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Ambition and innovation

Insider's Manufacturing Growth 100 ranks the fastest-growing manufacturers in the North West by turnover. Here we meet some of the companies in the list and discover the secrets to their success and strategies

The North West is home to a thriving and diverse manufacturing industry that has existed for well over a century. From digital point-of-sale systems and renewable fuels to heating valves and military bridges, a wide range of products are manufactured across the region and shipped all over the world.

Owing to their innovative products and bold visions, many of the region's manufacturing companies have achieved record growth in recent years and have ambitious plans for the foreseeable future. But a common theme is that Covid, Brexit and turbulent economic conditions have posed challenges along the way.

EVOKE CREATIVE

Dean Ward and Neil Clark's shared passion for product design led them to establish Evoke Creative as a small agency in 2007.

Since then, the company has grown to more than 150 employees based in the UK and the US. Evoke's sales reached £32m in the 2024 financial year, up from £23.2m in FY23 and £16.8m in FY22.

Today, Evoke develops digital kiosks, signage and electronic point-of-sale systems used by some of the world's biggest brands including McDonald's, Google, JD Sports and Bibliotheca. The company's growing roster of international clients and impressive growth played a significant role in BGF's decision to inject a multimillion-pound sum, following the £6m it invested into Evoke in 2018.

Ward attributes Evoke's high growth to the increased demand for self-service kiosks in retail and hospitality. But he admits that turbulent financial times, Brexit and the pandemic have posed challenges. He says: "Covid posed a bigger challenge as most businesses were closed."

He explains that diversifying Evoke's offerings across new markets, increasing its pipeline and fostering international growth made the company more resilient during



Dean Ward

these challenging times. For instance, Evoke opened a North American factory at the height of Covid.

Looking to the future, Ward and his team are eyeing "continued growth", aided by a new senior executive team and the recent BGF investment. He adds that the firm hopes to maximise the potential of the American fast-food and retail markets.

ESL FUELS

ESL Fuels has designed, manufactured and supplied a range of innovative and environmentally friendly fuels for more than two decades. The company, which operates sites in Ellesmere Port, Grangemouth, Immingham and Dagenham, traces its roots to when managing director Stephen Whittaker developed fuels and lubricants as a sole trader in the early 1990s.

The family-run business achieved incorporation in 2000, and throughout its 20-year history, it has shipped two billion litres of fuel across the UK. An early pioneer of biodiesel, the company has also produced roils for the heating and marine industries.

But in the face of the climate crisis and the transition to a low-carbon world, the company has turned its attention to developing renewable liquid fuels.



Richard Donovan

Richard Donovan, general manager at ESL Fuels, tells *Insider*: "We've developed innovative technology that enables us to process a variety of environmentally sustainable feedstocks to produce a range of renewable liquid fuels."

He says changes to the product strategy, in addition to increased oil prices and higher production volumes, was a big factor in the company increasing its annual turnover from £40m in 2021 to £185m in 2023.

The company continues to invest in research and development and, according to Donovan, its team's focus for the coming years is to "continue to innovate in the field of environmentally sustainable liquid fuels".

HEAP & PARTNERS

Heap & Partners has a long and varied history, with English civil engineer and industrialist William Heap launching it as an engineering supply company in 1866.

Today, Heap & Partners manufactures and distributes valves, filters, instrumentation and other equipment for the oil and gas, sub-sea and nuclear industries. The company, which operates offices in Liverpool, London and Teeside, sells its products to companies in 60 countries worldwide and has won seven awards for its work in the past decade.



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Although Heap & Partners has mostly operated as a distributor, managing director David Millar says the company is increasingly developing its own products as it looks to fill gaps in its product offering and has applied for a new diaphragm valve patent, he adds.

Despite its success as both a manufacturer and distributor, things haven't always been smooth sailing for Heap & Partners.

Millar explains how the company subcontracted the development of a component to a German company, which would end up abandoning the project after two years – just before Heap & Partners was ready to go to market with the product.

