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Work still to be done



Not for the first time *Machinery* finds itself writing about the West Midlands Accelerate initiative and the success with which it is associated.

Our cover story this issue involves the coming together of nine like-minded, non-competing sub-contractors in pursuit of OEM business, supported by funding from Accelerate (courtesy of the European Regional Development Fund). The initial intention was to establish a 10-company group that could take on and deliver a sub-assembly to an OEM

– the Midlands Assembly Network (MAN).

It has taken three years to establish a stable group of nine companies, and the main objective, that of winning a major sub-assembly order, is near but still in the future. However, the group has had astounding success in its last 12 months, winning new business to the tune of £8 million and employing an additional 50 people across the nine group members.

MAN's success was celebrated last month at the annual Accelerate Awards evening where it picked up the top place in the Awards' 'Partnership' category. Local success, yes, but this

example speaks to a wider audience. It is

a group that is uniquely successful not just in the West Midlands but in the UK as a whole. More than that, MAN has attracted attention from European countries at events on the continent: 'how has such a successful group been created?' is the question posed, reports Pete West, Accelerate project manager.

Some clear pointers emerge from the MAN example. It was set up initially by a consultant and managed externally with funding both flowing through and consumed by the consultant. While an external agent was critical to bringing the companies together, only once the companies managed themselves, with buy-in at top management level, did things start to motor.

The companies do not have competing capabilities, as is often the case with other such groupings/clusters here in the UK and Europe. This is hugely important in the cross-selling by each of each other's, and MAN's, services. It's important, too, in the sharing of customers; each company introducing others personally to cement a new relationship. Add to this also the sharing of best practice and various bits of 'intelligence'.

The funding to achieve this has not been huge – some £150,000 over three years. Unfortunately, Accelerate's funding may cease at the end of the year. MAN may not need continued financial support, but others will. MAN's success, as well as that of other companies helped by Accelerate, is a strong argument for the initiative's continuation. More than that it is an argument for support like this to offered more generally, not only in the West Midlands. Those who value Accelerate should make their voices heard in favour of its continuation. It would be more than a shame to see this head of steam dissipate. □

MAN has had astounding success, winning new business to the value of £8 million and taking on 50 more employees

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