

MAS-NEPA - Expert training accelerates business growth

An automotive supplier in the Tees Valley is back on the road to success.

Following a downturn in business, Stockton-based Nifco UK sought support from its parent company and One NorthEast and has transformed into an award-winning firm, with healthy profits and £2m worth of new business in the last financial year.

In June, Nifco celebrated its resurgence by claiming the Plastics Industry Awards' coveted "Processor of the Year 2008" and "Best Training and Development Programme 2008", claiming this award for the second year running.

Nifco design and manufacture functional plastic parts for the automotive industry. It is the UK subsidiary of a Japanese-owned company and boasts an impressive customer list including Nissan, Ford, Toyota and Honda.

One NorthEast introduced Nifco to publicly funded support such as North East Productivity Alliance (NEPA), who provided training for 650 people which is viewed as being the grass-roots of Nifco's revival.

NEPA is a Train to Gain intervention, now delivered in partnership with the Manufacturing Advisory Service by PA Consulting. Bringing these two initiatives together means that manufacturers of any size can go to one organisation to meet their business needs. Alongside this, Business Link and MAS-NEPA work together to ensure that the full range of public sector solutions - such as access to finance - can be accessed easily.

Nifco also received support for seminars and conferences such as "Lessons from Japan" which carried a strong message on the importance of communication; kaizen - continuous improvement; and quality circles, which are groups of workers who meet to discuss workplace improvements. All three were strongly embraced as the major pillars of Nifco UK's revival strategy.

Nifco's parent company continued to support the finances of the business and underpinned efforts with guidance, resource and a clear corporate direction which dovetailed with the activities of the local management team and staff members.

Mike Matthews, Managing Director at Nifco, said: "The company had to change. We implemented a business revival plan and brought in assistance from One NorthEast, which has been very understanding and supportive regarding the investment.

"The business has been transformed into a successful, profit making enterprise with motivated staff. By establishing a number of fundamental strategies - superior quality, human resource development, accelerating globalisation, increasing profit and technical development - we have completely turned the business around."

"Today, everything that Nifco strives for is underpinned by a policy of "customer first" and "zero defects" manufactured in a safe environment carried out by competent staff providing solid shareholder value. I believe that manufacturing businesses can be successful in North East England and can succeed on a national and international platform."

Dr Colin Herron, One NorthEast's Manufacturing and Productivity Manager, said: "NEPA works with local companies across North East England to introduce tools and techniques that increase efficiency levels and cut costs.

"By identifying several improvement opportunities at Nifco, it is great to see the firm really reaping the rewards from these changes to become both profit making and award winning.