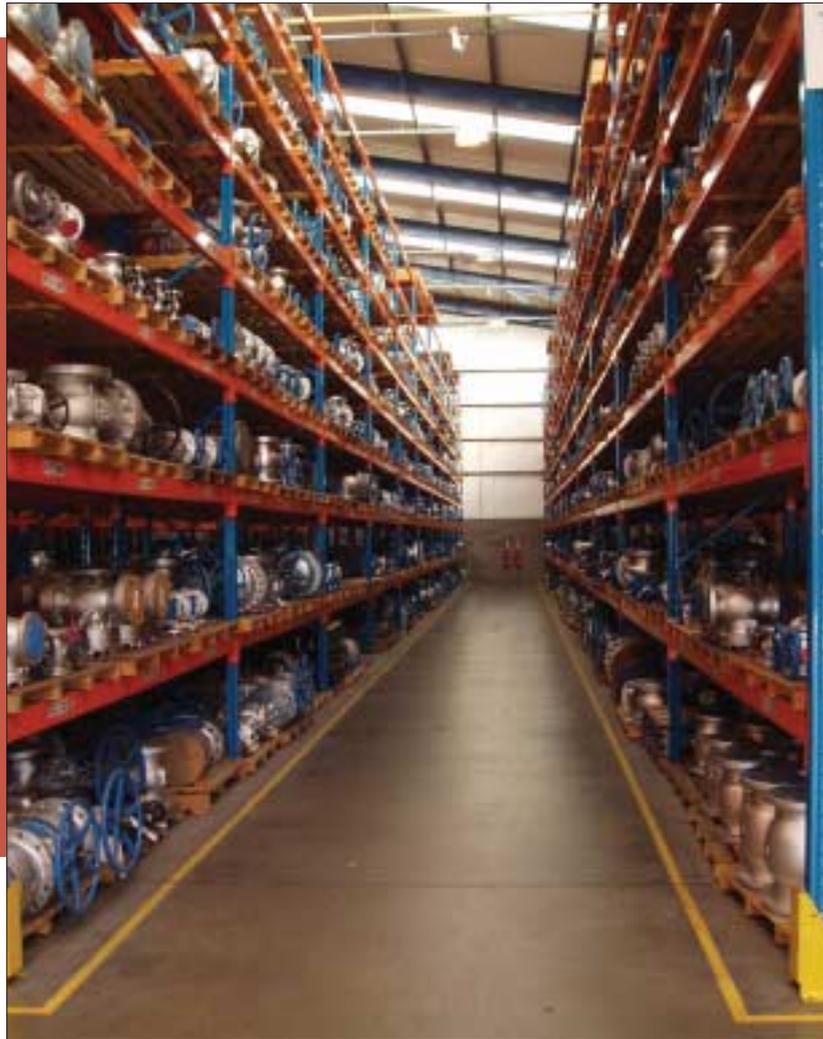


The Transmark team

Anyone visiting the headquarters of Transmark International in Bradford, England will be immediately impressed by the vast stock of warehoused valves, ready for immediate shipment to customers. Equally impressive, however, is the warmth and expertise that exudes from staff and their enthusiasm to provide clients with the best possible service. At a time when competition is becoming increasingly cut-throat in this business, Valve World visited management heads Simon Heaton and Neil Wagstaff to ask them what are the key factors behind the continued international success of their company.



By John Butterfield

“Perhaps the main factor which differentiates us from everyone else in the business is our services” says Simon Heaton, Chief Executive Officer of Transmark, International. “It’s not just a question of having the right stock at the right place at the right time, and at a competitive price. It’s also a case of building relationships.” “All our staff, at all levels of the company, have a genuine desire to get to know our customers, to listen to them and understand their needs. In this way they can help them solve their problems quickly and efficiently and work with them to develop their strategies for the future” adds Neil Wagstaff, the UK’s Managing Director. “We are not interested in just making a quick one-off sale.” And, over the years, this mentality has worked as a binding factor with customers since the Transmark staff have become true experts in dealing with the complex accounts of

some of the most reputable firms in the petrochemical, chemical and pharmaceutical industries. The attention and care which they pay to handling these portfolios has become a winning formula.

