

NETWORK

DONCASTER BUSINESS AWARDS

As anticipation builds for the 25th Anniversary Celebration of The Doncaster Business Awards, we revisit the winners from our most recent ceremony.

SOURCING BUSINESS FINANCE IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES

Expert financier, Andrew Austwick, shares his insights on how businesses can secure additional funding when everywhere is already saying "No".

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING RISKS

We take a look at precision-engineering firm, Agemaspark, and how their innovative approach and willingness to embrace change have helped put them on the map (and in space).

Doncaster Chamber May 2023

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Thursday, 1st December

Doncaster Business Awards



The Doncaster Business Awards have been going strong for many years now, with the rapidly-approaching 2023 ceremony marking a special milestone anniversary.

Ever since that inaugural black-tie event in 1998, the Awards has been a true highlight in the local calendar, delivering a triumphant evening of glitz, glamour, live entertainment and proud retrospection.

For the past 25 years, we have been using the ceremony to showcase the most impressive talent in our business

community and it has yet to show any signs of slowing. In fact, while we always strive to outdo ourselves year after year, our 2023 iteration is currently shaping up to be the biggest and best ever.

To commemorate the landmark silver anniversary of the Awards, we will be pulling out all the stops this time. Among other things, there will be a refreshed category list, a grander-scale ceremony and a nostalgic look back at bygone years.

With all that said, now feels like the perfect time to start getting excited for 2023 by reflecting on our most recent winners.

Taking place on December 1, 2022, the latest Business Awards saw a grand total of 13 trophies up for grabs and the competition was incredibly fierce. So let's take a look at the remarkable firms and individuals who managed to stand out from the crowd.

Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility: Orb Recruitment

Bestowed to a private-sector company that has exemplified philanthropic, charitable or moral values — and gone on to make a real difference in Doncaster — last year's "Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility" award went to Orb Recruitment.

The judges were struck by the firm's comprehensive CSR strategy and by how dedicated they are to improving the lives of residents through various different initiatives.

Celebrating this, Stewart Olsen, Group CEO of ORB Recruitment, said: "We're extremely proud of our Doncaster roots and a major part of our business ethos is giving back to the community we are part of, so for our work to be recognised in this way is really special.

"Over the last year we have been involved in a number of initiatives,

including: making a substantial donation to CAST'S 'The Big Give Christmas Challenge' [in order to] promote creative work with Doncaster's deaf artists and young people; supporting a local homeless charity; and renewing our commitment to local football club FC Doncaster.

"It's an exciting period of growth for ORB but, as we build our business, we will always continue to develop the longstanding connection we have with our local community."



A promising firm to begin with, Orb Recruitment was previously named "Business Start-Up" of the year at the 2021 Doncaster Business Awards.

Marketing Campaign of the Year: Venatu Recruitment Group

Shining a spotlight on exceptional PR and advertising, the “Marketing Campaign of the Year” category had an impressive collection of nominees.

Rising to the top of the pack was Venatu Recruitment Group, who totally overhauled their social media presence in 2022, with a regimented posting plan, deeper consideration of their audience, visually dynamic content and a more personal touch in general.

Meanwhile, they also branched out onto TikTok and saw their engagement levels increase tremendously over the course of 12 months. For instance, between January 2021 and June 2022, their LinkedIn followers skyrocketed from 4,153 to 9,620.

Rejoicing over the team’s win, Marketing Manager, John Jenkins said: “The team has been together for less than two

years so this is a fantastic achievement for us. Having support from the upper management team, a clear plan, and a team of creative and hardworking individuals who are empowered to experiment means we approach any task

without fear of failure. I’m so pleased that all the hours we put into this campaign have been recognised and I couldn’t be prouder of the team for all their efforts.”



Venatu Recruitment has a big presence on TikTok, with one of their recent videos garnering 880k views.

Excellence in Customer Service: D.S.O.C

Always putting their clients first, Doncaster Security Operations Centre (D.S.O.C) took home our award for Excellence in Customer Service.

They distinguished themselves here by taking immense pride in the level of service they offer and by evidencing to the judges how this has incentivised repeat and even new business from those in the self-storage industry.

Speaking about this, Ant Hebblethwaite, DSOC Sales Manager, said: “We have won Innovation Awards both locally and internationally. We are very proud of this. However, I would say the Excellence in Customer Service Award is our favourite yet!

