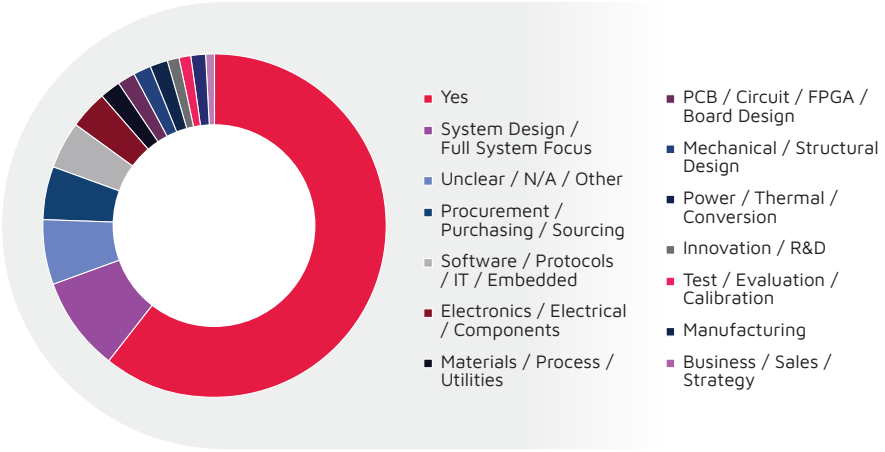
WHICH APPLICATIONS?



LAST BOUGHT CONNECTORS?



IS CONNECTOR SELECTION AND DESIGN-IN YOUR PRIMARY FOCUS? IF NO, WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY FOCUS?

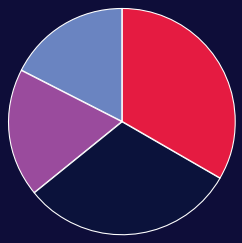


CHOOSING CONNECTORS AND SUPPLIERS

The survey considered the complete spectrum of connector types, with high-reliability connectors being seen as critical for the vast majority (78%) of respondents.

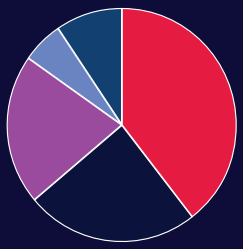
Power (low, medium and high) and data (low, mid and high) connectors were specified or purchased by 74% and 68% of respondents respectively.

POWER/CURRENT

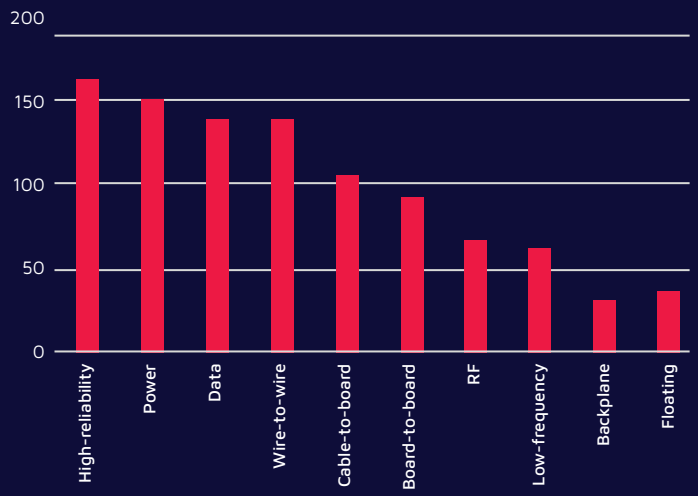


- Low Power (0-30A / under 100W)
- High Power (100A+ / 1kW+)
- Medium Power (30-100A / 100-1000W)
- Mixed / Ranges / Custom

