

# Connecticut Firms Knock On European Companies' Doors

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Attending the annual European aerospace trade show — this week, it was held outside London — doesn't automatically result in contracts for the dozen or so Connecticut companies that attend each year, but it's good business, they say.

"It's a time to network, make new contacts in the industry, and network with potential customers, you don't [immediately] come home with purchase orders," said Doug Rose, president of Aero Gear in **Windsor**, a factory with about 150 employees.

That's why it's worth the \$200,000 cost for the Connecticut booth, half of which has been subsidized by various state economic development funds for the last seven years. Rose said over the six years he's attended, about 20 different companies have used the booth.

"There's a company in Spain that I never even heard of until one of the air shows, and as a direct result of the airshow, two airshows ago, we have a 20-year long-term contract for two different part numbers," said Kevin Flanagan, director of sales at Glastonbury's Flanagan Industries and corporate vice president of the 110-employee firm.

As Rose has worked to diversify his customer base — a decade ago, 90 percent of his sales were to Pratt & Whitney — the annual trips helped. "We do about 30 percent of our business overseas now," he said. "Six or seven years ago, we had no overseas sales."

Colin Cooper, CEO of Whitcraft Group, said his company has gone each of the last six years, and at the first show, they signed a contract with Snecma, a partner with GE on the engine that competes with Pratt's V2500.

"It's a bit misleading to say we signed the contract because we were there," he said, given each company had visited the other several times before the signing, but Cooper said European buyers do expect Whitcraft to attend the trade show. He estimated that Snecma relationship has led to more than \$5 million in sales a year, enough to support about a dozen jobs. Whitcraft has close to 500 employees.

"One unanticipated benefit of the show, frequently we also meet with our U.S. domestic customers there, because they're all there," Cooper said, as well as with their own suppliers for metals and heat treating.

Like many attendees, Cooper scheduled meetings at Rolls-Royce's headquarters in England after several days at the trade show.

Whitcraft sells to Rolls-Royce US in Indianapolis doing both military and commercial work and he would love to be on the Trent family of engines, which are one of two options on the **Boeing** 787 Dreamliner.

"We'll be receiving some packages of parts to quote," he said. "We think that they will be higher complexity parts on a program that's got some very good order basis. We think the opportunity is significant for us."

Flanagan said, "It's incredible to see what comes out of this. I will be here forever."