



The “Custom Extrusion” Moment, Part I

Our last “Thought Leadership” piece discussed five select characteristics to consider when choosing a specific Custom Extruder as a plastics vendor. In this piece, however, we’d like to take a step back and address the value of a “custom” vendor altogether, and by doing so help to eliminate some confusion about what “custom” is and, also, is not.

Let’s start with a premise: Immediate differentiation that is compelling has today become a fundamental and strategic imperative to businesses’ overall success across many markets. Now more than ever before, technology, globalization, and the accelerated pace of competitive change make products and categories easy prey to commoditization.

In the realm of plastics, and extending to end-products that feature plastics substantively in their design structure, operation, or appearance, the fact is, partnering with a “custom” vendor has distinct advantages that address this premise of immediate differentiation, the challenge of the age.

The Custom Debate

“Why go “custom?” one might ask. Doesn’t “custom,” or, as the British might say blandly, “bespoke,” suggest only one-off products, specialty and small, *ad hoc*, even expensive, too variable to sustain for a long time or high volume? Doesn’t “custom” mean that the vendor may not know my business, or at best I have to explain it to them; that they don’t have the product off-the-shelf that I am looking for? Or if they are familiar with my market, it probably means they are in it themselves, working for and supplying my competitors, and thus no longer “custom”? But wait, does that mean a “custom” vendor is indeed unique, a means to differentiation?

This form of circular, stream-thinking speaks to the confusion present when considering various plastics vendors. How the vendor identifies itself, either by your market or by its own, by what you do or by what it does, may also influence the dilemma.

By definition, being “custom” suggests a more open orientation to markets and customers – a characteristic essential to outside-the-box, innovative thinking. Closed thinking about specific product lines is susceptible to “marketing myopia” and tunnel vision. Companies now need vendors who may not be tied to a specific product widget or to a specific material category alone, but feature flexibility and broad market, or better, *application* knowledge, even for product arenas typically thought as well-established. Applied know-how is key, and it underscores the essence of good custom plastics development.

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What will you make today?

Corporate Thought Piece



The sum advantages of this outlook to markets and applications can be broken down into a few additional concepts. When considered individually, they pose a compelling argument. However, in total, they present the compelling advantage of custom plastics itself, and as compared with alternative thermoplastic processing methods, custom extrusion particularly.

1. Open-Sourced Expertise. Open-source design innovation is the buzz word these days for new product development, but custom plastics has been doing this sort of work for clients and customers for years. Bringing ideas from different markets; recalling how things worked or did not in related circumstances; relationships with sundry material innovators and suppliers; leveraging historical knowledge of plastics and materials (also known as practical wisdom) – these are attributes from which a business can benefit by working with a custom vendor, even for a product-component that one would think as standard; or, that is, dare we say, commoditized to your disadvantage.

2. Trusted Advisor. In essence, by working with a custom provider, a business gets its own “Trusted Advisor.” Often with stretched resources internally, are OEMs really asking the right questions objectively for a specific product or challenge? Is the thinking too myopic with respect to the application at hand? What is the functionality that is desired, how might a plastic part yield the solution, and how do we engineer it? A company that just makes extruded window frames and door lineals cannot serve in this capacity. A company that only runs long-run production volumes of single materials or common die-sets cannot serve in this capacity. A company that is organized by divisions, separated by markets, compartmentalized by applications, cannot field this sort of need, which requires well-rounded experience and disposition, for your business and product differentiation.

3. Short-Run Specialization: The pace of product change and of product lifecycle turnover often creates demand for more limited batch production and small trial introductions. Quick-turn product designs and die development are increasingly required for companies to compete successfully, to respond, and to seize the moment of the market. Custom plastics processors, and custom extruders in particular, are especially suited to small production runs, given their expertise in set-up and shut down, line turnover, and other operational efficiencies. These traits come in handy when considering our next point, Total Cost Reduction.

4. Total Cost Reduction. Naturally, as the relative costs to develop new products increases due to the frequency of new introductions and shortened product life cycles, cost reduction has only increased in importance. But one must be mindful to treat this concept holistically, and not by only looking at per unit cost measures. A custom plastics processor is able to bring to customers a more open book of ideas and solutions, such that the total cost of a component, its surrounding context, and its supply chain position, within an end-product is likely reduced. And with this concept on the table at all times, you'll find that a custom vendor is aligned best with how you determine success. The result? An optimal solution becomes designed to your specs, for the product and for how you keep score of it.



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5. Added Value with Multiple Touches. It is oft-mentioned that many extruders feature value-added steps in their production process, hoping to create additional value for customers through welding, routing, punching, notching, packaging, or other downstream production steps for a thermoplastic product. All plastic processors feature these capabilities to some degree, but a custom processor likely brings to bear a wider variety and also flexibility across the spectrum of materials and functional applications. These downstream capabilities provide fertile ground for thinking outside-the-box for what might be done with a component part design and a plastic component in particular before it reaches your hands. And as it relates to extrusion, these steps provide advantages that may offer the capability to supply components with geometry across all three axes and not just two cross-sectional ones, as is typical with a base extruded part.

Consequently, the capacity within a single supplier for multiple touches actually opens the door for extrusion the process, and custom extrusion in particular, to areas of plastic processing that are typically predisposed to mold processing. We call this “Last Touch” expansion.

But that review will come in our next installment, Part II of the “Custom Extrusion Moment.”

For now, we hope we’ve helped set the record straight about the true value of custom plastics and the advantages this relationship can bring to your business during these competitive times.

About Pexco:

Based in Atlanta, Georgia with several manufacturing plants across the United States and Mexico, Pexco is a North American leader in the design and fabrication of specialty plastics products. It provides standard and custom products and components to manufacturers and end-users for a broad range of market applications, including the Aerospace, Medical, Filtration, Lighting, and other Industrial sectors. Pexco offers a full range of design, engineering and fabrication services. It operates six Class 7 & Class 8 medical clean rooms. Pexco meets the requirements of ISO 9001:2008, and holds ISO 14001, ISO 13485, 21 CFR 820, OHSAS 18001, GMP, AS9100C, ITAR and other registrations and/or certifications for its manufacturing operations. Pexco is your trusted plastics advisor for specialty plastic products and solutions. For more information, visit www.pexco.com or contact 404-564-8560.