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Engineer of his own success.

Pragmatism is what engineers are all about. It may earn them derision in the Dilbert cartoons, but, in every imaginable field, it is their determination which oils the wheels of commerce.

Take Gordon Deuchars, the managing director of GA Engineering, on the outskirts of Dundee. His father was a time-served engineer who saw new computerised lathes being introduced. When he came home at night he would tell young Gordon: "I could make a million if I'd one of those machines."

Now his son is doing exactly that.

His firm, which started with a hand lathe in 1992, is now on the point of hitting the £1 million turnover milestone. And he is giving work to 16 highly-skilled operators supplying precision-tooled parts to the oil, agri-business and technology sectors.

Deuchars began as an apprentice turner with a series of local engineering firms. Several of them got into difficulties and ceased trading, to open in a different form the next day.

"It was basically bad management," he said. "I was 19 and in the second year of my apprenticeship and it made me think about how short-sighted management affects other people."

After one of these collapses, he bought a lathe from the liquidator and kept it in a garage. He worked evenings and weekends on his own account, while working full-time for another firm and also sub-contracting to it. "It took the best part of a year to build up a customer base," said Deuchars.



He branched out on his own in 1993, with the help of a £1000 grant and a £2000 loan from the Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust (PSYBT). The money helped him to purchase a second lathe and hire his first employee.

Deuchars' breakthrough came with the purchase of his first computer numerical-controlled lathe, the type his father had waxed lyrical about. "It was all-singing all-dancing," he said.

"My machine could produce components in a fraction of the time of a hand machine. The speeds and feeds were much quicker, and the surface finish was spot on, time and time again."

It cost him £27,000 and was financed by the sale of his car, cash from his father and a modest bank loan. Company turnover soared over the next year to £250,000. "It was a big gamble, but it was very successful," said Deuchars. "We could take on a lot more work."

Projects now range from stainless steel "seabed sieves" for oil rigs, to tiny discs for mobile telephony. GA works with materials such as stainless steel, mild steels, aluminium and bronze.

“turning out quality”



Deuchars bought two more machines in 1997 at a cost of £93,000. "On the train home, I looked at the invoice and thought: 'What have I done?' But it was probably the best move I ever made. It opened so many doors."

He now has 11 machines and GA's growth has led to a subtle change in its relationship with customers. Instead of Deuchars chasing orders, major clients now come to him.

To smooth out demand, Deuchars has tried to create a "portfolio of customers", with no one client accounting for more than 15% of monthly sales.

Clients include Expo North Sea, for whom GA makes oil rig flare heads to be sold to Mexico, Norway and Nigeria; agricultural engineers Reekie; and Ferranti Photonics.

Business is weighted towards the oil industry and turnover is expected to rise to 25% to £1 million this year. "The plan in the next few years is to buy my premises rather than renting," Deuchars said.

"And if a big multinational came along to buy us out, I'd certainly consider it, so long as I knew that my guys were taken care of."

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