

Making it in Leeds

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Manufacturers in the city of Leeds have risen to the challenges of globalisation with a winning combination of enterprise and innovation that is enabling them to build market leadership and win new business in the face of fierce competition from overseas.

Leeds is the UK's third largest manufacturing centre, with over 1,800 firms employing almost 39,000 people. Manufacturing accounts for 8.6% of total employment in Leeds and punches above its weight by generating 10.8% of the city's total £15 billion output.

Despite international trends towards outsourcing production to developing economies, Leeds companies have maintained and enhanced their position globally through innovation, diversification, and a shift into high tech product solutions and processes which are difficult to replicate.

Paul Stephens, Leeds City Council's chief economic services officer said: "There are some highly innovative companies based in the city, pushing the boundaries and, in some cases, leading the world in their respective fields."

"The sector is also incredibly diverse, the majority of manufacturing companies are small to medium sized businesses, they play a key role in the economic life of the city, adding to the diversity and vitality of the economy and ensuring the city's fortunes don't depend on individual industries or companies."

Innovation and enterprise

Specialised engineering remains the largest sub-sector with around 13,250 employees. Printing and publishing, medical technology and food and drink production are also major employers. But Leeds manufacturers turn out a wide range of products used across the world, from artificial heart valves, to precision motor components and jet turbine blades.

Leeds-based company Glassflake Ltd is Europe's largest producer of microscopic flaked glass particles, which are used for a variety of applications from paints and plastics to power stations. Competitors in the Far East have been unable to replicate the company's high tech production process, and Glassflake is rapidly expanding its share of emerging markets in the region.

General Manager Simon Brigham comments: "There is tremendous potential for us to work with Chinese companies. We have recently appointed a network of local agents to service these markets on the ground. We're already supplying the rapidly expanding Chinese power station network. The car manufacturing industry is another sector we're examining."

Print jobs

Leeds is the UK's largest centre for printing, packaging and publishing outside London, with a workforce of around 6,900.

Major firms in the city include Nampak, producer of the new 'unzippable' sandwich packs, originally created for Marks and Spencers, which have revolutionised the FMCG packaging market and garnered multiple awards around the world. Recent investment at the Leeds site has included £4m on a six-colour Heidelberg Speedmaster press and a Bobst diecutter.

Agfa, a world leader in prepress solutions for the printing and publishing industries, is also based in Leeds. It is the world's largest plate supplier with the most extensive range of prepress and inkjet solutions.

The Leeds site's rigorous approach to best practice has led to national awards for environmental performance, including the MX Arup Award for Sustainable Manufacturing for improving its treatment of waste by 98.5%, virtually eliminating landfill.

At the forefront of the digital revolution, Communis is Europe's largest provider of intelligence driven communications delivering more profitable communications processes to an extensive international customer base.

The group plans, produces and delivers integrated communications across multiple channels, including print, email, SMS and the web, rapidly generating individually personalised, mass communications based on data insight.

Appetite for production

Some 4,200 people work in food and drink production in Leeds, with companies ranging from famous national brands to smaller independents.

Given Napoleon's thoughts on armies and stomachs, Leeds would make an excellent staging post for latter day expeditions of a more peaceful nature, with a growing reputation for excellence in food manufacture.

Employing some 10,000 people and approaching £1bn turnover, Northern Foods is headquartered in Leeds. Brands include Fox's Biscuits and Goodfella's Pizzas.

Big brands such as Anchor, Lurpak and Cravendale belong to the Arla Foods stable, also headquartered in Leeds, where the biggest of the company's six dairies is also located. Arla controls 25% of the fresh milk market with daily deliveries to over 2,000 supermarkets throughout the UK.

Meanwhile, the long-established Symington name is powering ahead with the Ainsley Harriott range of dried foods, Golden Wonder hot snacks (under license from the Tayto Group) and a wide range of Crosse & Blackwell family meals.

The hand-cut fruit facility of Daniels Group in South Leeds is widely regarded as the finest of its kind in Europe.

More recently established culinary entrepreneurs Karen and Uri Mizrahi typify the ambition of smaller operations. The bakery division of Bagel Nash exports gourmet bagels to over 20 countries across the globe, representing 30% of bakery turnover. The firm's chain of espresso and bagel bars has now reached 12 and continues to expand. In a combined turnover of £5m, bakery sales are 20% ahead and retail 8%, year on year.

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