DATA



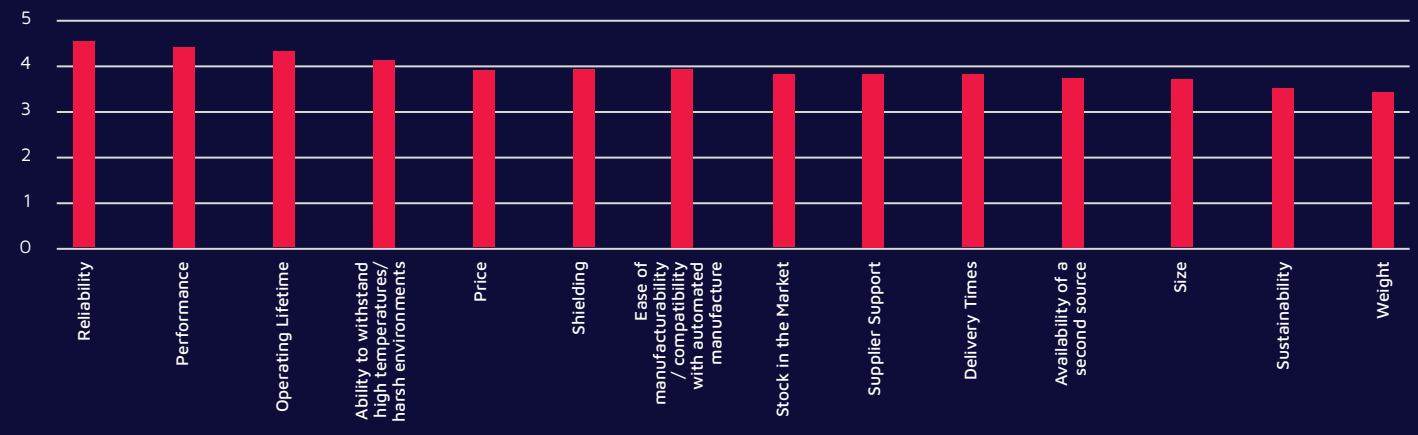
- High speed (Greater than 1 Gbps)
- Low speed (Below 100 Mbps, Kbps, Baud rates)
- Mid speed (Between 100 Mbps and 1 Gbps)
- Frequency based / GHz ranges
- Protocol / standard-based (USB, Ethernet, etc.)



When it comes to reliability, around 30% of the professionals surveyed expected their connectors to operate for more than ten years and a further 40% for between five and ten years.

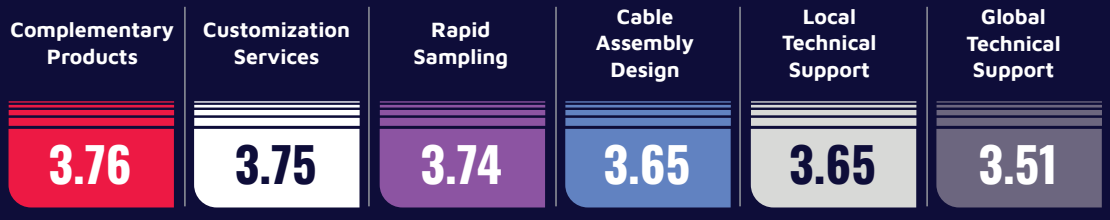
And, as with last year's survey, the focus on reliability was underlined when it comes to primary considerations for selecting and procuring connectors with reliability, performance and operating life being the top criteria.

PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS



MOST IMPORTANT CRITERIA?

In terms of selecting a supplier, availability of complementary products and customization services remain highly prized, while rapid sampling is also seen as important.



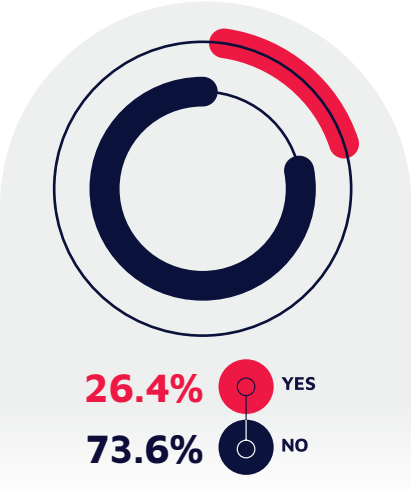
(Average scores out of five)

ONLINE TOOLS

Just over half of respondents (54%) said that they currently use or plan to use online design tools as part of the selection and design-in process.