Challenges aside, Millar and his team remain confident about the future as they look to increase exports over the next two years. "Currently international exports only account for about 15 per cent of our business," he says. "Our plan is to make them 50 per cent. This year we're budgeting, and are currently on target to hit 20 per cent growth, but we expect that to ramp up with the opening up of our export markets."



David Millar

KNDS UK

KNDS UK has been at the heart of the British defence industry for over a century. The company traces its origins to 1915 when it was known as Fairey Aviation Company and created iconic military planes such as the Swordfish, the Firefly and the Gannet.

In the following decades, the company changed its name to Fairey Engineering when it shifted focus from aviation production to developing military bridges.

In 2000 the company underwent another rebrand, becoming WFEL. In 2012, European defence giant KMW acquired WFEL and today the business is known as KNDS UK to reflect the rebranding of KMW to KNDS.

Since 2019, the company has been working on the Boxer armoured vehicle project, for which it has invested in a special facility and hired a dedicated team of experts. Last December, the government handed KNDS a £150m contract that will see it equip the British Army with quick-to-deploy bridges through Project Tyro. The firm says this will generate 300 jobs in Stockport.

Although KNDS UK has signed a number of major defence contracts in recent times, Emma Livingstone – communications and marketing lead – admits that recruitment and retention are a challenge due to "a buoyant post-Covid job market".

With this in mind, the company continues to pour money into training and development initiatives to shore up its future and strengthen the wider industry. It operates an on-site welding school and is always keen to hire retired Army personnel and reservists.

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The manufacturing industry is extremely important to the North West, with many other sectors being reliant upon its overall success. Freeths are proud to have a leading team of lawyers that offer the complete range of services needed for those who operate in this sector.

