

Ad-Vance Engineering... A High Technology Approach To Serving Industry

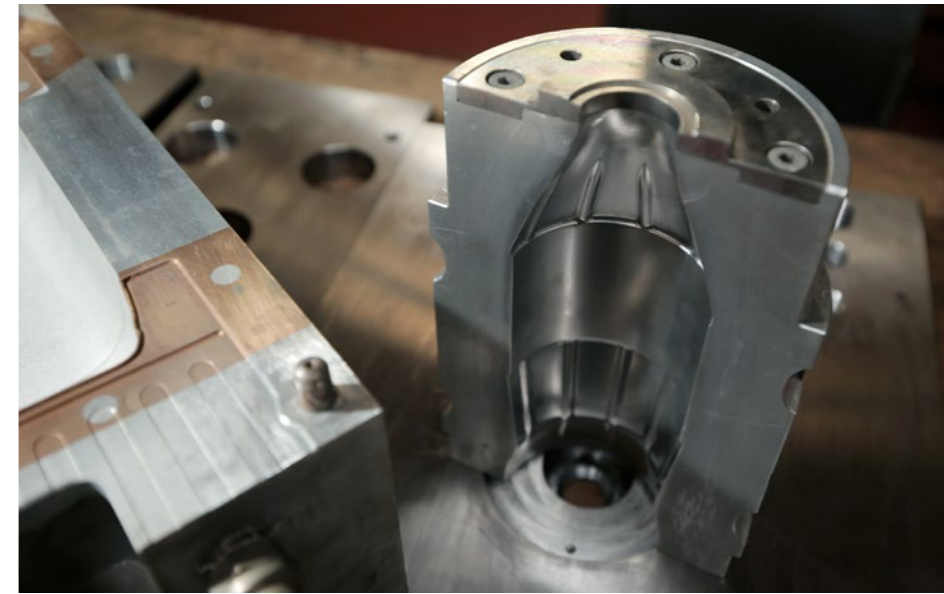


Tucked up next door to the Maze regeneration site and Eikon Exhibition Centre to the west of Lisburn is a Northern Ireland company successfully marrying traditional manufacturing skills with the latest technology.

Ad-Vance Engineering designs and manufactures complex injection moulds for use in the plastics manufacturing industry and it's a company with customers all over the island of Ireland, British Isles and beyond. "There really isn't anyone else doing what we're doing here in Northern Ireland," says Roger Vance, Managing Director and the man who founded the company 14 years ago. "We're the only company capable of manufacturing high specification

moulds for the plastics industry that is based here. All of our competitors are either elsewhere in Southern Ireland the British Isles or overseas. "Our proactive approach to the market enables us to focus on a customer's specific needs and translate those requirements into bespoke solutions." A toolmaker by trade, Dungannon man Vance worked at the old Ford Motor Company plant at Finaghy in Belfast before joining the team at the former Wilsanco Plastics

(now Greiner Packaging) back in Dungannon where he managed the tool room operations. His own company, Ad-Vance Engineering, was established at the Altona Industrial Estate in Lisburn in 2004 but moved in more recent years to a larger site which Ad-Vance acquired close to the Maze complex. The company receives a package of support from Invest Northern Ireland and it's an operation which ticks most of the boxes for the economic support agency.



Not only is it a growing indigenous manufacturer with an important role in the supply chain, but it's also a company built on innovation and one with growing export success. Ad-Vance employs a team of nine and Roger Vance has been joined in the business by his son Sam, a mechanical engineering masters graduate who worked as a project engineer for GE Aviation in Wales before returning home. Ad-Vance Engineering has customers across a range of industry sectors - automotive, medical, healthcare packaging and building products amongst them. "We've built a strong reputation at the quality end of the market," explains Roger Vance. "Plastics manufacturers can source moulds relatively cheaply from Far Eastern manufacturers, but competing on price with China isn't something we want to do. We're manufacturing high quality products for

customers who insist on quality." As well as manufacturing, Ad-Vance Engineering also offers a mould repair service, and is active in technical research and development producing a range of prototypes for its customer base. On the prototyping front, the Lisburn firm can offer the very latest in 3D printing technology, enabling it to produce prototypes quickly as well as relatively cheaply. A member of the Gauge & Tool Makers Association, the company is a past winner of the R&D category at the Lisburn Business Awards and it has taken part in two of Lisburn & Castlereagh Council's Westminster trade missions. "A current focus for us as a company is to make sure that we qualify for the suppliers lists at some of the Tier 1 GB-based manufacturers in the automotive and other key sectors," adds Roger Vance.

"We work in partnership with the companies we supply. We will help to develop their end products right from the design phase. The moulds that we produce and supply, after all, are crucial to their manufacturing process and to the quality of the products they're supply to their customers. "Complex designs normally go through numerous design alterations before sign-off and this requires an approach to toolmaking that combines a partnership approach with a strong focus on quality. "Only locally-based toolmakers can tick all of the boxes for clients, and I think that's why our prototyping expertise is increasingly being recognised." Ad-Vance Engineering plans to recruit new members of staff, but Roger Vance admits that it's verging on the impossible to find skilled toolmakers in

the current marketplace. Two apprentices are currently working with the company, having been recruited from the local further education college. The Lisburn company also has links with the Polymer Research Centre established at Queen's University in Belfast, regularly attends trade shows in GB as well as the annual British Plastics Industry Awards, held last year at the Hilton Park Lane in London. "The fact is that almost every manufacturing industry needs plastics in some shape or form and that's not a situation that is likely to change," says Roger Vance. "Our objective is to continue to produce high quality moulds and to make sure that we build our customer base on the island of Ireland, in Great Britain and overseas." The company offers a complete tooling solution from initial design concepts through to prototyping, manufacture, testing, installation and after-sales repair and maintenance. Investment in the latest CNC machinery and CAD/CAM software systems has helped to ensure that Ad-Vance has the capability to manufacture mould tool components to tolerance of as little as +/- 5 microns. The company's products are sophisticated in design. An injection mould can cost from a few thousand pounds up to £150,000 depending on size and scale. "Traditional toolmaking skills lie behind what we do here. But the manual toolmaking machines have been consigned to history now. It's a very complex, technology-driven 21st century design and manufacturing process, and one with quality at its core."

