

NAVIGATING IDAHO'S SUPPLY CHAIN SUPPLY CHAIN SUCCESS STORIES



PORTSMITH

Navigating Idaho's Supply Chain: Vessel Partnership Answers Immediate Go-to-Market Sourcing Need

Challenge: Supplier Disruption

Solution: Vessel's Strategic Sourcing and Procurement

Results: Affordable & Timely Product Sourcing; Launch Deadline Met

Background

Portsmith designs, manufactures, and distributes charging/Ethernet docks and adapters for handheld devices built by companies like Zebra Technologies, Honeywell, Motorola, and Samsung. In 2021, as supply chain disruptions continued across the globe, Portsmith identified an opportunity to quickly build and launch multi-slot charging docks for Zebra's 9300, its flagship handheld computer used for inventory management and logistical operations in enterprise spaces such as retail stores and manufacturing facilities.

After 20 years in business, Portsmith was poised for success. The company already used a semi-modular design approach to reduce the time needed to develop new docking products like this one. This means that for most new OEM docks, only about half of the parts need to be designed specifically for the handheld. (These multi-slot charging docks would require electronics, injection-molded plastic, and sheet metal.) Portsmith also has proven, speedy paths through regulatory testing and production startup, having established good relationships with multiple contract manufacturers that provide materials for many of its products.

If Portsmith could quickly launch these new charging docks and have the product validated by users — while other manufacturers remained hamstrung by parts shortages and delivery delays — the company would be poised to get a foothold in the market. However, would widespread supply chain problems prevent Portsmith's own suppliers from delivering the critical components at a reasonable price point and on time for the product's launch?

All Hands on Deck

After contacting the supplier that was to manufacture several parts needed for the charging dock, Portsmith learned that lead times for both the plastic tooling and sourcing of the sheet metal would be far too long — meaning it could be 15 to 20 weeks before the company might receive its first unit. If this product was to be launched quickly, Portsmith would have to get creative.

ABOUT VESSEL

Vessel is a veteran- and minority owned company established and headquartered in Boise, ID. Our mission is to empower growing companies to introduce their products to the market on a commercial scale. From conception to establishing and maintaining your sales funnel, Vessel is poised to drive success for businesses. Whether you need to scale your product by utilizing our established network of manufacturing partners and fully operational supply chain management service, or need an experienced sales & marketing team as you grow, Vessel will take your company to the next level.



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The company decided to run a small pilot program in advance of an official product launch. PortsSmith would source hard-to-get materials through speedier channels, then produce and distribute 100 to 200 units to five to ten customers, a group which would consist of major distribution partners and value-added resellers (VARs). Such a pilot would also provide an opportunity to test the market. And, although this approach would mean a greater upfront cost, it would speed up production.

The plastic parts would be easy to manufacture; PortsSmith had access to a dedicated design team via its sister company, SGW Designworks, and could use 3D printed parts in place of the injected-molded parts. Sourcing the electronics would be no problem; PortsSmith's contract manufacturer agreed to speed up production and ship the necessary number of circuit boards to be programmed. However, one issue remained: where would they get the sheet metal? Would the company be able to find the material needed for 100 to 200 units — and then have it shaped and powder coated — all in time to assemble, test, and ship the units as part of the pilot run? Even PortsSmith's backup sources for the material were backlogged. With not a moment to lose, they contacted Vessel to brainstorm a potential solution.

Finding Longitude

Upon learning of PortsSmith's challenge, Vessel immediately began contacting several of its partners to inquire about available options. One partner in particular stood out: a sheet metal manufacturer in the region with a reputation for superior quality, reasonable timelines, and competitive pricing. The supplier provided a project estimate and some good news: it would be able to provide the manufactured sheet metal needed for 100-200 units in time for PortsSmith's pilot launch (and within budget).

In five weeks, the sheet metal supplier manufactured, packaged, and shipped material directly to PortsSmith. Vessel served as a critical liaison between both parties throughout the process — from the initial project quote to final delivery. This required services such as design for manufacture, as well as maintaining a frequent feedback loop regarding necessary modifications to the parts and any other project updates. (Note: This supplier sourcing and management approach is Vessel's standard practice. It ensures that errors are minimized, efficiencies are maximized, and, to the extent possible given current supply chain challenges, unnecessary delays are eliminated.)

