



YINTONG TALKS WITH...

Ron Williams, owner and managing director of The Blayson Group Ltd

The Blayson Group Ltd is a specialist manufacturer, producing precision casting industrial pattern waxes for engineering foundries. Products made in this way include jewellery, sporting goods, medical implants and aerospace engine and airframe components.

Ron Williams and his company hold a special place in my heart since they were my very first client. Looking relaxed and self-assured as ever, Ron told me that the company had come through the recession but that the economic conditions had been the worst he had ever experienced. "The worst time was actually at the beginning, as we just didn't know how bad it could get."

To survive, Blayson, a £10m turnover, 43 employee company, had to make some quick decisions. With a four-day week and travel reductions, however, they managed to avoid redundancies. "Businesses can get complacent when orders are coming through," Ron commented. "But extreme situations focus the management's thinking. Now the business is running leaner and more efficiently and we are ready to grasp any new business opportunities."

Working closely with Blayson, I am familiar with the company's scope and global reach. By supplying a diverse selection of industries around the world I reckoned they had a comparative advantage. Ron agreed: "when the automotive industry and the general commercial orders were down, Blayson



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benefited from steady volumes from the aerospace and industrial gas turbines sectors."

Though relatively small, Blayson's international footprint is astounding. From manufacturing bases in Britain and Japan, the group supplies customers in 50 countries with China taking up 20 per cent of all orders and set to become a bigger market. A UK Trade & Investment report records that China imported \$350m of aerospace products from the UK in 2008, up 22 per cent on the previous year. Rolls-Royce, the champion of the aerospace industry and active in China for more than 40 years, predicts that up to 2026, China will need some 3000 new aircraft, and 6500 engines, at a total value of \$65 billion.

As a supplier of Rolls-Royce's China operation, Ron is naturally enthusiastic about its



future business in this enormous market. Blayson started by supplying basic products to the Chinese commercial foundries a decade ago, but in recent years, as China increasingly looks to produce higher quality products to compete on the world market, importing quality materials from companies like Blayson has become a necessity.

It is exciting to see British manufacturers playing an important role internationally,

but it is worrying that the UK has so few of them. When I first became Blayson's China consultant nine years ago I noticed that many people in the UK casting industry regarded the emerging markets as tremendous threats. How is the situation now? "Although China is known for its exports, it is also the world's second largest importer. People should recognise the tremendous opportunities it offers," Ron said passionately.

Some may say Blayson is fortunate to have the right products for overseas markets, I suggested, but this may not be the case for other companies. "Partly true," said Ron, "but companies should actively seek opportunities further afield, develop new products and prepare themselves for new market gaps."

"The UK domestic market is tiny compared with the USA and China. Rather than competing here, we should reach out for the untapped 'Blue Ocean'. At Blayson, R&D is a key area and by constantly adjusting ourselves to suit the market trend are we able to have the chance to survive and progress."

I asked Ron for advice for SMEs looking to enter global markets. He emphasised the importance of being open-minded and being willing to take a risk. "If you see or hear a business opportunity in another country, go there and have a look. Attend conferences, maybe give a presentation, these are good ways to make a link. You never know where the next opportunity will come from."

www.blayson.com

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