Although Valve World was visiting Transmark’s headquarters, both managers were keen to stress from the outset that what happens in Bradford is very much representative of the company’s other international offices and warehouses. And in order to give us a unique insight into how their customer-oriented approach works, we were provided with a guided tour of the site’s departments.

Saving the customer work

First port of call was the sales department which, in order to facilitate the rapid processing of orders, has been organised into two units. The first deals predominantly with cus-

tomers. Immediately evident was the serene air of calm, professionalism and tidiness which prevails (and which incidentally is a noticeable factor throughout the entire company). Here, the employees are primarily concerned with stock orders for maintenance, repair and overhaul contracts. The streamlined administrative system means they can devote most of their working day to communicating with the customer, whether this be by phone, fax or e-mail. Because of it, they are able to quickly respond to customers on all sorts of matters ranging from pricing and deliveries, to the allocation of products to incoming orders. Moreover, as many of the staff have worked at Transmark a long time, they know the clients well, understand their problems and have mastered the art of providing solutions to their often complicated needs with great efficiency. Customers, naturally, appreciate this.

at your service!



Left page: valves and yet more valves, stored in every conceivable shape and size.
Top left: all incoming valves are immediately checked upon arrival through a 100% visualization, certification, and specification checks.
Top right: inspecting the valves for imperfections.
Bottom left: performing positive materials identification.
Bottom middle: pressure testing.
Bottom right: tagging according to the customer's own coding system.

The second unit in the sales department is composed of a team of sales-support staff who enter the purchase and sales orders into the administrative system. As well as expediting sales and back-to-back orders they are also responsible for stock management and as such for ordering new materials to keep the stocks in the warehouse at efficient levels. As this group also tracks the individual purchasing patterns of clients it has been able to take on a pro-active role in terms of expediting. The confidence that their customers have in these skills is illustrated by the fact that many of them have requested Transmark to take over

the entire responsibility for maintaining their own stocks. Not only does Transmark do this, but it also guarantees its customers that 95% of all their orders will meet prearranged delivery times. And it checks each month to see that these limits are indeed achieved. Should this not happen - which is rare - then steps are immediately taken to resolve the issue and these are reported back to the customer. A further service that Transmark provides is that it sends its customers weekly/biweekly status reports about their product orders. In this way the progress of orders can be double checked and the customer can see at a glance what is

happening to his purchases. Billing has also been streamlined, orders from all locations being collected together and sent out to a particular customer once a month as a summary invoice. The advantage for clients has been that they have been able to reduce the number of value-added, non-core-business activities carried out on their sites and transfer them to Transmark.

Finally, included within the sales-support department is a group of staff devoted to international projects. These employees tender bids for contracts with new and established customers. "It's a highly specialised job and you



have to speak the customer's "language" and understand his needs in order to be successful," points out Neil Wagstaff. "Many of the bids are million-dollar affairs so you cannot afford to make mistakes."

Check, check, and check again

Next comes the operations department. Instantly noticeable is the vast stocks of valves in every possible size and shape. Worldwide, Transmark has stocks valued at over 30 million Euro's and this is one of the reasons why they are able to fulfil orders so quickly. The majority of these are stored in the UK, the Netherlands and Singapore but significant, client-orientated stocks are held at all locations. Recently, for example, they have increased stocks in France and Belgium to reflect the growing importance of these areas. Also significant is the surprising number of staff involved in checking and inspecting all incoming valves. "The advantage of this is that problems are recognized immediately and no time is lost in tackling them. Many of our competitors do not execute a materials check until the valves are about to be sent to the customer, or do not carry out a check at all," says Simon Heaton. "As a result annoying delays can occur before matters can be rectified. Transmark actually take the trouble to ensure that the product is the genuine article before it is dispatched." Other inspections which are carried out are 100% visual, certification and specifications