The most important factors when using such tools are product comparison and selection, the ability to simulate and customize connector configurations, and the download of design files.

WHO USES AI AND SOLUTIONS SUCH AS 'DIGITAL TWINS' FOR DESIGN AND OPTIMIZATION?

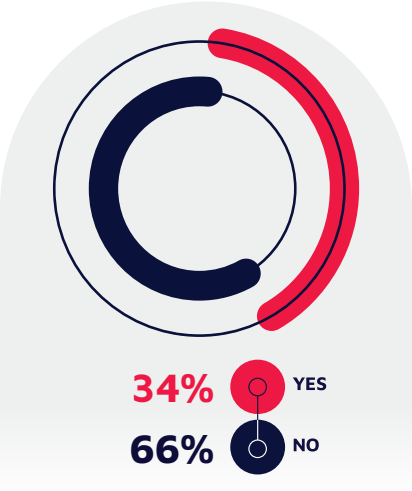


Unsurprisingly this year's survey confirmed the ongoing adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for design and optimization. Over a quarter (26.4%) of those surveyed now use AI, up from 17.5% last year.

What's more, it seems the use of AI is spreading into more of the design and production process with key areas now encompassing:

- Connector selection, comparison and optimization
- Predicting connector performance and reliability under various electrical, thermal, and mechanical conditions
- Reducing design iterations by optimizing layouts before physical prototyping
- Analyzing signal integrity, thermal behavior, and stress points in high-speed, high-power and high-density applications
- Optimizing connector placement on the board
- Predictive maintenance (anticipating component failures)

DO YOU USE OR PLAN TO USE 3D PRINTING FOR PROTOTYPING OR PRODUCTION?



This year's survey found that over one third of respondents also use or plan to use 3D printing.

Among the reasons cited for adopting this technology are:

- Rapid prototyping
- Testing fit, form and function
- Refining designs before moving to full production
- Accelerated design testing and validation
- Small-scale production
- Mock ups of accessory parts

These results underline just how important it is that suppliers align their strategies to provide the tailored support that customers are coming to expect when deploying advanced digital technologies that speed design, testing and production.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

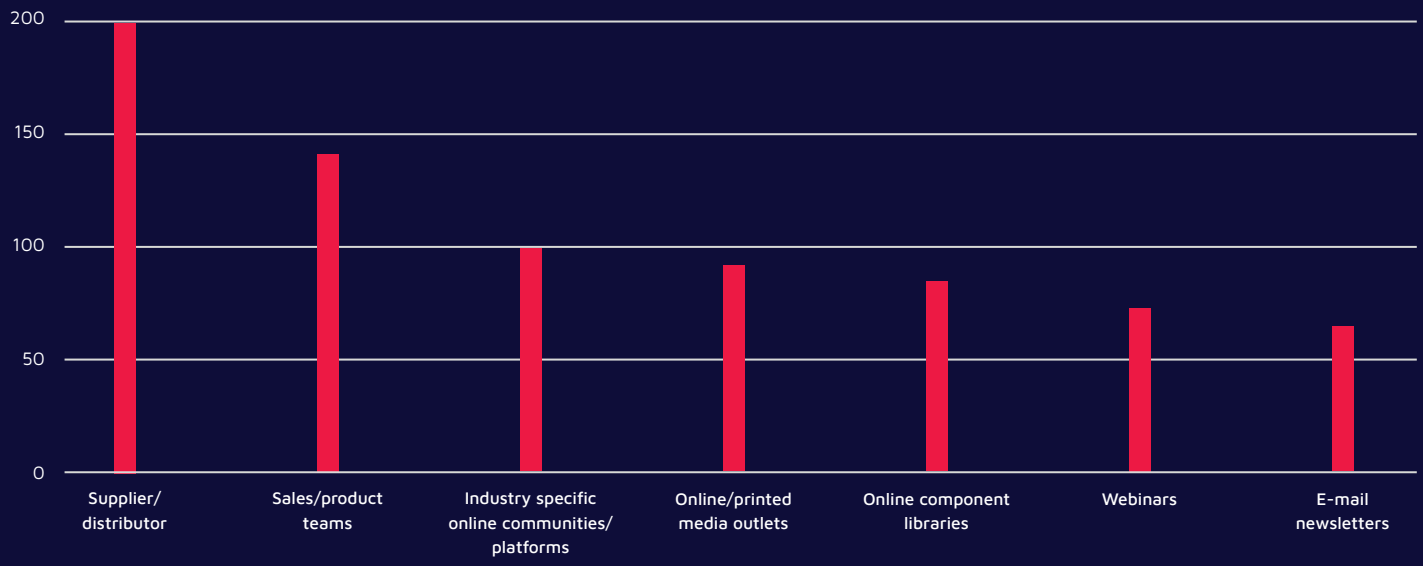
54% of users report using online design tools, compared to 36.8% of specifiers and buyers surveyed in Europe in Harwin's 'Connecting with Europe' survey.

