It was founded in 1947, primarily to market hand-instruments imported from post-war Europe. Today, Parkell is the country’s largest manufacturer of small electronic devices (ultrasonic scalers, apex locators, e-surges, etc.) It also manufactures a wide range of silicone materials (Blu-Mousse, Cinch Vinyls, etc.) In addition Parkell has a close relationship and exclusive distribution agreement for adhesive and restorative products (C&B-Metabond, Touch&Bond, Amalgambond, etc) with the medical subsidiary of Japan’s industrial giant Mitsui.

FLEXING THE POWER OF “SMALL”
Parkell isn’t a “small company” in dental industry terms, however it has somehow avoided the temptations of excessive growth. Parkell has no sales force. It doesn’t sponsor speakers or educational programs. Instead, it markets almost entirely through direct mail and advertising.

According to Alex Mitchell, Owner and CEO, one of the benefits of being small is that Parkell can afford to focus on a certain kind of dentist.

Mitchell says, “If a dentist only feels comfortable buying products he hears about at seminars, he’ll probably never even try a Parkell product. And we can live with that. We target the reader-dentist, those dentists who really enjoy learning about products and techniques before they decide to try something.”

In addition to the Parkell Today “catazine” (part catalog/part magazine), which is mailed monthly to every US dentist with a detectable pulse, Parkell publishes a number of targeted non-promotional newsletters written by its Director of Research Dr. Nelson Gendusa. Though conversational in tone, and sometimes

Parkell is a family-operated dental company headquartered in Farmingdale, Long Island...about an hour outside of New York City.
humorous, these newsletters go far beyond conventional company promotional literature. They are highly clinical in nature, and often discuss new areas of research that are overlooked by busy wet-gloved dentists. For example, a Parkell Newsletter was the first US publication to discuss the hybrid layer (today’s dominant theory of bonding), and the dangers of drawing clinical conclusions from in-vitro research.

Another “small company” characteristic: Parkell remains private. This means there’s never a conflict between customer interests and shareholder interests.

Five years ago, when the company was developing its line of ultrasonic inserts, it ran into an unexpected snag while upgrading from prototype to production. The quality of the initial production simply wasn’t as good as the custom-made samples. Though most users probably would not have noticed a difference, Mitchell refused to release products for shipment until the manufacturing operation could consistently produce inserts that were indistinguishable from the pre-production standards. The result was an embarrassing delay in the initial shipments … but a better product.

“I’d like to think I would have made the decision to scrap the initial production runs if we were a public company. However, if I were faced with shareholders screaming for month-to-month sales increases, there might have been some temptation to say that those early inserts were “good enough.”

DIRECT TO THE DENTIST

Though some dental dealers offer Parkell products, mail-order houses often avoid their products, because Parkell offers only a limited dealer discount. Most of the company’s sales and 100% of its marketing effort is direct to the dentist.

According to Research Director Dr. Nelson Gendusa, direct distribution permits the company to more closely track dentist feedback. During 2001, Parkell conducted more than 13 different surveys among users of its products: Everything from intensive multi-page questionnaires sent to users of the new Touch&Bond no-etch bonding agent, to short surveys to find out how they could improve their service.

“We pay a LOT of attention to the feedback,” says Gendusa. “And we have very few products that haven’t been affected by these survey results.” When the company originally introduced C&B-Metabond their initial surveys immediately showed that the step-by-step instructions simply weren’t clear. So Parkell replaced them with a 12-page booklet that provided separate instructions depending on the specific application. The company recently added a slower setting version of its Mach-2 die silicone because surveys showed that the original Mach-2 set too fast for some applications.

A TRIAL PERIOD KEEPS THEM HONEST

According to Mitchell, Parkell’s entire marketing program orbits around two

THE UGLIEST ADVERTISING IN DENTISTRY… AND PROUD OF IT.

Most dental journal advertising is intended to create interest in a product and encourage requests for more information. Parkell advertising is intended entirely to generate orders.

As Mitchell likes to emphasize, traditional advertising is like asking for a first date. Parkell’s advertising on the other hand, is more like a down-on-the-knees marriage proposal. When you’re proposing a mail-order marriage, you’re obligated to tell the reader a lot you might not reveal on a first date, including the limitations of a product. As a result the typical Parkell ad includes applications, instructions, trial-period info, warranty description, the results of independent studies and a detailed listing of what’s included in the package.

Parkell claims it doesn’t actually set out to create ugly ads, but by the time they’ve included everything a potential customer might want to know before buying (they call it the “kitchen sink approach”), the general effect is pretty much a Ginzu Knife ad.

“I heard of one lecturer who routinely refers to us as the ‘National Enquirer of Dentistry,’” laughs Mitchell. “Some of the applications we show may be a bit off the wall. But this speaker ignores one important difference between us and the famous tabloid. Our messages are 100% true.”
centers: the company’s risk-free trial policy and its five-year electronics warranty.