“This is an award for our people. Our operators work 24/7, 365 days a year, the teams rotate shifts with each other, and they all work incredibly hard to not

only protect our customers’ sites but also to ensure everyone receives the service they deserve. We have taken on local, national, and international projects [but] our approach never changes. Thank you

all for the recognition of our Customer Service. We are here for you, as always: Tailored, Trusted, Together.”



D.S.O.C was also nominated in the Success Through Innovation & Diversification category.

Business Engaging With Education: Active Fusion

Having made a significant impact in Doncaster, by partnering with both schools and young people, Active Fusion was a more than worthy recipient of the “Business Engaging with Education” award.

With a mission of helping more children develop a love for being active, the charity is dedicated to improving mental health and wellbeing across our city, and does so by working closely with local education providers. The judges were particularly impressed by Active Fusion’s core values, reach, inclusivity and overall impact, noting that the organisation makes a real difference to Doncaster’s youth, from across all different walks of life.

Reflecting upon the win, Lindsay James, Director of Active Fusion, said: “To receive the award of Business Engaging

with Education is a testament to the passion and dedication of our team who are inspired to help young people to develop their life skills and create a positive pathway into employment.

We support 124 schools and connect with 30,000 young people through our Education and Communities programmes helping them to be the best version of themselves.”



Active Fusion strives to increase the physical activity of children and young people from the age of 3 to 24.

Apprentice of the Year: Luke Lawson, Polypipe Building Products

One of our most inspiring categories, the “Apprentice of the Year Award” goes to an individual who displays a real commitment to learning, a strong work ethic and dedication to achieving their potential.

Amidst a tough field, the 2022 accolade was presented to Luke Lawson, who always goes above and beyond to assist the team at Polypipe Building Products. The judges were blown away by Luke’s strong ambition, how he will often propose new ideas and his clear vision for where he wants to go in the future.

Celebrating the award win, Luke said: “I am delighted to have received the Apprentice of the Year award and to have been recognised for my hard work and commitment. I want to thank Polypipe Building Products for

trusting my application and Doncaster Chamber for the opportunity.

“It has been the highlight of my apprenticeship, and it has improved my confidence. Winning this award

has made me believe that I can keep progressing within the company and [push] myself through further education. Most importantly I am grateful to the people I work with, as they have helped massively to get me to where I am today.”



At Polypipe Building Products, Luke is held in high esteem as a truly invaluable member of the automation team.

Success Through Innovation & Diversification: Agemaspark

Always an exciting category, “Success Through Innovation & Diversification” commends those who have managed to stay ahead of their competition, by driving change in their respective industries and expanding into new products and markets.

Our 2022 winner was precision-engineering company Agemaspark, who wowed the judges by readily adopting new technology, nurturing fresh talent and embracing the future. To find out more about their trailblazing work, read our dedicated feature on page 13.

Upon collecting his trophy, Paul Stockhill, Managing Director of Agemaspark, said: “It has been quite a few weeks for Agemaspark. We are very proud to have won an award in our home city. The Doncaster Chamber award is a fantastic tribute

to the hard work my team put into being innovative in our approach to every problem.

“We’ve developed an innovative conformal cooling technique, created and developed over many years, to help us to deliver solutions for businesses that reduce cycle time and save energy.

“We are currently using our technique in various sectors and have lots of trials lined up to utilize our metal 3D printer to help companies reduce their energy consumption.

“Our Chamber is a wonderful asset to the City of Doncaster and we are really happy to be recognised by the voice for business in our region.”



Known for their high-tech innovation, Agemaspark have many high-profile clients, including Rolls Royce and Boeing.

Green Business of the Year: Enviro Electronics

An I.T. asset disposal firm, Enviro Electronics was named “Green Business of the Year” for 2022.

The company — which safely disposes of computers, printers, projectors and other such equipment — eked out the strong competition by demonstrating that every member of the team has an evident passion for sustainability. When it comes to being green, Enviro Electronics leads by example and works across the whole community to make a difference. In short, the environment is at the heart of everything they do.

Speaking about this, CEO George Ackah, said: “We at Enviro Electronics are absolutely thrilled to win this award. This is a testament to all the hard work and effort we have put into delivering a service which

seeks to promote sustainability whilst being sustainable ourselves.

“Operating in this way is part and parcel of who we are and we continuously seek ways to improve. We are proud to win

this award because it recognises how we are working with and helping businesses, as well as educational institutions, to increase the levels they recycle.”



Enviro Electronics has been providing a safe, secure and environmentally-accredited IT disposal service since 2009.