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	COMPANY	LOCATION	LATEST YEAR'S GROWTH	TURNOVER £M	PRE-TAX PROFIT £M	EMPLOYEES	YEAR END
1	CORAL PRODUCTS	Manchester	144.7%	35.2	1.3	186	Apr 23
2	LATTIMER	Southport	116.2%	23.8	2.3	181	Mar 23
3	SURFACE TRANSFORMS	Liverpool	116.2%	5.1	(6.0)	96	Dec 22
4	MEDICATION PACKAGING	Crewe	102.5%	49.1	2.9	272	May 23
5	KENDAL NUTRICARE	Kendal	88.4%	34.1	6.6	130	Mar 22
6	ESL FUELS	Ellesmere Port	80.9%	185.4	10.6	20	Jun 23
7	FLAVOUR WAREHOUSE	Darwen	80.9%	140.1	28.2	281	Nov 22
8	NSN MANAGEMENT CO	Manchester	78.8%	14.9	0.3	113	Dec 22
9	DINNER LADY FAM	Blackburn	74.2%	41.9	4.1	132	May 23
10	LIVENT LITHIUM UK	Wirral	72.7%	82.3	6.3	66	Dec 22
11	JOSEPH HOLT	Manchester	69.2%	70.2	4.3	677	Dec 22
12	TREVALLY (T/A Bullens)	Liverpool	66.3%	60.4	4.3	180	Mar 23
13	TOTALLY WICKED	Blackburn	66.1%	90.5	3.4	372	Mar 23
14	STEEL DYNAMICS	Blackburn	65.3%	51.1	7.5	97	Dec 22
15	LASER QUANTUM	Stockport	63.0%	48.0	22.2	169	Dec 22
16	CHRISTEYNS FOOD HYGIENE	Warrington	62.7%	29.5	4.6	77	Dec 22
17	LYSTER	Bootle	61.1%	34.1	11.9	94	Dec 22
18	MI-FLUES	Blackpool	59.4%	39.9	11.2	113	Jun 23
19	M & I MATERIALS	Manchester	58.7%	92.0	10.8	187	Mar 23
20	LANXESS SOLUTIONS UK	Manchester	57.5%	159.3	30.0	185	Dec 22
21	POPPIES EUROPE	St Helens	57.1%	38.0	1.5	231	Dec 22
22	NORTHWOOD TISSUE (DISLEY)	Stockport	56.9%	26.4	1.6	55	Dec 22
23	INGEVITY UK	Warrington	56.7%	198.4	35.0	163	Dec 22
24	TOUGHSHEET	Bolton	55.8%	17.6	5.9	74	Mar 23
25	MN (T/A Manufax)	Stockport	53.2%	12.4	1.1	90	Feb 23
26	WFP (T/A GCP)	Stockport	51.5%	15.3	0.1	99	Dec 22
27	DAIRYGOLD FOOD INGREDIENTS (UK)	Crewe	50.5%	127.5	3.0	-	Dec 22
28	EXTONS FOODS	Manchester	50.4%	97.7	3.3	140	May 23
29	SANKO GOSEI UK	Skelmersdale	50.2%	41.0	2.2	163	May 23
30	EDBRO HYDRAULICS	Bolton	48.9%	26.2	(1.5)	170	Dec 22
31	JS BAILEY	Nantwich	48.2%	48.1	2.1	100	Sep 22
32	CSM INGREDIENTS UK	Manchester	47.7%	51.5	0.7	112	Dec 22
33	PF CONCEPT UK OPERATIONS	Blackpool	47.1%	27.1	2.6	237	Dec 22
34	SIRIUS (T/A Chargepoint)	Liverpool	47.1%	26.2	(9.8)	128	Dec 22
35	MEDTRADE PRODUCTS	Crewe	47.0%	45.4	6.0	84	Feb 23
36	STRONGDOR	Carnforth	45.2%	15.6	3.1	92	Dec 22
37	DIODES ZETEX SEMICONDUCTORS	Oldham	44.7%	130.3	39.8	358	Dec 22
38	NEXPERIA UK	Stockport	43.7%	163.9	9.1	947	Dec 22
39	PROLINE CORPORATION	Bootle	43.5%	10.2	2.3	65	Mar 23
40	FARMHOUSE BISCUITS	Nelson	42.5%	21.0	0.3	221	Dec 22
41	WM NELSTROP	Stockport	42.5%	97.6	3.8	43	Mar 23
42	LS DIXON	Macclesfield	42.1%	11.9	0.3	81	Dec 22
43	AHML (T/A Northern Diver)	Chorley	42.0%	11.6	2.5	56	Apr 23
44	SOLVAY INTEROX	Warrington	41.7%	38.5	16.8	67	Dec 22
45	SCHMITZ CARGOBULL (UK)	Manchester	40.6%	83.2	0.5	68	Mar 23
46	PELTA MEDICAL PAPERS	Milnthorpe	40.5%	58.1	(0.5)	145	Dec 22
47	TANDOM METALLURGICAL	Congleton	40.2%	139.1	4.6	128	Aug 22
48	MOMENTIVE PERFORMANCE MATERIALS UK	Bolton	40.0%	27.8	4.4	53	Dec 22
49	RENRAY HEALTHCARE	Winsford	39.8%	18.7	0.7	135	Dec 22
50	CAMFIL	Rossendale	39.6%	48.2	12.7	251	Dec 22



