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£400,000 success story for engineering firm

ENGINEERING

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Birmingham engineering company Sorion has bucked the automotive industry downturn by winning an order worth more than £400,000 against competition from Germany.

The Ladywood company, which supplies diagnostic products and testing equipment to the automotive and manufacturing industries, won the new business with the help of Accelerate's international initiative, AutoZone.

The new orders, worth nearly £440,000 in total, are with an un-named British luxury carmaker and an Italian sportscar manufacturer.

Sorion said that not only have the orders secured the firm for 2009, but they are now looking to take on additional skilled engineers to fulfil the contracts.

“This new business means security for us for the remainder of this year

PHIL YATES

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.

Sorion managing director Phil Yates 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 in Ladywood, was formed in 1990 and currently employs ten people. It specialises in the production and integration of software systems to help companies improve their manufacturing processes, traceability and



Pete West of Accelerate (foreground) with Sorion MD Phil Yates (left) and commercial director Steve Hayes

testing. “A great deal of our work involves testing of sub-assemblies such as seats,” said Mr Yates. “Each seat is different but has to be tested thoroughly.”

Under the new contract, Sorion is supplying equipment that calibrates 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 business.”

Sorion counts among its customers leading manufacturers such as Bentley, Aston Martin, 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.

“It just goes to show that, even in these difficult times for the automotive supply sector, there are success stories and this should give heart to everyone currently experiencing difficulties.”

UPDATE

Stop dithering over car package says city MP

Birmingham MP and Tory front bench spokesman Andrew Mitchell has accused the government of dithering over its support package for the UK car industry.

On the eve of the West Midlands Auto Industry Summit in Birmingham, Mr Mitchell said the ‘Mandelson Plan’, a £2.3 billion package of aid for the industry, failed to address all of its challenges, and called for the introduction of widespread loan guarantee schemes.

Mr Mitchell, Shadow Minister for Birmingham, said: “The fear is that the clock is ticking for the car industry and action is needed now. The Conservative Party has been calling for help for small, medium and large businesses since November last year and the delay so far from the Government has already resulted in job losses and problems for the industry. Whilst any support from Government is welcome it is clear that there are still a number of concerns about their proposed scheme.”

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