Excellence in People Development: Home Instead Doncaster

The “Excellence in People Development” award is presented to a local business that has invested heavily in its workforce and benefitted as a result.

Last year, the illustrious prize was given to Home Instead Doncaster — who provide elderly care services — for their robust staff development and training strategy. Unwavering in the belief that people are their most valuable assets, Home Instead ensure that the whole team is equipped with the skills that they need and that they can fulfil their potential.

Speaking about this, Amber Booth, Pro Team Leader, said: “As a team leader I am so proud to be part of an amazing team! I am so happy we won, we deserve it! It was an amazing night celebrating and winning the award of Excellent In People Development with our team.”

Echoing these sentiments, Company Director Zoe March said “We work hard to develop our staff, we are proud of them and the work they do for people in the Doncaster community. We were delighted to win the award for Excellence in People Development, and a fab night celebrating all the winners was enjoyed by the team.”

Charity of the Year: Eve Merton Dreams Trust

Championing the very best of third-sector organisations in Doncaster, the “Charity of the Year” award for 2022 went to the remarkable Eve Merton Dreams Trust.

In service of an incredible cause, the money raised by this phenomenal team is used to help those who are suffering from serious or terminally-ill cancer. Specifically, the charity aims to fulfil their dreams and grant incredible wishes, even if it is only for one day.

Applauded for their proactive approach, the personalised support they offer, and for filling a much-needed gap, the team at Eve Merton Dreams Trust were more-than deserving winners here.

Speaking about this, Martin Lawrence, Development and Fundraising Manager, said: “Having our charity, and the memory of Eve Merton, being not only nominated but winning “The Charity of the Year”, is such a huge honour for everybody involved. We dedicated ourselves to use the grief of losing a mother and [channelled] it to make a difference for other Doncaster families going through the same experiences.

“During our work, we’ve already met so many amazing families and been privileged to offer support, answer Dreams, or grant their wishes. However, awareness and recognition such as this, can only help us reach even greater numbers in the future. Thank You.”

Start Up of the Year: Skill Step Group Ltd

Chosen as our “Start Up of the Year” for 2022, Skill Step Group Ltd is a family-owned firm that is managed by a husband and wife team.

As specialists in project delivery and training within the rail industry, they are one of the nation’s leading providers of Overhead Line Electrification (OLE) training. Renowned for employing some of the most experienced and knowledgeable people in the sector, they have a very bright future ahead of them. The judges took note of their strong commercial performance, keen marketing awareness and clear vision.

Speaking about their success at the Business Awards, Katie Hodgson, Managing Director, said: “We were thrilled and honoured to have been shortlisted as finalists but to have gone on to win the Business Start up of the Year award is just amazing. We had such a great night, celebrating with family and friends, and it was a privilege to be in the

same room as so many amazing local businesses.

“I am so proud of everything we have achieved over the last two years and would like to thank our amazing team for

their help and support. Congratulations to all of the award finalists and thank you Doncaster Chamber for a fantastic evening.”



Skills Step Group are an approved supplier for the likes of Network Rail, Balfour Beatty, Volker Rail and Morgan Sindall — and have subsequently earned themselves a fantastic reputation.

Large Business of the Year: SYNETIQ

Our large business of 2022 (which is defined as a firm with over 50 employees) was SYNETIQ Ltd.

Excelling across every piece of criteria, the integrated salvage and vehicle recycling company was commended for its financial performance, ambitious objectives, competitive edge and brilliant customer service, all of which came together to drive incredible growth in 2022.

It was also noted that SYNETIQ is an incredibly forward-thinking company, with a keen ability to adapt during challenging times and a willingness to embrace new technologies.

“We were delighted to win Large Business of the Year; it was a really proud moment for the whole team” said Tom Rumboll, UK Managing Director for

IAA and SYNETIQ CEO. “We have built our reputation through our customer-first approach, continued innovation and commitment to doing the right thing; to be

recognised for our wider contribution to Doncaster’s economy and communities is a huge honour.”



In addition to winning Large Business of the Year, SYNETIQ was nominated in two other categories.

SME Business of the Year & Success Through Partnerships: Harrison College

Receiving one of our biggest awards of the night — which goes to the company, with up to 50 employees, that demonstrates all-around excellence — Harrison College was crowned as our ultimate SME of the year.

Carving out a niche for itself, the education provider is the only one of its kind in Doncaster to focus on securing internships, employment and work skills for post-16s with special needs.