Despite a mid-project change (the geometry of a cutout in the sheet metal needed a slight alteration), the project was still completed on time and on budget. PortsSmith was able to successfully launch its pilot program, getting its product in the hands of users eight weeks earlier than if they had waited for full production units. This timeline allowed customers — who liked the product and validated the design — to qualify the product for specific upcoming deals.

THE SOLUTION

WE BELIEVE IN YOUR COMPANY AND THE VALUE YOUR PRODUCT WILL BRING TO THE MARKET.

OUR MISSION IS TO EMPOWER YOU WITH SOURCING AND SUPPLY CHAIN SOLUTIONS TO MITIGATE YOUR RISKS — BY PROVIDING COST-SAVING MEASURES AND THE ABILITY TO SCALE EFFECTIVELY. VESSEL IS A VETERAN- AND MINORITY- OWNED COMPANY ESTABLISHED AND HEADQUARTERED IN BOISE, ID. WE SOURCE OUR MANUFACTURING PARTNERSHIPS IN IDAHO FIRST, THE UNITED STATES SECOND, AND THEN GLOBALLY.



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Staying the Course

"Portsmith is a great example of a company that is prioritizing innovation despite — and even in answer to — disruption," says Derik Ellis, Vessel Co-founder and CEO. "They identified an opportunity to develop and launch a product that would answer an immediate need in the market, seized that opportunity, then were nimble enough to change course when their traditional sourcing channels were unable to deliver parts within a specific timeline. Portsmith is taking advantage of market variables to expand its product offering and better serve its customer base. You love to see it."

When successful Idaho companies like Portsmith reach out to Vessel for support, it's a win not just for a specific brand or product launch, but for Idaho manufacturing. By remaining hyper-focused on growing its network and forging strong relationships with its partners, Vessel is able to make valuable connections — connections that often provide solutions to even the most tricky supply-chain-related challenges.

"We were impressed by how quickly Vessel was able to identify a qualified shop to quote the parts," says Ryan Gray, Portsmith Co-owner. "And they did a great job managing the process, but also in including us when decisions needed to be made."

"Just because a client doesn't have full capabilities and the various suppliers necessary to bring a product to market, that shouldn't stop them in their efforts," says Mike Sieler, Vessel's Director of Strategic Sourcing.

"Vessel will bridge that gap by delivering the parts needed so a company can focus on the end goal — which is to create a viable business as competitively as possible, while connecting their product to their customers," Sieler continues. "Then, when the client has traction, they have the financial resources to bring in the elements necessary to grow their business — from both a production and a manufacturing standpoint — to support the sales they've discovered."

THE APPROACH

- "COMPASS" INITIAL INTAKE & ALIGNMENT
- "NAVIGATOR" GAP ANALYSIS (RECOMMENDATIONS & PLAN)
- "WORKFORCE" SUPPLY CHAIN SERVICES
 - SOURCING, MANUFACTURING & LOGISTICS
 - STRATEGIC OVER-WATCH & CHANGE MANAGEMENT
 - MANAGED & PROJECT MANAGEMENT SERVICES
 - OPERATED & FULFILLED BY VESSEL
 - BUILD, TRAIN, OPERATIONALIZE & DOCUMENT
 - TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

THE FOCUS

- R&D & PRODUCT EVALUATION
- PLAN, SOURCING, MANUFACTURING, LOGISTICS
- COMPLEXITY ALIGNMENT & VISUALIZATION
- TEAM CAPABILITIES & EXPERTISE
- GO-TO-MARKET REALITIES & APPROACH
- OPERATIONS (LEGAL, FINANCIAL, SALES & MARKETING)
- TECHNOLOGIES & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
- ERP, CRM, INVENTORY MANAGEMENT
- CUSTOMER TRACTION, FEEDBACK & APPROACH
- INTERNAL ADOPTION & CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENTS

