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News from Accelerate

Sorion offers beacon of hope to automotive supply sector

Birmingham engineers Sorion have offered a beacon of hope to automotive suppliers across the West Midlands by demonstrating that orders are still possible even in this current climate – providing you get the right sort of help.

The company, which supplies a comprehensive range of diagnostic products and testing equipment to the automotive and manufacturing industries, has secured new business worth almost £440,000 after receiving support from Accelerate's international initiative AutoZone.

The new orders, won against strong competition from German firms, are with a British luxury car maker and an Italian sports car manufacturer. Not only have the orders secured the firm for 2009, but Sorion is now looking to take on additional skilled engineers to fulfil the contracts.

Funded and managed by supply chain support programme Accelerate, which is backed by Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, AutoZone supports companies looking to cash-in on the multi-million pound order pipeline serving the European automotive sector.

Funding from the initiative enabled representatives from Sorion to visit last year's European Automotive Testing Expo in Stuttgart, a commitment the company might not have made had it not been for the additional support.

Phil Yates, Managing Director of Sorion, said: "Had it not been for Accelerate's support we may not have been able to attend the show and if we hadn't then we would almost certainly have missed out on these latest orders.

"I have to say that last year was a tough one for us and we would probably have been struggling, as others are now, had it not been for the new work. As it is, this new business means security for us for the remainder of this year and we are even looking to take on a new software engineer with applications experience to help us fulfil the orders."

The company, based at the Magreal Industrial Estate, Ladywood, was formed in 1990 and currently employs ten people.

“We specialise in the production and integration of software systems to help firms improve their manufacturing processes, traceability and testing. A great deal of our work involves testing of sub-assemblies such as seats. Each seat is different but has to be tested thoroughly,” added Mr Yates.

The two contracts utilise the same piece of equipment – one that calibrates the seat tolerances according to the weight of the passenger. Legislation in the United States – where many of these premier cars will ultimately be sold – stipulates that airbags now have to have charges which activate proportionate to the weight of the person sitting on them.

“Put simply, if a smaller person is sitting on the seat then the charge will be light but if that person is heavier then the charge will be greater therefore each seat has to be individually calibrated,” said Mr Yates.

“Cars cannot be shipped to the US without this calibration so the manufacturers have to get it. The legislation permits an accuracy of 200g but we have managed to achieve around 20g, which is one of the reasons why these companies have opted to give us their business.”

Sorion counts among its customers leading manufacturers such as Aston Martin, Bentley, BMW, Jaguar Land Rover, Honda and Nissan. It also works with Tier 1 suppliers such as Coventry-based seat manufacturer Lear, Denso and Magna Automotive.

Pete West, joint project manager for AutoZone, said: “We were pleased to offer help to Sorion in their attempts to secure work and readily agreed to part-fund their visit to the Stuttgart exhibition.

“Our faith has been rewarded after they landed these two major orders and we are delighted with what they have been able to achieve. It just goes to show that even in these difficult times for the automotive supply sector there are success stories to be found and this should give heart to everyone currently experiencing difficulties.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Now in its thirteenth year of operation, Accelerate has grown into one of the most successful supply chain initiatives in the UK.

Driven by the changing face of the industry, the programme has assisted over 4000 companies in implementing best practice manufacturing systems, securing production efficiencies and cultivating workforce development.

Going forward, Accelerate will continue to support the evolving needs of the West Midlands supply chain, as it maximises the global opportunities of the 21st century.

Accelerate offers financial assistance towards:

Business Development

Collaborative Supplier Networks

Management and Workforce Development

Technology Transfer Centres

Supply Chain Network Programmes

The programme, which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), is managed by Birmingham Chamber of Commerce.

The ERDF provides assistance for investment which creates or maintains jobs, for infrastructure projects, for education and training in development of local businesses, and for research and development.

Issued by HCL Marketing Communications, The Innovation Centre, Keele University Science Park, Keele, Staffordshire, ST5 5NB.

For further details or interview opportunities, please contact Duncan Tift on 01782 667050 or 07590 305040. Email: Duncan@hcl.uk.com