The judges commended Harrison College for its consistent and stable growth, its forward-thinking strategy, and its incredible efforts to bring about change in our city and truly impact the lives of those who come through its doors.

In addition to this, the College also scooped up the prize for “Success Through Partnerships”, in recognition of how it works alongside employers from across a range of different industries to benefit all parties concerned, most importantly the students.

Speaking about the dual-win, Principal of Harrison College, Gemma Peebles, said: “We would have been over the moon to win one award, so to win two is amazing. We were told it is very rare for a business to win two categories on the same night.

“The great thing is that the awards recognise us both as a business and, importantly for our young people, as a collaborator that engenders successful partnerships to support our students.

“We work with some wonderful companies and organisations that, like us, [appreciate] the enormous potential our young people have, how their needs are not being met elsewhere and how they deserve a better education and better opportunities to secure employment and a fulfilling future. We are grateful to our partners and look forward to continuing to work with them, and any new partners who wish to get involved.”



Harrison College was established by Gemma Peebles three years ago.

dc Doncaster Chamber
Inspiring success
in business

OUR CEREMONY FOR THIS YEAR WILL BE EVEN BIGGER AND BETTER

The 2022 Doncaster Business Awards took place at the St Leger Racecourse on Thursday 1st December.

Our ceremony for this year will be even bigger and better, as it commemorates the event’s 25th anniversary.

More details about what we have planned and how you get involved will be revealed at our upcoming Launch Party event on the 23rd June. Don’t miss out! Visit the Doncaster Chamber website for more details.



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Our team are proud to work closely in partnership with Doncaster Chamber.



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EMPOWERPLAN:

An ambitious and specialised e-learning and empowerment platform designed to be used on an individual or corporate level. Empowerplan is aiming for serious growth, so scalability was a key focus. Users and companies have their own dashboard with custom reporting, interactivity, and engagement.



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When Everywhere Else Says 'No'

"We're not doing anything revolutionary. We're just doing what the banks used to do about 20 or 30 years ago."

Although a very modest summation — one that simplifies a lot of head-spinning minutiae and daunting complexities — Andrew Austwick's outline of Finance for Enterprise is easy to comprehend.

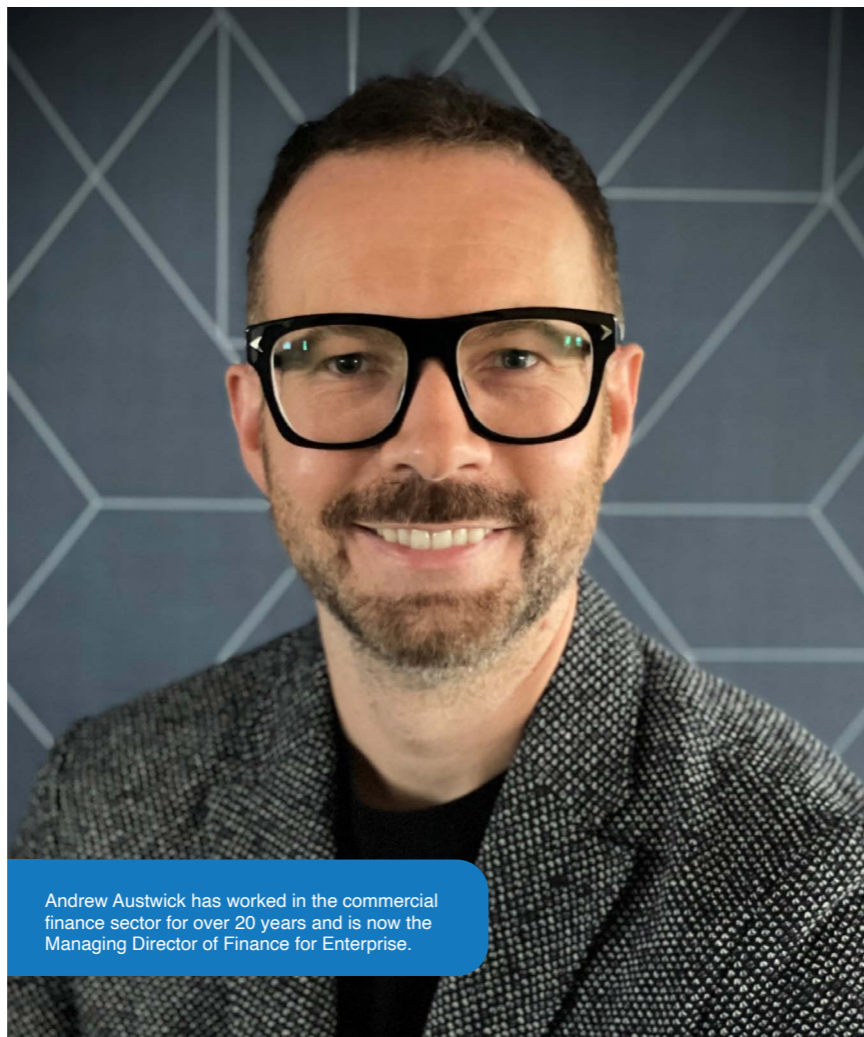
As Managing Director for the not-for-profit (a role that he's been in for the last 3 years), Andrew is more than capable of supplying an exhaustive rundown of his company's inner workings. But he's also very adept at cutting right to the heart of the matter and explaining things without resorting to impenetrable jargon or going into too much overwhelming detail.