“We want everyone who orders a product from us to know with absolute certainty that if they try a Parkell product and they decide that it isn’t what they’re looking for, they can return it and get their money back. We arrange to have it picked up at our expense, and the refund check even includes the original shipping charges. In other words the only thing trying the product has cost them is their time.”

All Parkell electronic devices and adhesives come with a 3-month trial. Most other products come with a 1-month trial.

According to Mitchell, the risk-free trial affects a lot more than the returned merchandise policy. For example, it reduces the incidence of what he calls “smoke and mirrors” in their advertising.

“It’s in our pure self-interest to be certain that dentists who buy a product have a realistic understanding up front not only of what a product can do, but also its limitations. If we say that our Touch&Bond bonding agent eliminates post-op sensitivity, and it really DOESN’T, three months is plenty of time for a dentist to notice and demand his money back.”

“Our Turbo 25/30 ultrasonic scaler was introduced back in 1993, but since then we’ve made something like 18 major design improvements to reduce the service rate. As a result Parkell devices are arguably the most trouble-free in the industry.”

**IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT**

Most of the company’s electronic devices such as the Turbo 25/30 scaler and the new Foramatron D-10 all-fluids apex locator are the brain-children of Mike Sharp, Vice President of engineering. He personally designs the devices and hand fabricates them through the prototype phase. The result is fast development and an economy that’s difficult to match in larger corporations.

For example, in mid-summer 2000 Sharp suggested a design concept that would dramatically reduce the cost of an apex locator that worked with conductive fluids in the canal. Within a week he was given the green light. At the end of four weeks he had several working prototypes being tested by endodontists. Though there were many subsequent refinements to improve appearance and usability, the finished product was introduced in November.

According to Mitchell, Sharp is a genius at coaxing maximum performance from mass-produced electronic components created for consumer products like televisions and VCRs. If you open a Parkell device, you’ll see some of the biggest names in semiconductors, but rarely will you find a custom component. The result is the extreme economy for which Parkell devices are known. Despite their 3-month trial and 5-year warranty, Parkell electronics generally cost about 50% of comparable devices.

**OUR 9-POINT PROMISE TO YOU**

When you first try a product, you have a right to send it back for a full, prompt refund.

Unlike most of our competitors, we make it easy for you to change your mind if you’re not totally satisfied. So most Parkell products come with at least a 1-month, risk-free trial. All of our electronic devices – plus Amalgambond, C&B Metabond, Touch & Bond, MicroBond, and TotalBond – come with a 3-month trial. If you buy a product for the first time and it doesn’t live up to your expectations within the trial period, we’ll have it picked up at our expense. And of course, your refund will include shipping and handling charges.

You have a right to be treated with courtesy, understanding and honesty.

It’s a shame we have to make such a promise but in this day and age, courtesy and honesty are not necessarily a given. So if you call during business hours, you’ll talk to a real person, not a machine.

You have a right to fast delivery.

Most orders are on their way within 24 hours. If there will be a delay, we’ll give you an honest estimate of the shipping date.

You have a right to prompt answers to questions about your order.

We’re very good...but not perfect. Our customer service system and our dedicated people keep errors to a minimum but when accidents happen we admit them and work with you to correct them to your satisfaction.

You have a right to knowledgeable, toll-free technical assistance.

Call us toll-free and you can generally talk directly to the dentist or engineer who designed the product. We publish an on-going series of full-color clinical articles that are so non-promotional, dental magazines have actually asked permission to reprint them. In addition, our Director of Research writes several easy-to-read clinical newsletters. If you purchase adhesives or impression materials from us, we automatically add you to the mailing list for the appropriate newsletter. (No charge, of course.)

You have a right to a truthful description of the product you’re buying.

We will not promise more than our products can deliver. Most manufacturers (including Parkell) think the stuff they make is terrific. Still, “advertising” should not be synonymous with “hyperbole.”

You have a right to expect a manufacturer to stand behind his products with a significant warranty.

All Parkell electronics are covered by a comprehensive 5-year warranty. (Cables, handpieces and hoses are covered by a 1-year warranty.)

If a device ever goes on the blink, you have a right to prompt, inexpensive repair.

93% of all electronic devices sent to us for repair are fixed and on their way back to you within 72 hours of arriving at our door. Because of our 5-year warranty, most repairs are performed at no charge. And if the warranty doesn’t apply, our service charges are very modest.

If you are ever dissatisfied with a Parkell product or service, you have a right to speak to any Parkell manager.

So relax. Take a deep breath. Pick up the phone and call us toll-free. We promise to treat you like a friend.

Alex Mitchell
Chairman

P.S. And if you ever feel that we haven’t lived up to our pledge, I want to hear from you!