Even if it takes, you know, a week to print, that's still a lot

Dr Wapenhans said that use of 3D printing would enable Rolls-Royce to slash lead times. The company would gain an “inventory advantage,” with less need to store parts, he noted.

“One of the great advantages in the aerospace world is that some of these parts that we make have very long
faster lead times, because of the tooling process that's got to [happen], and then it takes potentially 18 months to get the first part after placing an order – versus printing it, which could be done quite rapidly.

“Even if it takes, you know, a week to print, that's still a lot faster.”

Sales of 3D printers and related services rose to $2.2bn last year, and are estimated to rise to about $6bn annually by 2017, according to a forecast from consultancy Wohlers Associates.

The devices, which are expected to transform the manufacturing process of many products from hip replacements to sports shoes – have recently hit the headlines because of their ability to create a gun in the comfort of someone’s living room.

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