He makes it all feel rather straightforward, as we discovered for ourselves when we sat down with the finance expert for an in-depth conversation about business funding. Here, we spoke about the various lending options that are available to firms in Doncaster, the economic challenges we're all facing right now and how to increase your chances of getting a loan.

In case you're not aware of how Finance for Enterprise operates, it doesn't work like a mainstream funding provider.

Describing the lender's old-school methods, Andrew said: "It used to be that banks would go out to visit businesses in person, ask targeted questions, and then use the information [gleaned] from those conversations to make a recommendation for an underwriter. That's how they decided whether they wanted to give out a loan or not.

"Nowadays, it's all a lot more algorithm-driven. Lenders are reducing their headcounts across the board and are increasingly moving towards automation. While that works for stable, profitable businesses and helps them to get speedy credit decisions, it unfortunately leaves behind those other customers who have more of a background story to tell.



Andrew Austwick has worked in the commercial finance sector for over 20 years and is now the Managing Director of Finance for Enterprise.

"You can't explain certain things to an algorithm and that's where our approach differs. We don't rely solely on numbers and do common-sense lending instead."

To clarify, Finance for Enterprise offers loans of up to £250,000 to help businesses when mainstream funders (such as banks) have turned them away. By carrying out more qualitative forecasting, doing thorough due diligence and interacting more closely with SMEs, the team will often be able to see viability in high-risk loans when everybody else has said 'no'.

In the words of Austwick: "We are here to leverage the kind of loans that otherwise wouldn't be obtained by borrowers. If we can unlock the financial promise of a local firm then we want to make that happen. We don't want there to be a situation where a viable business isn't getting funding because that's not good for the economy at large.

"For example, throughout the pandemic, a lot of SMEs weren't able to trade

profitably. So, theoretically, you could have a business that was loss-making for over 2 years, but is now in a much better place and can afford to repay a [prospective] loan. A traditional bank, relying on algorithms, might not recognise that fact. But our people can!

"That's what makes us different. You can have a conversation with an experienced lender who will look beyond your financial accounts from the past twelve months. Because it's next year's cash flow that's going to repay us anyway.

"If we think it is a legitimate business that's sustainable, even if it has been making a loss previously, then we will lend them the money they need. Whether it's to expand their factory, take on more staff or buy a new machine that will increase productivity later down the line."



FINANCE FOR ENTERPRISE

Lending in the Face of a Recession

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Finance for Enterprise has provided £34 million worth of funding to borrower SMEs. This money is sourced via a combination of the lender's own capital, as well as things like the British Business Bank Recovery Loan Scheme, the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund and various other initiatives.

For Andrew, there is something very rewarding about supporting local businesses to grow through this activity, provided that it's a smart investment of course. Reflecting on this, he said: "We want to provide loans that are sustainable. Having confidence that borrower SMEs will have capacity to repay us is naturally an important thing for us.

"However, there are also happy by-products of our lending and it's always nice to see additionality after we've provided a loan. Businesses that have received our money will often end up employing more people, creating new local supply chains, paying more tax or sometimes even making strides towards carbon neutrality. It's a net benefit that pleasingly trickles down."

Unfortunately, current economic circumstances are making it quite difficult for Andrew and his team to judge which loans are going to be sensible in the long run and which are not.

