



Good Afternoon

Many of our clients have kindly expressed concern about the Ark-H staff who are valiantly soldiering on, picking, packing and shipping orders on your behalf. We are truly appreciative of your concerns, and thought it might be timely, as previously promised, to provide you with an update on the staffing situation here at Ark-H.

I have good news for you in terms of business impact on your account. At the time of writing this update I can reassure you that, as per my previous email:

- you and your customers should not be experiencing any negative impacts on our service due to staffing issues
- **Ark-H is continuing to operate Business as Usual** - in so far as anything is 'usual' in these extraordinary times
- we have no (**ZERO**) confirmed cases of Covid-19 - nor is anyone living with a person that has been confirmed to have the virus
- none of our personnel are at high risk/requiring shielding.

Speaking from an admittedly prejudiced position – **our staff are being fantastic.**

It is a strange and scary time for us all – and their normal work pressures are being much exacerbated by worries about their loved one elsewhere. Almost without exception they are continuing to work like Trojans (oops – isn't that another virus!), whether from home or from our business site, making sure that we can keep on providing a service through these very trying times. It is difficult for them because, with the extra precautions in place, more people are away from their desks and more people are having to cover work for colleagues. They are pulling together wonderfully well, supporting each other. Please bear with them if you sometimes find yourself speaking to someone other than your usual contacts. They will help as far and as fast as they possibly can.

It goes without saying that, without our staff we could not provide those services. We are experiencing some staffing pressures but, thus far at least, these have not impacted our ability to get your orders processed, picked, packed and out within SLA.

Where possible we have sent staff to work from home. Most of our entirely office-based personnel are now comfortably remote working, and that includes:

- our IT developers
- our finance team
- the majority of our Client Account Managers.

We were lucky in that, because all our systems are cloud based, including our phone system; and because we were already using technology such as Zoom for business, Skype and Microsoft Teams; the transition from an entirely office based management team to a largely home-based one has not proved too difficult. In fact, I think the biggest issue will be getting them all back!

However, as you all know, working from home is not a realistic option for the majority of our staff – they would need to have a VERY big home to accommodate your stock and pick-faces! Therefore, our people have to keep coming to work; they genuinely do classify for 'critical worker' status – although we have had to give them forms certifying this status – just in case they get stopped on the way to or from work, as Raj did last week!

Since we knew, early on, that our aim was to maintain business as usual, we were quick to put in place special procedures to protect our people, including but not restricted to:

- staff communications, training and posters – to drive home the COVID 19 messages of handwashing, social distancing, and the catch it bin it, kill it protocols

- deep cleaning/additional cleaning – by prior agreement with our wonderful cleaning company
- split shifts - to minimise crowding in the communal areas such as the canteen
- wall-mounted hand sanitiser units – which have been installed across the business
- floor marking – to remind people about keeping their distance in the warehouse
- desk/office moves - to allow for greater social distancing in the offices.

We do now have more staff self-isolating, although some of those who did so early on are now beginning to come back to work. We also have a small number of staff who have opted to stay at home on the grounds of childcare or family issues and we are, of course, supporting and encouraging that as much as we can.

Finally, at present, we have no plans to furlough staff (let alone laying anyone off). In fact, with the additional pressures we are facing, if anything we need more staff not less. Agency staff are, as you would expect, in plentiful supply (given how many companies are not operating) so we can call on additional staff to supplement our core teams without any problem. However, there are some areas of our work where just throwing bodies at the job does not cut it. Therefore, we are re-allocating personnel to ensure that agency personnel are deployed in areas where less training/detailed knowledge is required, such as kitting; and diverting our full-time highly experienced personnel to cover the more complex and high priority fulfilment.

The upside is that we shall come out the other side of this with a much more multi-skilled workforce than we had before – a sort of accelerated, COVID-induced, cross-training programme. We applaud and agree with the statement from the UKWA this week that:

*In the national interest, it is essential that warehousing, as a critical element of the UK's economy and society, continues to operate as usual. If this vital function is undermined or even breaks down, it could result in blockages in the supply chain further upstream, with catastrophic consequences. To ensure the continued flow of essential goods through major transport hubs, such as ports and airports, the UK's logistics networks – including warehousing - must be allowed to continue to operate in their entirety throughout the duration of this crisis.*

Here at Ark-H we are doing our bit to make sure that happens; and **we'd like to thank all of you, our loyal clients, for your help and understanding as we continue to do this.**

Best wishes and stay safe.