Take-up of AI was also higher in North America. In the European survey, this figure was 16.8%. However, Europe appears to be ahead in 3D printing, with over 50% of respondents saying they use or plan to use it for prototyping or production.

SOURCING INFORMATION AND BUYING CONNECTORS

The survey indicates that the resources of connector manufacturers and their distribution partners continue to be a key for information relating to product specification and ordering. This is followed by sales and product teams (who are often contacted after initial online research).

HOW DO YOU SOURCE INFORMATION FOR CONNECTION SPECIFICATION/ORDERING?



Given the increase of AI-driven search we can realistically conclude that a growing number of manufacturer and distributor websites are being found via more sophisticated online searches - including those from users who are actively seeking solutions to design challenges rather than specific products.

With this in mind, it has never been more important for supplier and distributor websites to go beyond simply providing product data to including authoritative information, guidance and tools that simplify and speed identification, comparison, selection and ordering.

TOP DISTRIBUTORS

The survey identified the top three preferred distributors **DigiKey, Mouser and Arrow.**

1. DigiKey
2. MOUSER ELECTRONICS
3. ARROW

SOME KEY CHALLENGES

There is a consistent theme between last year's survey and this year's in that most respondents continue to believe their role will become more challenging in the future.

Fewer than one third think their role will become easier.

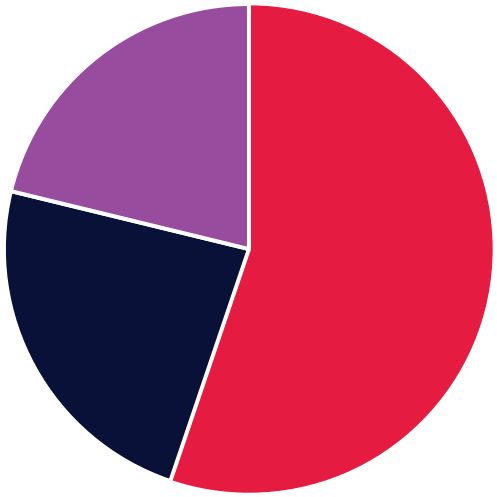
HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR ROLE CHANGING IN THE FUTURE?

Connector issues that present challenges in engineering projects include reliable long-term performance in areas such as signal- and power-integrity and mechanical durability. These challenges become even more acute in high-speed and high-density designs and applications that require repeated use and/or operation in harsh conditions including exposure to vibration, moisture, dust and varying temperatures.

Miniaturization is another common challenge, not least when selecting connectors that must meet bandwidth, impedance control and shielding requirements within tight area constraints.

Concerns when it comes to identifying and specifying products include inconsistent supplier documentation, cross referencing and compatibility with automated manufacturing processes.

From a commercial perspective, a number of respondents cited the challenges of balancing performance, reliability and size with cost. Management of component availability and long lead times also puts pressure on specifiers and buyers, sometimes leading to redesigns to accommodate alternative parts.



RESPONDEE FEEDBACK

RELIABILITY INCREASED PERFORMANCE
CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS
PRODUCT AVAILABILITY LONG LEAD TIMES
MINIATURIZATION SUPPLIER DOCUMENTATION
COST AUTOMATED MANUFACTURE

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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