

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SUBCON EXHIBITOR

Every year, Subcon transforms the halls of the NEC Birmingham into a vibrant hub of engineering innovation, manufacturing expertise, and real business opportunity. But what's it really like to be on the other side of the stand?

We caught up with several exhibitors – both long-standing veterans and first-timers – who shared what a typical day looks like at Subcon, and why the show remains a standout event in their calendar.

For many, day one starts early, and it's anything but relaxed.

"Day one is incredibly busy and stressful," admits Leyland Clowsley, managing director of Apex Manufacturing. "We were setting up two stands across two shows, so there was a lot of running around. But once you get started, it's invigorating – there's real energy. It just flows."

That sentiment was echoed across the hall. Whether it's getting stands prepped or warming up with early conversations, the morning rush is something all exhibitors come to expect and even enjoy.

"You know the morning's going to be busy," said Dean Munkley, marketing manager at Qimtek. "So we set up a networking lunch to keep the pace going, it's all about keeping the momentum."

MAKING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Unlike some trade events where casual browsers dominate, Subcon brings in visitors with a purpose. This is what keeps exhibitors coming back year after year.

"If there's only one show we do a year, it's this one," says Paul Sargent, business development director at Cornelius Electronics, a long-time Subcon exhibitor. "The quality of visitor here is second to none – real engineers looking to outsource, change suppliers, or bring work back to the UK."

Leon James, a technical sales engineer also at Cornelius, added: "I've had people turn up with NDAs to sign, others with actual wire harnesses in hand. These aren't tyre kickers, these are serious buyers."

DIVERSE CONVERSATIONS, FOCUSED OUTCOMES

From major OEMs to niche startups, the visitor base at Subcon is as diverse as it is engaged. Sony's business management team were busy across both days, and they noticed a clear focus among attendees.

"Day two has been non-stop since 10am," said Joe Whaley from Sony. "Yesterday was a little quieter so I had a chance to walk around, but today it's all about conversations. Sustainability has been a big theme at our stand."

Subcon isn't just for selling, it's for learning. AI, reshoring, sustainability, and supply chain resilience were just some of the trending topics floating across the show floor.

"We're hearing more people talk about bringing manufacturing back to the UK," said Cornelius's Paul Sargent. "That shift is real."

WHY SUBCON WORKS

Subcon isn't just a trade show, it's a community event where exhibitors and visitors alike come to learn, connect, and grow.

"It's rare to find everyone in engineering and manufacturing in one place like this," said Clowsley of Apex. "That's what makes it so valuable – who

you meet can lead to unexpected opportunities."

The Qimtek team felt a change in atmosphere this year too, one that was more engaged, more focused, and more positive.

"It's been the best Subcon since pre-COVID," said Munkley. "I met more supply chain managers this year than ever before. The conversations have been rich and meaningful. Everyone's been open, and genuinely looking to connect."

His advice for exhibitors? Be brave. "The best leads I got were from simply reading someone's badge and starting a conversation."

WHY EXHIBIT AT SUBCON?

"Every exhibitor we spoke to had a version of the same answer: if you're not here, you're missing out."

"You have to spend money to win business," said Munkley. "Why not do it in a place where the buyers are actively looking for what you offer?"

Whether it's the high quality of leads, the variety of visitors, or simply the buzz of being among the best in British manufacturing, Subcon delivers.

And as Leon James from Cornelius summed up with a smile: "I love exhibiting – I couldn't do it every day, but for us, this is the show that matters."

Subcon returns to the NEC next June. If you're in the engineering or manufacturing supply chain, make sure you're a part of it. See you in 2026!

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