

Textile equipment that's in demand across the globe

Lizzie Murphy

THE region's manufacturing industry has been hit hard during the economic crisis but James Heal is growing in the face of adversity.

The Halifax-based company, which won the SME Manufacturer of the Year category, sponsored by the Manufacturing Advisory Service, designs and makes fabric and colour-testing equipment for textile manufacturers, supplying customers including Marks & Spencer, Victoria's Secret and Louis Vuitton.

It has been a part of Yorkshire's manufacturing industry since 1872 and is the only company in its field still manufacturing in the UK.

This year, the company has increased its sales 10 per cent beyond its target.

Last year's turnover of £6.6m is expected to reach £7.5m, which is above the £7.1m turnover for both 2007 and 2008.

The company is also developing a new purpose-built distribution centre to help manage increased order levels and export logistics effectively and efficiently.

Managing director David Repper said the firm was "elated" to win the award. "We are a successful business and have been for many years but we haven't really shouted about what we do before. Getting this recognition will help us going forward."

The company employs almost 90 people at its 72,000 sq ft headquarters and it has recruited 20 people over the last

WINNER
JAMES H HEAL & CO LTD
SME MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR

year. It also has over 60 agents and distributors in 61 countries.

In 1995, James Heal won the Queen's Award for Export Achievement. About 90 per cent of its current turnover comes from the export market, particularly the main centres of



ELATED: Jon Culshaw presents the award to David Repper, the company's MD.

textile production – China, India and Turkey.

Mr Repper said: "I don't know what is going to happen in the future but as long as the global market continues to be successful then demand for our products will increase.

"Our biggest market is China. Companies like M&S, BHS and Next who manufacture abroad need to be sure that they buy the testing equipment from people like ourselves to make sure the quality doesn't diminish."

James Heal has invested heavily in new product development and machinery in recent years.

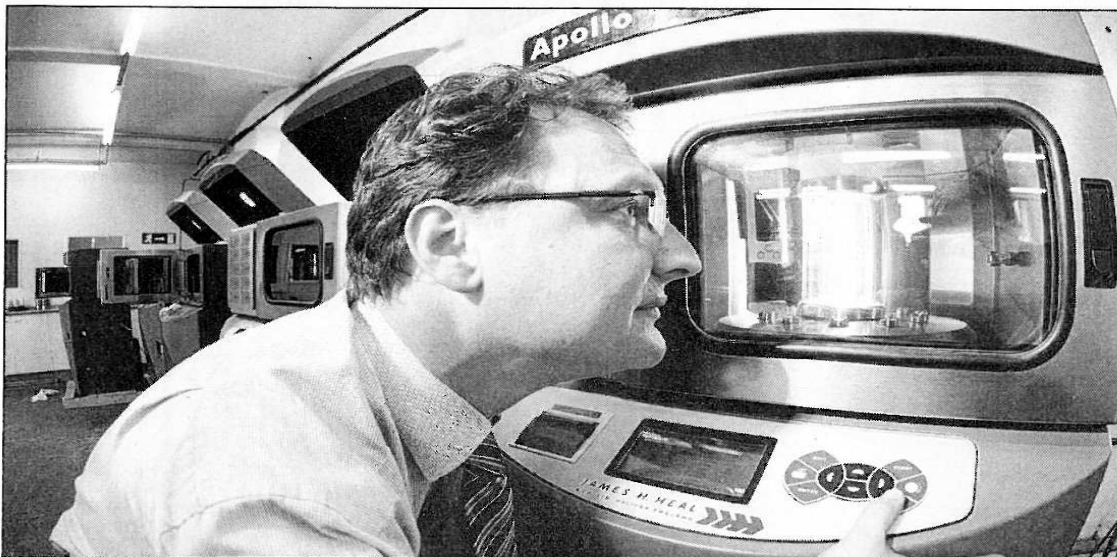
Last year it also adopted a "lean manufacturing" approach, working with the Manufacturing Advisory Service to find new ways of driving down costs to enable them to remain a UK manufacturer while being more competitive through market development and diversification, such as supplying machinery to test diverse products like hernia patches and wet wipes.

Mr Repper said: "We are into lean manufacturing. If we are going to remain a UK manufacturer, we have to get our costs down to compete.

"With the help of MAS we are well into a lean manufacturing programme, which is all about how to knock the cost out of what we do."

The company is also planning to undergo a rebranding in the next six months.

"The company has been around since 1872 and at no point has anyone stood back and looked at the overall brand. That's something we are looking to address," said Mr Repper.



LEAN AND MEAN: Neil Pryke, engineering director, James H Heal, who champion "lean manufacturing".