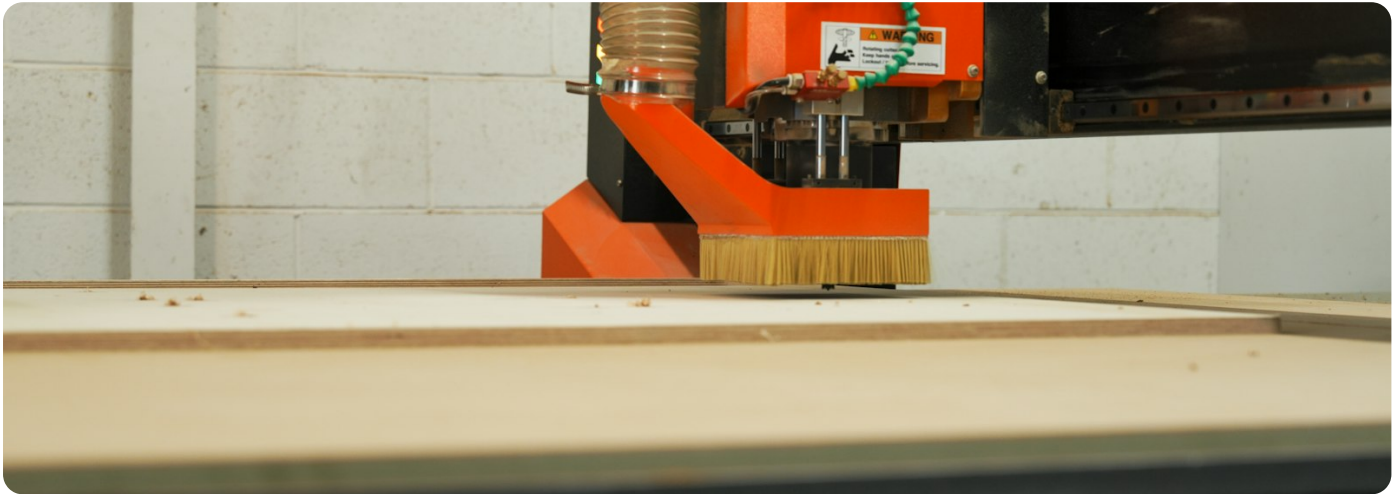


BUSINESS STRATEGY & GROWTH

Dreaming of a full order book: a letter to engineering firms

By Leyla Hussein • 30 March 2026



I spent a morning last spring on a stand at an engineering show in the Midlands, two rows down from a company that machines precision components for the aerospace sector. Their stand was a lovely thing. Machined samples laid out like jewellery, a screen running slow, silent footage of a five-axis mill at work, a neat stack of well-designed brochures that nobody was picking up. The two engineers manning it clearly knew their craft down to the last micron. Ask them about tolerances or exotic alloys and they came alive. Ask them how they win new work and something went quiet. “Word of mouth, mostly,” one of them said, with a small shrug that told me he already knew it was not much of a plan.

British engineering firms are, as a rule, superb at the actual engineering. The making is second nature, handed down and hard won. The selling, though, tends to be somebody else’s language, and it is spoken with a good deal less confidence. That gap is the whole subject of this letter.

The dream, and the blind spot

Nearly every engineering business owner I have met shares the same quiet ambition, whether or not they would say it out loud. A full order book. Work booked out for months. Machines running, staff secure, and an end to the Sunday-night sums about whether next quarter covers the wages. It is a completely reasonable thing to want. It is also, for a lot of firms, the one thing they are least equipped to build on purpose, because the skills that fill an order book are simply not the same skills that fill a workshop.

Feast, then famine, then feast

Here is the pattern we see over and over. A firm wins a big contract. The workshop fills up. Everyone is busy, morale is high, and [business development](#) stops dead, because who has time to [chase new work](#) when you are delivering flat out? Then the contract ends, and there is a horrible, echoing gap where the next job should be, because nobody was having the conversations six months ago that would have filled it today. So begins the scramble, and eventually another big job lands,

and the whole cycle starts over. It is exhausting and it is expensive, and it is caused almost entirely by prospecting only ever happening when the workshop is quiet, which is precisely the worst moment to begin.

Your customers cannot buy what they have never heard of

Being the best precision machinist in the county is worth very little to a buyer who does not know you exist. Somewhere out there is a procurement manager or a technical buyer with a problem you could solve beautifully, and right now they are handing that work to a competitor who is frankly worse than you but happens to be better known. That is a painful thought, and it is a common reality. Good work does not sell itself if nobody is aware of it. Reputation is powerful, but it travels slowly and it travels unpredictably, and sitting quietly hoping the right person hears your name in time is not a strategy. It is a wish.

Steady beats sporadic, every time

A full order book is not luck and it is not one good month. It is the result of a steady, deliberate stream of the right conversations with the right buyers, kept going regardless of how busy the workshop happens to be. The aim is to be in front of your future customers long before they need you, so that on the day their current supplier lets them down, or their requirements shift, yours is the name they already have in mind. That consistency is the hard part. It is unglamorous, it takes discipline, and it is always the first thing to be dropped the moment real work comes through the door. Which is exactly why it so often makes sense to hand it to a team whose only job is to keep it running.

We speak your buyers' language

We have sold industrial and engineered products for a long time. We are comfortable talking to procurement teams, technical buyers and operations managers, and we can tell the difference between a genuine requirement and a tyre-kicker fishing for a free quote to beat their existing supplier down on price. We find the right people in the sectors you serve, open the conversation properly, and hand your team an opportunity that is already warm rather than a cold name on a list. You stay on the tools, doing the work you are good at and, I suspect, actually enjoy. We keep the diary filling in the background.

Back on that stand in the Midlands, the footage was still running and the samples still gleaming, and the two engineers were still waiting for the right person to wander over. The engineering was never their problem. It rarely is. Their problem was that a business that good at making things deserved an order book to match, and a full order book has to be built with the same care and the same steadiness as everything else on the shop floor. An idle machine costs money for every hour it stands still. The conversations that keep it turning are worth having now, while things are busy, rather than later, once it has gone quiet. If your order book runs hot and cold and you would rather it ran steady, let us talk about [the prospecting that keeps it full](#).

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