



Custom Cable Is Here to Stay

Accessible, Affordable, Fast and Easy

When design engineers who need special cable constructions hear the word custom, they often cringe, conjuring up dollar signs and delays. That doesn't have to be the case anymore. Due to customer feedback and overseas competition, progressive manufacturers have adapted to make custom cable solutions accessible.

Conventional manufacturing methods used in the production of wire and cable necessitate large-volume runs. Therefore, many manufacturers have primarily supplied, and continue to do so, standardized or commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) products. Traditional manufacturing involves multiple machine setups, generates costly scrap to refine the process, and requires time to clean the machine after a production run. As a result, the cost to make 1,000 feet (304.8 meters) of cable is nearly the same as the cost for 5,000 feet (1524 meters) of cable. While COTS cable is appropriate for some applications, customers purchasing it do not have control over design, tolerances or materials that can require them to select a COTS product that does not meet their requirements.

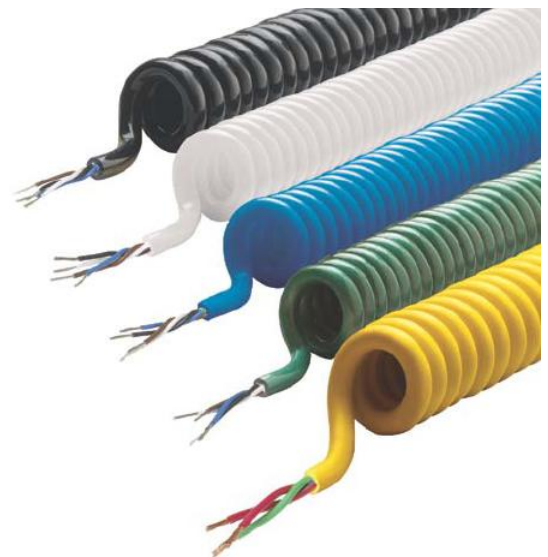
In many applications, wire and cable are an integral part of the system and its performance. Yet, customers require solutions designed and manufactured for specific needs. Now that custom cable is readily available and affordable, buyers can get their precise design needs met, at a manageable cost, with shorter lead times.

How has this custom product offering become possible? Innovative cable manufacturers have developed methods to build prototypes at lower cost, minimize scrap and dramatically shorten setup times and production runs.

They've done this by adopting practices that emphasize responsiveness and agility. Responsiveness involves talking and listening to customers. Industry surveys repeatedly indicate that customers want quick responses to inquiries, speed in negotiating terms and fast delivery of product.

Given this need for speed, progressive manufacturers have improved their customer relations management programs and taken advantage of Internet-based and other electronic tools that enhance the customer experience. They also have implemented programs such as Lean and Six Sigma® to improve manufacturing processes and efficiency.

"Every customer should have easy, affordable, timely access to custom cable products when that's the best solution for an application," says Katina Kravik, CEO of Northwire Inc., Technical Cable, a cable manufacturer based in Osceola, Wis. "When the application requires smaller run custom cable solutions, customers do not want to make large minimum purchases or pay exorbitant prices and wait six to 12 weeks for delivery. Smart manufacturers have adapted to provide customers with this necessary service. Customers want their cable *their* way, not the manufacturer's way. It's a change of mindset in our industry."






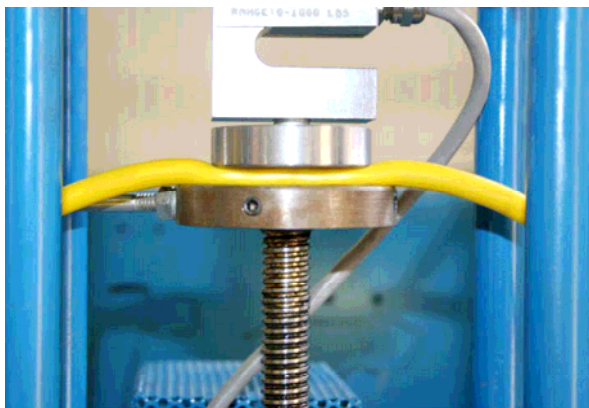
"In many cases, offshore suppliers can't manufacture and ship quickly, communication may be challenging, warranties and guarantees can be difficult to enforce, proprietary designs might not be protected and short-run custom solutions can be unattainable," says Kravik. "Northwire has natural advantages over competitors."

Another service innovative manufacturers can provide, and customers increasingly expect them to provide, is engineering design expertise. This proficiency helps customers navigate the complex channels of international and domestic standards, environmental regulations, agency compliance and cable product specifications such as NFPA 79, REACH and RoHS.

The days are over when buyers want their product specification inquiries met with, "You have to buy 25,000 feet (7620 meters) minimum" or "We don't stock it but can get it in 10 weeks." Customers want and should be able to select specifications and have some control over design, tolerances and materials.

There's a place for COTS wire and cable in many applications. But custom cable is no longer impractical. It's affordable, fast and easy to order. Custom cable is in demand.

Northwire offers the fastest lead times in the industry with no minimum-length or order quantity requirements. Contact us today for a custom cable designed for your application at no additional charge.



Nine important questions to ask your cable supplier

1. What is the manufacturer's minimum length quantity requirement?
2. Is your supplier willing and able to develop prototypes and engineering samples under reasonable terms?
3. Does the manufacturer have design expertise and are they responsive to your design requests?
4. Does the manufacturer have in-house expertise with approval issues and requirements such as UL and CSA?
5. Can development costs be recouped after production orders begin?
6. Can the manufacturer's products be backed by actual testing?
7. Will the manufacturer guarantee its cables to perform to design requirements including cold bend, crush, impact, temperature extremes, electrical, tensile and elongation, water block, sterilization, chemical and abrasion?
8. Will the manufacturer back up its quality claims and performance of the cable relative to agency approvals and special design requirements?
9. How will the manufacturer mitigate problems that may occur?

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