

Your Money **START YOUR OWN BUSINESS**

Picture: AP Photo/CHRIS PIZZELLO

**E**NGINEER entrepreneur Andrew Redfern sealed his commitment to British manufacturing and job creation when he bought Lightning Aerospace, a sheet-metal fabricator making components for the likes of Rolls-Royce and military armoured vehicles.

Since Redfern's arrival last year, investment in technology at the Coventry-based firm has taken turnover to £3 million, backed by a 40 per cent annual growth rate.

The increase in the skilled workforce from 31 to 42, "reflects our confidence in the future", says Redfern, 39, whose vision is to create a competitive one-stop shop for engineering services and special design projects.

A wire harness production unit and laser equipment are among the major introductions he has made to increase capability and diversify the firm's customer base.

Redfern is an advocate of water-jet technology which uses high pressure streams to cut materials. One of the firm's star performers is its five-axis robot arm.

"We can now deliver the full range of services to manufacture and supply complex electro-mechanical assemblies," he explains.

"That's the case with other similar-sized companies but Lightning does it with the care, flexibility and customer focus of a specialist boutique business.

"We've the capacity to run production-batch sizes and produce bespoke prototypes to demanding defence and aerospace quality standards.

"We also pride ourselves on rapid turnaround, in 24 hours if need be,

# Lightning's bright future

Engineering success. By **Maisha Frost**

which is one of our unique selling points. That, plus the fantastic skills base we have here in the West Midlands."

Among its most successful business areas has been the manufacture of complex electro-mechanical parts for bomb disposal robots.

Redfern says: "In the past four months there have been significant changes at Lightning.

"Nobody knows which parts of the economy will grow so we can best prepare by being more commercially-minded and flexible enough to win orders in a range of markets."

One of the attractions in buying Lightning, he says, was the opportunity for the company to join a group of independents and pool expertise, contacts, best practice and resources.

The business is the latest member of the Midlands Assembly Network (MAN), a subscription-based collective of 10 sub-contract manufacturers.

Redfern spends a day a month with MAN in return for noticeable rewards

that include new sales opportunities, worth £200,000 already, and sharing trade show costs.

He is also promising further expansion. "We'll strengthen management and then consider more acquisitions now that we've raised the bar for quality and delivery performance."

● [www.lightningaerospace.co.uk/](http://www.lightningaerospace.co.uk/)  
024764 22038, [www.man-group.co.uk](http://www.man-group.co.uk)



**GROUP POWER:** Redfern is benefiting from being in a network

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ISA seeks