"The problem right now is obviously confidence", he admits. "We don't know what raw materials are going to cost in six months' time or what wage demands are going to be like. Nor can we predict the [trajectory] of electricity prices, which is a problem for many energy-intensive businesses, like factories and manufacturers. There is so much ambiguity at the moment and

entrepreneurs are struggling to make quality long-term decisions as a result.

"It's hard for us to make choices too because we can't tell which businesses are still going to be viable in the near future. We're not here to try to rescue businesses that are no longer going to be viable, so it's really difficult trying to navigate through this constant churn of uncertainty."

How to Source Business Finance

So what are businesses meant to do in the face of such upheaval? How are they meant to secure the funding that they need in order to grow?

Austwick's main piece of advice is to ensure that you're approaching the right lenders to begin with. That's not a bit of opportunistic self-promotion by the way, as he actually points out that Finance for Enterprise shouldn't be your first port of call in most cases.

He explained: "What we don't want is to displace other funders in the marketplace. So if there's a loan that is straightforward and of the bread-and-butter kind, then your bank really ought to be doing it. And if that doesn't pan out, then you should probably try a second bank afterwards.

He also recommends the use of commercial finance brokers, who will be able to signpost you towards relevant funding opportunities. He continued: "Many of these specialists were former bankers themselves and so they have an in-depth knowledge of how providers think and what they're looking for. You'll be paying for their services, but brokers will often connect the dots for you and might be able to pull together packages from various different sources. So it can end up being worthwhile."

If you've already explored those options and want to give somewhere like Finance for Enterprise a call, then Andrew does have a few, more specific pointers:

"Anyone who is coming to us needs to have a coherent explanation for why they want to borrow money. In what way is it going to help them? What will it be spent on? How are they planning to repay it? If they can't answer those questions then we are unlikely to lend.

"The other thing is that you need to understand your business model and how it could be affected by an unforeseen change in circumstances. The past few years have seen SMEs dealing with the consequences of Brexit, the pandemic, skills shortages and rising energy costs. These things do happen and you need to show that you are ready to adapt.

"If we can see that you have a good handle on your business, that you can justify why you need our loan and have access to good information that will help us forecast, then we'll be comfortable that you're on the right track. We're not averse to risk. It just needs to be a well-calculated one."

For a conversation with Finance for Enterprise, businesses can call 0333 014 3455 or email info@finance-forenterprise.co.uk.

Embracing Change

We speak to Paul Stockhill, founder of Agemaspark, about how his approach to taking risks has helped him stay ahead of the competition.



Based out of Kirk Sandall Industrial Estate, Agemaspark Engineering has been showered with countless awards over the years for its forward-thinking ethos, technical innovation and novel approach to people development.

Yet when we sit down to speak with the company's founder and Managing Director, Paul Stockhill, these accolades are not pride of place anywhere in his office. There is a display cabinet here, but it's not lined with trophies or winner certificates. Instead, it houses a collection of unassuming metal parts, many of which are no bigger than your index finger.

Eager to show off these components, Paul grabs a handful and lays them out

on the table before us. At first glance, they appear to be unremarkable pieces of metal but, upon closer inspection, you can see that they each have highly complex internal structures, of shapes and sizes that would be exceedingly difficult to create by hand.

That's because these parts have actually been produced by the firm's cutting-edge 3D Metal Printing technology, or Additive Manufacturing (AM). In a nutshell, this means that a computer-controlled machine fabricated them layer by layer according to a virtual schematic. It's a process that is both incredibly efficient and flexible, allowing for all kinds of designs that would otherwise be impossible to fashion.

Having always embraced new technology — ever since it was first established in 2002 — Agemaspark is one of the few UK engineers to have adopted 3D Metal Printing. While other engineers seem to be resistant to the change, Paul attributes a lot of his own personal success, as well as that of his firm, to futurist thinking.

Describing his business philosophy, he said: "So much is going to change in the next 5 to 10 years and I intend to be at the front of that. This technology just opens up so many doors for manufacturing. Taking advantage of it is really a no-brainer."

A Local Firm Working with Rolls Royce and Boeing

Sure enough, there is a voracious appetite for Agemaspark's work, with them having high profile clients across multiple different industries.