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	COMPANY	LOCATION	LATEST YEAR'S GROWTH	TURNOVER £M	PRE-TAX PROFIT £M	EMPLOYEES	YEAR END
51	KNDS DEFENCE UK	Stockport	39.3%	33.0	(0.9)	239	Dec 22
52	OLIVER VALVES	Knutsford	39.0%	31.4	3.5	136	Sep 23
53	TOM MARTIN METAL PROPERTY	Preston	38.2%	79.3	7.0	85	Dec 22
54	WHARTON	Manchester	38.1%	13.3	2.4	115	Aug 22
55	MI VEHICLE INTEGRATION	Leyland	37.5%	9.1	0.4	138	Apr 23
56	PRO BOARD	Ellesmere Port	37.2%	147.5	4.1	65	Dec 22
57	VELOCITY COMPOSITES	Burnley	37.2%	16.4	(3.1)	102	Oct 23
58	EVOKE CREATIVE	Wirral	37.2%	23.9	(1.6)	110	Mar 23
59	FERALCO (UK)	Widnes	36.9%	31.4	10.7	29	Dec 22
60	MICRO SYSTEMS (UK)	Warrington	36.1%	8.6	0.1	62	Dec 22
61	FARREL	Rochdale	36.1%	43.5	1.3	169	Dec 22
62	MIDSTEEL NORTHERN	Liverpool	35.6%	9.3	0.6	10	Jun 22
63	BERWIN RUBBER	Dukinfield	35.0%	51.3	(1.3)	192	Dec 22
64	ATLAS CONCRETE	Wigton	34.1%	26.3	2.4	88	Mar 23
65	UNITED ALUMINIUM	Manchester	34.0%	13.3	1.9	101	Dec 22
66	NORTH CHESHIRE	Warrington	33.0%	11.0	0.4	25	Jan 23
67	SALT SEPARATION SERVICES	Rochdale	32.5%	10.6	0.5	81	Apr 23
68	ENRICHMENT TECHNOLOGY	Chester	31.9%	114.7	31.5	447	Dec 22
69	HEAP & PARTNERS	Birkenhead	31.6%	9.1	0.4	38	Mar 23
70	LINCO CARE	Manchester	31.6%	13.0	2.2	72	Aug 23
71	FREDERIC ROBINSON	Stockport	31.2%	83.1	9.6	935	Dec 22
72	PUNJAB PAPER CONVERTERS	Darwen	30.9%	14.5	0.4	51	Sep 23
73	AGC CHEMICALS EUROPE	Thornton-Cleveleys	30.6%	180.2	9.6	220	Dec 22
74	LANCASHIRE FARM	Rochdale	30.5%	67.1	4.1	233	Jan 23
75	LUPTON & PLACE	Burnley	30.4%	13.7	0.5	126	Mar 23
76	DACSA	Liverpool	30.2%	73.4	4.0	36	Dec 22
77	TAYLOR ENGINEERING & PLASTICS	Rochdale	29.8%	24.7	1.4	231	Sep 22
78	SEQIRUS VACCINES	Liverpool	29.7%	165.9	16.5	667	Jun 23
79	SARACO INDUSTRIES	Bolton	29.5%	22.1	1.4	93	Dec 22
80	COMPUTIONICS (T/A C-TEC)	Wigan	29.5%	26.6	2.1	218	Apr 23
81	BISN	Warrington	28.6%	14.2	2.4	87	Dec 22
82	AIRBAGS INTERNATIONAL	Congleton	28.4%	67.6	1.1	215	Dec 22
83	CRANE PAYMENT INNOVATIONS	Oldham	28.0%	126.4	24.7	326	Dec 22
84	DEWLAY CHEESEMAKERS	Preston	27.9%	40.4	3.5	113	Mar 23
85	GILBERT GILKES & GORDON	Kendal	27.8%	25.9	1.1	178	Sep 23
86	BOBST MANCHESTER	Heywood	27.3%	51.5	3.5	137	Dec 22
87	HOLCHEM LABORATORIES	Bury	27.1%	63.3	3.0	226	Dec 22
88	PENTRE	Leigh	27.1%	27.3	4.5	174	Mar 23
89	FORT VALE	Burnley	26.9%	119.8	28.9	595	Feb 23
90	RITRAMA (UK)	Dukinfield	26.6%	66.4	2.3	79	Dec 22
91	TUFF X PROCESSED GLASS	Prescot	26.3%	27.6	3.3	257	Dec 22
92	LOFTHOUSE OF FLEETWOOD	Fleetwood	26.2%	66.5	4.7	334	Dec 23
93	METALUBE	Manchester	26.1%	19.4	3.3	70	Aug 22
94	PARITY COMPUTERS	Wirral	25.9%	20.6	0.5	58	Dec 22
95	FORRESTERS OF CHESHIRE	Frodsham	25.2%	81.6	1.5	410	Mar 23
96	MINI GEARS	Stockport	24.9%	9.4	0.3	76	Apr 23
97	SACHETS	Hyde	24.8%	16.0	0.1	61	Mar 23
98	PRESSPART MANUFACTURING	Blackburn	24.7%	48.6	7.3	178	Dec 22
99	IMPERIAL FURNITURE	Bury	24.7%	18.7	2.0	127	Dec 22
100	BOOTH	Blackpool	24.5%	13.1	0.2	132	Dec 22

