

More than just money

Fastener maker Barton Cold-Form's managing director, Paul Denning, reflects on the West Midlands Accelerate initiative, of which it has made good use. It's not just about the money, he says

Manufacturers often try to obtain more Government support, so it is little wonder that so many West Midlands automotive suppliers have eagerly taken advantage of Accelerate.

The initiative is celebrating its 10th birthday this year and Barton Cold-Form (see page 21) has been tapping into this scheme for about eight of those years.

This has seen us secure grants towards new machinery and business development, take part and subsequently host supply chain improvement projects and, more recently, receive guidance on our relocation to a new £4 million facility.

It would be naive of me to suggest that the first time we got involved our first questions to the Business Link adviser weren't anything other than 'how much money can we get our hands on?' 'Could we get the vital cash needed to purchase a CNC controlled multi-die heading machine and what are the chances there'll be anything left in the 'piggy bank' to train a few of our staff to get the most out of it?'

I'm sure many MDs from all over the country will be nodding in agreement or raising a wry smile at these lines, but the reality is that in these competitive times any additional funding could make all the difference in launching new products, retaining orders and breaking into untapped markets.

In that time, we have transformed the way we operate as a company,



increased turnover to £9 million and secured a number of measurable QCD (Quality, Cost, Delivery) improvements, passing these on to both customers and suppliers.

Eight years of experience have given me the opportunity to reflect a little deeper on the additional benefits Barton Cold-Form has received.

First and foremost, the talented individuals that run the program are very good at involving themselves with companies and understanding their requirements in fine detail, often suggesting efficient ways of utilising available funds to maximise the results to benefit the participating companies.

Second, I believe the Accelerate team has done more than any other organisation in the UK to instil a much-

needed sense of belief in the West Midlands' automotive industry. In the first stage of its development, the initiative forgot about the word 'survival' and instead concentrated on helping manufacturers achieve world class performance.

This was no idle boast either. You only have to look at the fall-out of the MG Rover crisis to see how many companies heeded the message and are now, although slightly winded at the time, taking considerable strides forward. Accelerate's emphasis has also moved on a stage and is now focused on winning new business and ensuring that local suppliers are well placed to trade globally.

Barton Cold-Form has embraced this approach and is already supplying parts into MG Rover's buyer, Nanjing, and, as we speak, is only a few months away from launching a Polish distribution centre that puts us in a great position to target Eastern Europe.

I'm not saying that we wouldn't have achieved it without external support, but there's nothing like creating a groundswell of popular opinion to provide the necessary confidence required to make such a move.

So Accelerate is about more than just money. It's about changing the mindset of an industry that was on the ropes and giving it the tools and the culture needed to evolve and become a world force once again. □

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