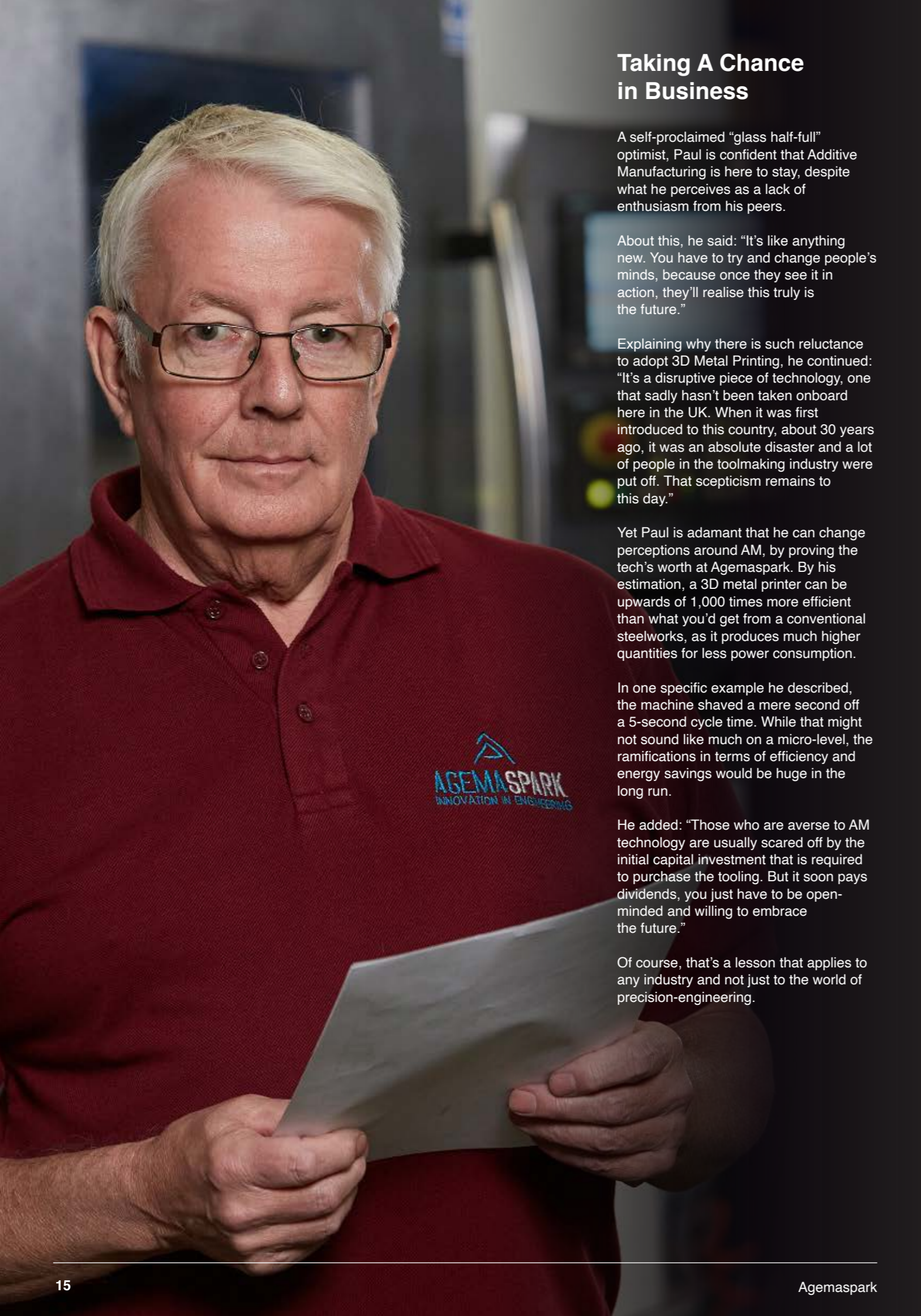
Indeed, their Additive Manufacturing technique is used to produce parts for aviation, the medical sector (where they help make orthopaedic joints), robotics and oil drilling. They even have interstellar components that can be found in places like Mars and the International Space Station.

In terms of the latter, they produced rugged terrain boxes for a consortium of Agemaspark, an electronics company, NASA & Boeing. Under normal circumstances, these boxes (which are often used to protect the navigational systems in submarines or the missile guidance computers in tanks) would be made up of several components but that was out of the question for here, due to the risk posed by flakes or paint chips breaking off in space. As such, the units needed to be made from just a single piece of Aluminium as only this method would be acceptable.

According to Paul, this is just one of several "off the wall" jobs that Agemaspark has undertaken in recent

years, although many of the best examples are classified under strict NDAs. Nevertheless, it's clear that the company is in very high demand right now, as its services are actively sought out by the likes of Boeing and Rolls Royce.

