

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

23/04/2020

The invitation to order system gave us a chance to breathe and refine the ways in which we cope with unlimited demand for very limited stocks. We are not enjoying playing God as we decide who gets stock and who does not, but decisions have to be made. As of week commencing 19th April week we have moved to a PPE+ pass system that gives us the ability to allow our existing recent care customers the chance to order a limited amount of PPE stock lines + other short supply products. By controlling the frequency and value of the passes, we can match the demand to the stock that is available.

What's more, this PPE+ pass means that any, new or existing customers can purchase without restrictions products like bins, paints and nappies.

When we are confident about the long-term availability of a product, we can remove the PPE+ flag with its associated restrictions to allow new and existing (Care and non-Care) customers to purchase the product.

The stock situation is changing all the time. At the moment, we have a good supply of face masks and are experimenting with letting all customers purchase them. That lets us gauge the demand and inform our future ordering. Enough stocks will be held back for Care customers so we can support them in their invaluable role as they look after our grandparents, sick relatives and frail friends.

We feel terrible about some of the prices that we are having to charge our loyal customers. In normal times it would be outrageous and wrong. There is a stark choice that we have had to make to secure stock. Either we pay the new price or we have no stock to sell on to you. Ultimately, we see ourselves as your buying department. Where possible we make sure that we have sufficient stock and leave it to you to decide if you want to pay the price. Our prices will go up and down with the prices that we have to pay to secure your stock.

Every day we are sending out similar volumes of stock to what we would supply in a normal non Covid-19 week. That has been broadly sufficient to keep our recent regular care customers going with minimal "Out of stocks". There have been specific challenges around face masks, alcohol gel, infection control wipes and Chlorine that we have not always been able to bridge. Part of the reason for this is that our UK suppliers for gel and wipes were told to cancel our production slots (which had been pre booked well in advance) and produce for the NHS. Despite being one of the 7 Public Health England appointed emergency suppliers to the Social care sector, we could not get hold of those products.

When the demand for Chlorine based products goes up 4 fold and the lead time from suppliers extends overnight from 2 weeks to 8 weeks, even our normally large stock holding cannot bridge the gap. We would have needed nearly a year's worth of stock in store to keep you supplied. Sadly, we only had 15 weeks of stock which sold in under 4 weeks.

Going forward, there are definite challenges on most PPE related lines. We have reasonably good visibility until July 2020. The buying team is doing an amazing job of trying to push that out to August and beyond. Because we are in this for the long term and appreciate the priceless work that our customers are doing, we are doing everything that we can to make sure we keep care and key workers supplied week in week out. It will certainly not be everything at all times that you need, but it will be the vast majority.

The big unknown in all of this is working out what happens next and how long will it last. We have no idea. We will proceed with what feels like a healthy mix of caution and bold moves. Only time will tell us if we have the right mix.

Last week there were many accusations bouncing around on Twitter, the press and Nicola Sturgeon that we had been told to only supply England with PPE. This related to of 3 specific products from the England pandemic flu stocks that Public Health England had asked us to supply to Care homes in England only; because Scotland and Wales had been allocated their own part of the UK's stockpile. Day in, day out, we continue to supply customers in Scotland, Wales and England with Gompels PPE products. No restrictions, no government advice to the contrary, just perfectly fairly to all our existing recent customers.