



Good Morning

It feels like ages since we last sent you an update on the implications of Coronavirus at Ark-H. I thought that it was worth waiting for a Government announcement on the possible extension of the lock-down, and now we have one. We still do not have exact dates; but we do know that we are facing at least three more weeks, possibly a little longer.

I'll try to keep it brief – but there is a lot going on. The other problem about these updates (apart from how wordy I am) is that, almost as soon as I have written one, something changes. It's beginning to feel like the pre-October Brexit updates – only scarier.

Following the format we have used before I will give you the updates by area, starting with the most important one – so this is all about staff and clients. The next instalments, which I will try very hard to get out next week and the week after, will be about space/stock and shipping/despatch.

So – Episode 1 Staffing & Client Activity

I know I keep saying how terrific our team here is, but I simply have to say it again. Despite working under difficult conditions, the Production staff just keep on hitting daily targets and turning the work around.

Our numbers of full-time staff are down. Quite apart from those who are now working remotely, we have quite a number on leave of absence due to family issues and health concerns. Fortunately, as yet, still no-one with the dreaded virus; and we are doing everything we can to keep it that way. We have even discovered a new use for the production line anti-fatigue mats (now re-christened anti-virus mats) in that they provide an excellent way to demarcate two metre social distancing without having to deface the warehouse floor. So, comfortable feet and health-protection all in one mat!

Not only do we have slightly less core staff, they are having to be more flexible, working on the high-activity high-priority areas and stepping well outside their comfort zone in some cases. They are doing great at that, and the ample supply of high-quality interim people (a sad silver lining to the current employment situation) is certainly helping.

Not all our clients are busy. Indeed some, such as those in the leisure and hospitality sectors, are currently closed; and to them we extend our wholehearted sympathy. Hang in there - we will be ready and able to help you re-ignite your fulfilment engines as soon as you are able to hit go.

Those clients that are busy, are crazy busy. The clients that supply medical appliances and other healthcare items are, of course, going mad. The ones that supply foodstuffs are seeing a huge surge in demand – we have

handled more pallets of pasta over the past three weeks than over the past three months. Then, of course, there are some of the other necessities of life, like handwash, toilet rolls and, of course, wine, gin, and chocolates!

Slightly more surprising is the uplift in activity from many of our other ecommerce clients, those dealing in products which, whilst non-essential, are clearly highly desirable. Lock-down has done more for the ecommerce sector than anything else since Berners-Lee invented the internet. Whilst that shift may not compensate for the fall-off in trade orders, or the drastic impact of the high street closures, we are really happy to see so many of our clients managing to keep their businesses moving forward despite the parlous times.

As some of you will already know, having heard from your individual Account Managers, we have finally had to give in and accept the need to Furlough some staff. This is driven by two factors:

- The need for some staff to be absent from work on the grounds of concerns about the Coronavirus
- The fall-off in work within the Client and Customer Service area, as a result of those of our clients whose own operations have been curtailed by the current situation.

In the interest of fairness to our staff we have opted to use the scheme on a rotational basis – allowing staff to take Furlough Leave for the minimum three week period, with a view to being able to offer this facility to all those who want it. We currently have six staff on Furlough leave, so about 4.5% of our total staff, and we are hoping to be able to allow it for another three or four.

However, as you know, most of what we do can only be done on site – so most of us will be seeing out the lock-down, however extended, from within the warehouse walls. We were delighted to see the response the UKWA received from Government in the form of a letter confirming that:

... managers, warehouse staff and all other logistics professionals need to continue to go about their business to keep supply chains moving, and government policy is clear that this applies to all supplies chains and not only those for food and medical supplies. All travel by logistics workers to places of work such as distribution centres is therefore to be considered 'essential travel' in the context of current restrictions.

The Government even went on to provide a sort of thank you note – *thank you for everything you and your members are doing to keep supply chains moving in these difficult times* – which we have added to the far more motivational and inspirational messages we have been receiving from our clients.

I'd just like to close this 'episode' of my Coronavirus Update Saga by saying once again, THANK YOU to all those who are sending such fabulous messages of support to their teams here. With your help we have been able to donate protective clothing to our local hospital; provide gloves for our own staff; source some masks; and we have even received a quite outstanding 'thank you' video from one client.

To all our clients, large, small, open, closed, quiet, busy or totally mental - you and your customers are all **essential** to us; and you have simply no idea how much difference your messages of support and encouragement make to everyone here.

Stay safe and stand by for the next episodes on Space/stock and Shipping/despatch.

Best wishes.