In the toolmaker's own words: "We service innovation, helping companies who want to trailblaze into the future. Our work is at the foundation of so much, because we are fabricating the tools that others need in order to make the things that people really want. We might not be making milk bottle tops or whatever, but a lot wouldn't get done without us."



Taking A Chance in Business

A self-proclaimed “glass half-full” optimist, Paul is confident that Additive Manufacturing is here to stay, despite what he perceives as a lack of enthusiasm from his peers.

About this, he said: “It’s like anything new. You have to try and change people’s minds, because once they see it in action, they’ll realise this truly is the future.”

Explaining why there is such reluctance to adopt 3D Metal Printing, he continued: “It’s a disruptive piece of technology, one that sadly hasn’t been taken onboard here in the UK. When it was first introduced to this country, about 30 years ago, it was an absolute disaster and a lot of people in the toolmaking industry were put off. That scepticism remains to this day.”

Yet Paul is adamant that he can change perceptions around AM, by proving the tech’s worth at Agemaspark. By his estimation, a 3D metal printer can be upwards of 1,000 times more efficient than what you’d get from a conventional steelworks, as it produces much higher quantities for less power consumption.

In one specific example he described, the machine shaved a mere second off a 5-second cycle time. While that might not sound like much on a micro-level, the ramifications in terms of efficiency and energy savings would be huge in the long run.

He added: “Those who are averse to AM technology are usually scared off by the initial capital investment that is required to purchase the tooling. But it soon pays dividends, you just have to be open-minded and willing to embrace the future.”

Of course, that’s a lesson that applies to any industry and not just to the world of precision-engineering.

A Homegrown Workforce

Paul’s open-minded thinking is not only evident in his use of cutting-edge technology but also in the way that he nurtures Agemaspark’s loyal workforce. Glancing down at the factory floor, he proudly reflects on how virtually everyone at the company got their start right here and then chose to stick around.

He explained: “When Agemaspark was founded in 2002, I just couldn’t find the engineering skills I needed in Doncaster. That’s when I decided to cultivate my own talent and to build a fresh-faced team using apprenticeships.

“So, what I’ve ended up with is a workforce that is predominantly home-grown. They all came to me when they were around 16 or 17 years old. They didn’t have too many qualifications, they weren’t all academically-minded, and university just wasn’t on the cards for a lot of them. Now, those same people are overseeing day-to-day operations at the company. They’re my managers.”

Paul himself benefited from somebody taking a chance on him when he was younger and more inexperienced, so it makes sense that he would see the inherent value of this. Leaving school at age 17, he got his first job at Crompton Parkinson electrical company (then

based on Wheatley Hall Road) where he managed to impress his interviewer by showing them a hand-made coffee pot.

He was told that he could start on Monday and, from that humble beginning, an illustrious 53-year career blossomed. Since then, Paul has gone from being an apprentice to cycling through various senior management roles, before then going self-employed and eventually starting Agemaspark as an entrepreneur.

Having experienced the benefits of an apprenticeship first-hand, he is naturally inclined to employ them in his own firm. He elaborated: “We are working with the next generation’s technology, so I’ve decided to build my business on youth. In searching for new talent, I have engaged a great deal with the Doncaster University Technical College (UTC) and that move has paid off tremendously.

“In a conventional school, young people are only exposed to so many career pathways. They’re told that they should aspire to be lawyers, doctors or nurses. But the UTC widens their perspectives and shows them what else is out there, such as jobs in engineering. That’s where I will find my future apprentices.”

Like with the 3D printers he has installed, Paul sees these young members of staff as a long-term investment. One that consistently pays off. He clarified: “I get so much more from them than what I put in. If you are encouraging, considerate of personal circumstances and make sure that they are contented, then they will repay you with hard work and dedication.”

Paul also believes it is important to increase diversity and inclusion in the field of engineering and sees his work with schools and colleges as a way of accomplishing this. Through work placements and apprenticeships, he’s managed to bring more female employees on board, and given opportunities to those with dyslexia.

“I now have a core workforce that have all grown together. They have gone through so much, have developed under the same roof and, when newcomers join the business, they welcome them aboard with open arms. These guys came to me as teenagers with no experience and now they’re putting things in space. It’s really quite enlightening to see what they can do when properly supported.”

In recognition of all its pioneering work, Agemaspark took home the “Success Through Innovation & Diversification” prize at last year’s Doncaster Business Awards. For more details on that event and the other winners, turn to page 1.