checks. Although the manufacturer is in fact responsible for the certification of products, Transmark have always checked these to make sure that all items are in full compliance. "Not surprisingly" says Neil Wagstaff "human errors are easily made." Once this has been carried out, the certificate is scanned and put on optical disc and the valve is tagged according to the customer's own coding system, bar-coded and stored. Transmark stores the optical discs in their own database, a service that is appreciated by their clients as copies can be quickly provided on request at a later date. "Many customers have such faith in our system that they no longer keep the certificates themselves. This saves them considerably on administrative and logistics costs, particularly when some of the certificates cover batches of more than fifty valves," he adds. Further testing is carried out on a more random basis or at the customer's request. A lot of their clients' inspectors, for example, ask them to carry out checks on percentages of their purchases so it's important that they have the facilities available to be able to do this. One of the most common requests is for pressure testing to ascertain if there is ppm leakage from packing and gaskets. This work is done simply as an extra service. It is not something that they have to do.



▲ Transmark International's impressive Headquarters in Bradford, UK.

◀ Saving the customer work: in the heart of the customer contact and customer support departments.

The Bradford headquarters is unique in that it also has a workshop where modifications can be made to valves. Here specialists carry out actuation, lagging, special drilling, and materials identification. Most of these tasks can be carried out by manufacturers but Transmark also have the flexibility to handle extremely rapid turnarounds. A further service offered is that they are able to alter base valves to meet their customer's specifications and have them ready for shipment within three days. The advantage of this is that Transmark avoids having to stock whole ranges of products they can adapt themselves. In the regional offices without a workshop, such tasks are outsourced to companies that meet the high-quality standards demanded by Transmark. Their advancement into all these fields has saved their customers considerably because they no longer need to maintain their own inspection and purchasing departments or retain their own warehouse and stock. Transmark does it all for them. In the dispatch and warehouse that follows the operations department, a final inspection and tagging of the products is carried out before they are shipped to their customers. Again another safeguard, and here, the logistics of delivery and certification are also handled. When looking at the teams supporting clients, Transmark's field sales employees should also



▲ Repacking a valve to prevent leakage.



► Re-boring a valve to specific customer requirements.

not be overlooked. These staff operate at a regional level and spend most of their time in face-to-face contact with the company's customers developing and expanding existing MRO agreements, handling PR work, informing clients about new stock ranges, and acquiring new clients. And as impartial advisers they will often come up with cost-saving, alternatives to problems which perhaps the client had not even thought about. Finally, being at the forefront of the business they are also able to provide first-hand feedback on how the company is performing and about changing trends in the market.

Tying all these departments together is a quality assurance group that ensures that their manufacturers meet stipulated quality standards and that they themselves follow the procedures according to ISO 9000 certification.

Always open

"We are open twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year" says Neil Wagstaff "so we can always react very quickly to urgent requests. For example, we have been called by a refinery at

3 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon and have had the requested valve in their refinery within two hours. And this type of situation happens often. We are called out at least once or twice a month - rarely in the middle of the night - but quite often in the weekends. Moreover, most of the materials which we handle are consignment stock. Sometimes these orders are worth more than 200,000 British pounds. Whilst the order is listed as consignment stock, the materials belong to us even though they may be stored on our customer's site. They are only sold to them when needed and this saves them on capital costs."

What the future holds!

Looking ahead Transmark intends to continue to grow globally. They will follow their clients as these move to new locations and will continue to provide them with the high levels of services to which they have become accustomed. And, naturally, they will be watching the situation in Asia carefully to see where they can play a role, in addition to the European and American markets.

"The current trend among end-users" says Simon Heaton "is to reduce their number of suppliers and expect more from them, so we will persist in finding ways to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace." In particular Transmark will be looking at how they can extend their services to add more value to the whole distribution process by taking over many of their clients' non-core activities. A number of their customers are already asking them to purchase more than just valves and these types of consignments are likely to increase in the future. Interestingly, they are also looking to expand their product range particularly for the pharmaceutical industry, though the traditional gate-globe check-ball valve will remain about 90% of their business.

"And finally," says Simon Heaton "we will continue to be there for our customers and help them find good solutions to their problems. You will not hear us say that we are the cheapest, but we are providing so much more to our customers and they know and appreciate this." It is what makes us unique. ■