

## HOW BROTHER ENGINEERING ENGINEERED SUCCESS IN A RECESSION

Setting up a new engineering company in a recession can be a risky business, but for two brothers from Swansea, the gamble has paid off. Since starting the aptly named Brother Engineering in 2009, Blu and Billy Joe Thomas have seen their company grow from a start-up to an established business generating over half a million pound turnover, within three years.



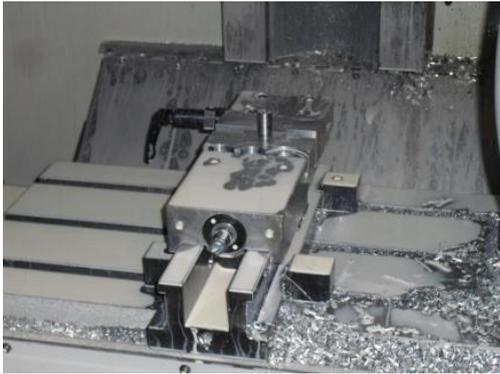
The Thomas brothers had always worked within the local toolmaking industry and despite the recession, believed that there was work out there for a local engineering business making high quality, bespoke fixturing. So they found a general engineering workshop for sale, purchased all the machines and Brother Engineering was born.

To begin with, the fledgling business took in many different types of general engineering work and maintenance, but was limited in its scope by the machines available. The brothers worked hard and invested in new machines so that within 10 months they had the equipment they required to produce quality, turnkey engineering solutions. Within six months they had also taken on another skilled toolmaker and today the company has six employees including two apprentices.



Blu Thomas said: "Starting up in a recession was very hard and we worked long hours but our customers and partners were very supportive." One of those partners was Roemheld (UK) Limited. Having worked with Roemheld components for over 12 years, Blu Thomas was keen to carry not only carry on using them, but also to become a local Roemheld distributor. With Roemheld's support, Brother Engineering has become a Roemheld Centre of Excellence for the South Wales

region and is authorised to sell the full range of Roemheld products including



hydraulic elements, vices, 5-axis clamps and vices, quick die change components, zero point mounting systems, Jergens 5-Axis vices and work supports.

Blu Thomas said: "We wanted Roemheld as a quality partner. As we also maintain fixtures we see the other end of things and we know that Roemheld products last longer. The range is excellent and being able to easily view and download CAD files from the website is extremely useful."

From its humble beginnings, Brother Engineering now supplies to local automotive Tier 1 suppliers, including Continental Teves based at Ebbw Vale, as well as to a range of local companies within the aerospace and medical sectors.



Matthew Price, Engineering Manager at Continental Teves, said: "From small to large projects, Brother Engineering and Roemheld provide high quality robust work holding solutions."

Blu Thomas believes the company's success is down to their unique offering. He said: "We are the only company in South Wales that can provide the complete solution of design, manufacture, test and maintenance. We also have expertise in machine and fixture integration. We excel in designing and delivering anything highly technical or out of the ordinary."

Brother Engineering specialises in producing jigs and fixtures and special purpose machinery, with particular expertise in designing, building and testing hydraulic fixturing. Utilising a solid CAM/Solid works design system, Blu is responsible for the design side of the business, drawing upon previous years of experience as a design manager, while Billy Joe runs the workshop. As a start up, the company has

received help from the Welsh Assembly and with its encouragement, has applied for and been awarded the 'Investors in People' accolade.

The company is committed to creating apprenticeships as both of the brothers began



work as apprentices themselves. Plans are already in the pipeline for Brother Engineering to take on a further two apprentices, who will be trained up by the company's skilled toolmakers and will learn their craft on manual machines before progressing to CNC machining.

This is vital as the company uses a

mixture of modern technology and 'old school' toolmaking expertise to meet the varying needs of its customers. In addition, all the employees are multi-skilled as each one will be responsible for a job from start to finish, rather than different engineers carrying out different processes. The brothers believe this not only improves efficiency and increases individual ownership, it also improves quality control as it replaces end-of-line inspection with constant in-process inspection.

In February 2012, Brother Engineering moved to new, larger premises just outside Swansea, but the company has no plans to grow much larger. At its current size, there are no manager/ shopfloor distinctions and all employees, including Blu and Billy Joe, work together as a team on projects, drawing upon their wide range of experience.

Blu said: "We want to stay small because we believe it will enable us to maintain our high standards of quality, remain efficient and drive overheads down. We don't employ sales people as we have always been able to rely on repeat business and recommendation. However, we have always, and will always continue to, invest heavily in the right machinery, the right people and the right technology."

To find out more about Brother Engineering, visit [www.brother-engineering.com](http://www.brother-engineering.com) or telephone 07528 834680.