



JENCO

Jenco and Cole-Parmer:

*How a single project flourished
into a 45-year partnership*

About Cole-Parmer

Cole-Parmer was founded as a classic scientific supply house in 1955 by Jerry Cole and John Parmer.

From its humble beginnings in a loft in downtown Chicago, Cole-Parmer has since evolved into a multinational business with a loyal following. Today, Cole-Parmer is one of the most well-known brand names in the scientific industry and has expanded from being a distributor to producing and distributing its own line of electrochemistry and spectroscopy solutions.

Its Quest

When Cole-Parmer was created over 60 years ago, it faced steep competition. Large-scale scientific equipment distributors like Fisher Scientific and VWR International were already well-established in the field and had gained significant market share. To succeed, Cole-Parmer would need to differentiate itself from the big-name competition.

It started by producing and distributing a color catalog—a novelty at a time when most industries were still printing in black and white. This innovative choice helped Cole-Parmer earn recognition and become an industry leader in the direct-mail business.

To maintain its early advantage, Cole-Parmer set out to pursue an even loftier goal: to deliver custom products to the scientific community that weren't being created elsewhere.



Its Challenges

In order to do so, it would need to transform from a distributor into a major private-label business. This, in turn, would require expanding its capabilities and expertise in a major way—but Cole-Parmer was up to the challenge.

In 1963, it acquired Masterflex peristaltic pumps, Gilmont Instruments, and Manostat Pumps. Through these acquisitions and others, Cole-Parmer added manufacturing capabilities, fluid handling, biochemistry, and biosciences to its portfolio.

As the business continued to grow, so did the industries it serviced. Although it originally focused on scientific, academic, and research

communities, it quickly became clear that the same solutions were needed in modern commercial enterprises. Industries such as water and wastewater processing, food and beverage manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, biotech, and aquaculture began to require advanced electrochemical testing equipment in order to operate. These commercial industries also demanded greater levels of automation, lower equipment downtime, and seamless data connectivity (among other unique considerations).

To deliver customized solutions to these industries, Cole-Parmer needed an original design manufacturer (ODM) with electrochemistry expertise. It set out to find a company that could provide a range of capabilities without sacrificing efficiency or flexibility.



Why Jenco?

According to Marv Kaiser, Cole-Parmer's product manager in electrochemistry and spectroscopy, Jenco checked all the right boxes on the company's wish list. In addition to having electrochemistry expertise, Jenco had the internal capabilities to handle everything from product design and engineering to manufacturing its white-label product. Having a partner with all of these in-house capabilities ensured greater cross-functional accountability, communication, and efficiency. Jenco's commitment to owning product design and manufacturing also made it more knowledgeable about the entire process from end to end.

In addition to these capabilities, Jenco had experience producing a variety of electrochemistry equipment, including testers, portable meters, benchtop meters, and inline controllers. Jenco knew its products well, but unlike other manufacturers, it also knew how to

customize those products to solve the challenges of different industries.

Those small modifications, Kaiser explained, take a high level of industry knowledge and adaptability. Jenco's expertise was especially apparent when it came to the company's inline controllers. In addition to taking electrochemical measurements, Jenco's inline meters could also be connected to dosing pumps to automatically adjust chemicals based on incoming data feedback—a function that is essential in commercial settings.

“THE BEAUTY OF ELECTROCHEMISTRY IS THAT A SIMILAR PRODUCT CAN BE USED IN FOOD AND BEVERAGE, PHARMA, AND BIOTECH INDUSTRIES. IT'S NOT ABOUT MAKING DRAMATIC CHANGES TO AN INSTRUMENT'S DESIGN, BUT ABOUT MAKING SMALL MODIFICATIONS TO THE PRODUCT TO MAKE IT A BETTER CHOICE AND A BETTER FIT.”

An Ongoing Partnership

What started as a single project more than 45 years ago has blossomed into a decades-long business partnership that's evolved considerably over the years and is stronger than ever today. When asked why Jenco has been one of Cole-Parmer's premier partners for so long, Kaiser was quick to respond: "With any good company, the people are the driving force and the real value."

As a product manager, he oversees a variety of Cole-Parmer's ODM and OEM partnerships and always hopes to work with more like Jenco. In addition to the company being accommodating and professional, he cites Jenco's can-do attitude, flexibility, and innovation as key reasons why it's been such an ideal fit.

