



UNIPART: PUTTING SAFE WORKING AT THE HEART OF LOGISTICS BY KATY FARRINGTON

Written by Katy Farrington | 29th June 2020

As companies start to head back to work during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, there's mounting confusion about how to keep people safe at work. One company with a long track record for world class safety, has implemented a way of safe working in distribution centres, offices and factories that is continually evolving and improving as scientists learn more about the COVID-19 virus.

Unipart, which operates in the manufacturing, logistics and consultancy arenas, was recently crowned as country winner in the British Safety Council international awards which included more than 500 entrants.

The Oxford-based private company has created an operational model for safe working which has been implemented in more than 70 sites globally.

It is particularly relevant to those sites supplying essential products to customers during the pandemic. For those sites, maintaining smooth operations and meeting customer demand is critically important. For Unipart, keeping people safe at work was at the top of the agenda and enabled the company to continue to deliver outstanding service to its customers.

For instance, to many people staying 'connected' has been a lifeline during this Coronavirus crisis. When governments across the world announced country-wide lockdowns, Three Mobile's Contact Centre in Mumbai closed as did all Three stores in the UK in support of the social distancing effort.

Unipart Social DistancingTo continue to provide great service to Three customers who still needed help and support, Unipart and Three put together an immediate response. The ambitious plan involved recalling all stock from each of the 320 stores in four days, as well as supporting the set-up of a temporary customer care function and delivering laptops to retail store agents who were now working from home.

"Unipart has shown some exceptional partnership working with Three. They have helped our customers stay connected by continuing to fulfil next day deliveries 100% of the time, even during this challenging period, as well as supporting us to manage stock out of stores," said Payal Rawat, Three Director of Channel Operations.



Similarly, when COVID-19 caused a lock down of Britain's high streets, like many other retailers, Waterstones' bookstores were affected. Customers who wanted books to help them through the lockdown period went online to find them. Unipart worked closely with Waterstones to quickly adapt and respond to the changing retail environment.

The scale of demand for Waterstones required a rapid response, with online orders increasing by more than 1300%, from 2000 to more than 28,000 units per day at their peak.

Becky Preece, Supply Chain Director at Waterstones, commented: "Thank you again for everything you do to help us reach all those readers, inside their homes, for whom books are essential. We value your contribution because you're sending out dreams, hopes, optimism, learning, comfort, entertainment, and inspiration."

Unipart kept delivering for customers because it had set out the safest working conditions to protect employees. During the pandemic's peak, Unipart distribution centres implemented "COVID-19 Secure" working by launching social distancing, handwashing, physical cleansing and protective workwear as the standard for all operations. In some cases, this meant changing the habits of a lifetime for people who had been working closely, side-by-side for many years. But an extensive communications plan, coupled with clear floor markings, visual reminders and consistent employee engagement made all the difference.

For instance, an online tool, the Social Distance "S" is used by teams every day to capture their experience and audit the way in which safety standards are being used,

particularly around social distancing. Unipart also 'takes the emotional temperature' of teams through frequent surveys, acting on the insight gathered to make continual improvements.

Unipart's 'COVID-19 Secure' working standards have now been codified in a comprehensive operational handbook on the company's knowledge management website.

As it has been implemented in all Unipart sites in the offices, distribution centres and manufacturing facilities, Unipart people are continuing to add to the knowledge base by capturing their experience, and learning and turning it into best practice.

This focus on COVID secure operations has enabled one of the safest companies in the world to continue to get even safer when it comes to keeping Coronavirus out of the workplace.

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