



Good Morning

I think things must be calming down a bit because it is now nearly a month since I last felt impelled to put pen to paper (or fingers to sanitised keyboard) to give you a Covid-19 update. So I thought it was high time, even though I do not have much in the way of 'new' news, to send you another note. To try and make it more digestible I have broken it into sections.

#### **Looking Ahead to Life After Lock-down – we're still here for you as and when you need us**

I don't know whether it is just the sunshine, but it does feel as though life is a little bit less scary. There is certainly more traffic on the roads; but looking on the bright side, that means less parked cars and clogged streets to hinder the delivery drivers.

As you are all well aware by now, Ark-H has never really been 'locked-down' – so the endless webinars I keep getting invited to about getting out of lock-down seem slightly incongruous. Ecommerce orders continue to grow and, indeed, for some of our clients, have accelerated significantly. We are truly grateful to those who have been keeping us rushing around, albeit at a social distance, throughout the past eight weeks.

However, what is even more exciting is that it feels as though life might be getting a little easier for those of you who have been hurting so badly in recent weeks/months. Interestingly, we are now seeing a slow but steady return of trade orders and there is a definite sense that the world might be gearing up for a 'back-to-business' frame of mind. I hope it goes without saying that, if there is anything we can do to help you to get the wheels turning again, just let us know. We are standing by to do whatever it takes to help you to stimulate demand, woo your customers, or, for those of you moving more and more on-line, to win new ones.

#### **On Space - we've been using the quiet time, with your help, to do some 'spring cleaning' on stock levels**

As I think most of you know, we have not been 'resting' just because things have been quiet. A lot of work has been going on here in terms of stock-counting and general 'LEAN-ness' to ensure that we are ready to gear up when you are. Another thank you needs to go to those of our clients who have worked with us to take this opportunity to have a jolly good stock sort out. It has not been easy for you, of course, with so many client personnel on furlough; and it has not yet yielded the space we need because the waste destruction companies have been closed down. However, the good news is that they are hoping to be back at work from next week, so we should be able to get stock shifted out from next week onwards. This, therefore, is a gentle nudge to remind you that, if you have obsolete stock on your books that you would like us to remove/destroy for you, now is a good time to be working on it.

### **On Systems – we’ve moved up a gear on our new systems roll out**

With many of you, we have been using the time to focus on accelerating the move to the new bar-code enabled warehouse management system (WMS). It seemed to us that, while activity levels had dropped for some clients, it was the perfect opportunity to undertake stock counts and plan and implement systems migration. The enhanced inventory management ability of the Snap system does not just add visibility to inventory control (which it certainly does) but also speeds up staff training (ideal for the current climate) and massively improves pick accuracy on bar-coded product. We have increased our bar-code production scope/capacity; so for those of you whose product is not bar-coded at source, we can now produce and apply bar-codes economically as a part of the goods receiving process; thus making the benefits of the system more widely available. These initiatives are proving so successful that I think we will be increasing the size of our IT team going forward; simply so that we can maintain the momentum.

### **On Despatch - we’re doing our best to work with carriers to mitigate, or at least manage, delivery delays**

I know that some of you are experiencing frustrating delays on despatch; and I am truly sorry to tell you that I don’t think that area will be resolved overnight. The carrier companies, like the rest of us, are coping with the impact of the pandemic. They have experienced unprecedented levels of staff absences (due to sickness, self-isolation, bereavement etc.); and they too have had to furlough some people due to the collapse of the B2B delivery side. Even the Global Giants like DHL and FedEx have been rendered fragile by the global pandemic; which is why, almost without exception, the carrier companies are operating outside of their normal SLAs. We, and they, are doing our best to manage this; and we are all sorry for any adverse impact that longer than usual delivery times might be having on your customer experience. However, there is even a slight silver lining to the problems of the carriage market, in that consumers seem to be becoming a little more realistic about lead times. One of my colleagues here was even willing to wait 10 days for a case of beer!

### **On Teams – using the technology to improve communications**

One of the most important lessons that we have learned from the past few weeks has been the real value of on-line client communications and meetings. We have all stepped up our use of the technologies we already had at our disposal, things like Teams and Zoom, and we have enjoyed the benefits of that both internally and in terms of client contact. Clients we have not seen/met with for ages, and who really struggled to make time for meetings in normal circumstances, have found it possible to make on-line meetings. It has proven much easier to involve large groups (including operations and IT staff) when the meeting has no travel time tacked on the beginning or the end of the meeting. Conferencing in the people at home; getting together in a calm, on-line way; and being able to share screens and data in real time has meant that we are achieving a lot more. Personally, although I absolutely loathe seeing myself on camera, I really do think we are all benefitting from the genuinely ‘face-to-face’ contact that Teams is giving us.

### **On Ark-H Staff - they’re still stars**

Finally, and I know you are probably sick of me telling you how terrific our staff have been, this is one of those songs I just can’t stop singing. Working from home seems to suit most of the managers and I think they are now beginning to see some productivity benefits. They tell me they are all very busy; but, the very least they are saving on their traveling time. The rotating furlough we introduced is working really well for the Customer Services exec teams. It gives them a bit of a break and we have seen real strides in cross-training, multi-skilling and team spirit, the benefits of which will last long after the lock-down is over. The picking and packing staff, initially stricken with a touch of ‘furlough envy’, have got over that now (pizza meetings in the yard have helped!) and are really enjoying some of the added responsibilities and learning that has come their way as a result of all this.

We are continuing to do all we can to keep them safe, especially given that they are the beating heart of our business. The use of anti-fatigue/anti-viral-spacer mats and hand sanitisers will, I think, become part of our everyday lives. Furthermore, I am delighted to say that our masks have finally arrived. We bought posh ones (washable, breathable and environmentally friendly) on the basis that if people do not want to wear them in the workplace (most don’t) they could at least use them on public transport and/or doing their shopping. They come in a choice of colours, black, blue or pink, as stylishly modelled here by Kat and her team.



We went a bit further, and offered all staff the option to have full face visors, but very few people seem to feel they want one.



However, Neil did send me an idea for a personal choice of facemask he thought might be appropriate.



I choose to think he meant for himself not me!

On which note, I will close this email now. Before I go, just let me remind you all that we are here for you when you need us. If you are beginning to plan your own business life after lock-down, do please give us a call or drop us a line, and let us know what the next few months look like for you. The more we can share your plans and objectives the better we can serve you. So please let us know.

Meanwhile, best wishes and stay safe.