"In my mind, it's always a matter of capabilities, professionalism, and people," he said. In addition to being easy to work with, Kaiser looks for companies that are "not only interested in earning our business, but in growing our business and supporting it on the back end."


For Cole-Parmer, Jenco has been instrumental in helping the company grow and continue to deliver innovative products that align with its vision.

Cole-Parmer, like Jenco, now sells mostly business to business.

"We're similar to Jenco in that we work with customers every day," Kaiser said. "For some customers, we've been their preferred supplier for over 50 years."

Sustaining those partnerships, he explained, requires you to be invested in your customers as much as you are in your own business. With Jenco, he feels that passion and commitment in every project—and he has seen proof in the form of quality products and positive customer feedback.

Cole-Parmer works with a variety of suppliers, but Kaiser admits that long-standing partnerships like the one with Jenco aren't always the case.



"LONGEVITY SPEAKS VOLUMES IN THE BUSINESS WORLD, IF YOU CAN WORK WITH SOMEONE OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME. IT'S PROBABLY A GOOD INDICATION OF WHAT THEIR CAPABILITIES ARE, HOW EASY THEY ARE TO WORK WITH, AND HOW SUCCESSFUL THEY ARE."

The Jenco Process

When companies partner with Jenco, they can expect to work with a professional partner that oversees product rollouts from conception to completion.

As an example, during a recent meeting in Chicago, Cole-Parmer asked the Jenco team whether it would be able to create a new 1/8 DIN analyzer by combining the features of a controller and a transmitter. Having a complete and flexible in-house R&D team, Jenco quickly got the right hardware and firmware engineers, industrial designer, product manager, and project manager involved. Because Cole-Parmer wanted to launch the product as soon as possible, Jenco also fast-tracked the project and began working on it within two weeks.

The work was a truly collaborative effort. The project champion advocated for Cole-Parmer within Jenco and directly worked and communicated with the customer, providing status updates, responding to new feature requests, and collaborating on design approval. The product manager took charge of product specifications and made sure the new device fit into the existing Jenco portfolio and had the right features and value for market success. The project manager worked to make sure the internal Jenco team was on track and alleviated any bottlenecks. The hardware and firmware engineers designed the new model according to specs. The team lead worked with regulatory laboratories to secure certificates of approval, which enabled Cole-Parmer to sell the product in the United States, Canada, and Europe. The industrial designer created new faceplate designs and renderings of the new model for Cole-Parmer's approval.



Ultimately, the product was passed off to the production team, where the production engineer worked with production leads to ensure design intentions were properly realized while creating the right quality assurance procedures. After all of the kinks had been worked out during the trial production run, product development was finally complete. The Jenco team then took the analyzer into its first production run and fulfilled Cole-Parmer's inaugural order.

When it comes to custom products, most people think that companies have to place a minimum order, such as 100 items or more, each time. With Jenco, that's not the case. Jenco understands that its partners are trying to reduce the inventory they carry at any given point in time to free up cash.

To this end, Jenco doesn't require minimum quantities on custom orders. The company forecasts how many items its customers might need and makes sure it has that amount ready. In the case of Cole-Parmer, Jenco shipped products from its manufacturing facilities in China to its warehouse in San Diego. This way, when Cole-Parmer was ready to place an order, the company didn't have to wait for products to be shipped across the world via ocean freight. Now, when an order comes in, Jenco ships it either directly to Cole-Parmer's customers or to Cole-Parmer's warehouses, depending on the situation.

The entire production process is not as time-consuming as one might think. When building a custom product from scratch, the whole process is wrapped up in 13 weeks. In Cole-Parmer's case, the process took about half the time.

THE FUTURE

As of the beginning of 2019, Cole-Parmer has about six product concepts in the works with Jenco and another six already in development. Kaiser stated that Cole-Parmer has been impressed with how Jenco has evolved over time and empowered the company to deliver cutting-edge solutions. Jenco has been a pioneer in bringing water quality monitoring technology into the modern age by engineering Bluetooth testers that connect to smartphone apps.

By continuing to innovate and adapt, Jenco has been able to present Cole-Parmer with opportunities to deliver better solutions to its customers for over a quarter of a century.

JENCO

Jenco is a family owned water quality instruments manufacturer that's on a mission to bring innovation to anyone who works with analytical instruments.

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