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## Accelerator Case Study



West Special  
Fasteners

West Special Fasteners



**Sector:** Manufacturing **Location:** North East Derbyshire **Size:** Medium **Turnover:** £9.7m

### About the business

Founded in 1999 and based in Dronfield, Derbyshire, [West Special Fasteners](#) specialises in manufacturing high-quality stainless steel fasteners for a range of sectors, including defence, construction, renewable energy, oil and gas and even heritage restoration. The company designs and manufactures custom solutions and precision-engineered bolts for many challenging environments. It operates in over 35 countries, supplying precision-engineered fasteners and has a 60 strong workforce.

### Challenges faced

Following a Management Buyout in 2024, the new leadership team at West Special Fasteners were keen to build a stronger understanding of the regional manufacturing landscape and the opportunities available closer to home.

Until then, they hadn't been involved with local business groups and recognised that they could be missing out on valuable connections. By joining the [East Midlands Manufacturing Network](#) (EMMN), led by East Midlands Chamber, they aimed to establish relationships

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East Midlands  
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with other local manufacturers, share knowledge, and explore opportunities for collaboration complementing the support already provided through their national trade association membership.

The team were also keen to learn more about the business support available through the Chamber and its partners, from funding opportunities to skills development and export advice, all of which could play an important role in delivering their ambitious growth strategy both in the UK and internationally.

### Solution and Impact

Through the EMMN forum meetings James Hawkins (CEO) and Simon Grass-Smith (Business Development Manager) have built valuable relationships with fellow manufacturers and EMMN partners which has directly supported development and delivery of its business growth strategy.

Their Sales and Marketing Apprentice has benefitted from attending EMMN meetings, gaining early exposure to professional networking. This experience not only supports confidence and skill development but also contributes towards formal apprenticeship learning outcomes.

Through the EMMN meetings the business heard about the Accelerator business support programme and have taken advantage of 1-to-1 business advice and mentoring from Chamber Business Adviser, Richard Crowden.

With guidance on the application from Richard, West Special Fasteners has secured an Export Accelerator Grant of £8,000 (total project cost £10,504). Currently the business exports to English speaking countries including Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, USA, Finland and Australia. At the moment they see very few enquiries from France, Germany and Brazil but think they could be big markets. The funding will be used to make website improvements to cover these regions, not only in language but also using SEO for those regions. An increase in enquiries will mean higher productivity coming from new territories.

The business has also made the most of skills training attending Accelerator workshops including Practical Guide to Marketing, Negotiating with your Customer – Hints and Tips, Introduction to Marketing AI and ChatGPT as well as several sustainability webinars.

It was also successful in securing the Chamber's £2,000 Bursary which will enable Sales Director, Tim Wilson to attend the Five-Day Director Development Training programme ensuring senior leadership capability grows alongside the business.



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Looking ahead, the management team is working with the Chamber's Innovation team to explore additional support through Innovate UK.

West Special Fasteners have begun engagement with Innovate UK Business Growth with the senior management team having completed a GrowthMapper diagnostic. Further support is planned for next year.

### A word from the business:

*"Richard's support and the Export Accelerator grant have made a real difference to our plans for expanding into new overseas markets."*

**James Hawkins, CEO**

### Support provided:

- 1 to 1 Business Advice
- Export Accelerator
- Workshops
- Sustainability Webinars
- EMMN
- Innovate UK Business Growth

### Impact to business:

- Upskilling workforce
- Cost savings
- Safeguarding jobs
- Improved Productivity
- New Markets

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