



Lancaster Fastener moves customer service forward

A new ERP system, new product ranges and ongoing developments into launching an online portal, UK-based Lancaster Fastener is looking forward to enhancing customer satisfaction throughout 2024 and beyond.

Trading within the fastener industry for over 40 years, Lancaster Fastener has become established as a specialist importer and stockist of small diameter industrial threaded fasteners, supplying fastener distributors in over 50 countries worldwide. Operating from 3,150m² premises in the north-west of England, Lancaster Fastener supplies many of the leading multinational fastener distribution groups whilst also offering support to smaller distribution companies throughout the world.

Elaine Hollier, managing director at Lancaster Fastener Co Ltd, explains: "To say that the last few years in our industry have been tumultuous and challenging is an understatement to say the least. As a stockist with an average stock inventory level of at least 95% we were well placed to service an increase in customer demand as we started to emerge from the pandemic, which culminated in a record sales year for 2021/22. Despite macroeconomic factors throughout 2022 including container shortages, labour shortages, inflation and an increase in raw material and operating costs, we continued to operate above pre pandemic levels. With it, 2023 brought its own challenges: the introduction of new directives, such as Russian Sanctions and CBAM, compounded with overstock in Europe which has slowed down demand for some of our product ranges."

However, now that supply chains are starting to stabilise and with normality returning to stock levels, Elaine, former sales director, now managing director since March 2023, is confident that Lancaster Fastener is in a strong position to service its extensive customer base as demand returns.

Launch of a new ERP system

In February this year Lancaster Fastener implemented a new ERP system to improve efficiency, adaptability, and productivity. "The transition to a new system was a huge undertaking. We have never relied

on 'out of the box' sales order processing, purchase order processing or warehouse management systems to operate our processes. We have been continuously developing software for over 30 years that has been specifically tailored to meet the needs of our business and to satisfy the requirements of our customers," says Elaine.

She continues: "That said, thanks to a concerted effort across all areas of the business, the transition proved to be seamless. From day one, we were able to quote, process sales orders, allocate, despatch and invoice. The only change from a customers' point of view was at the front end, with the improved design and presentation of our documentation. Our new, state of the art ERP system, will provide us with improved integration capabilities and automation that will allow us to offer customers 'real time' access to our stock levels and eCommerce platform."

Upgrading to a new ERP system has also enabled Lancaster Fastener to commence the development of an online portal for the benefit and convenience of its customers. "It is our intention to offer 24/7 access to our stock levels. In addition to placing orders through the portal, customers will be able to access stock availability and pricing," continues Elaine.

Currently in the development phase, Lancaster Fastener plans to launch the online portal later in the year with the intention of enhancing customer satisfaction and engagement.

Investment in new product ranges

From over 3,000 tonnes of stock, comprising over 10,500 product lines, Lancaster Fastener offers a fast and efficient delivery service supported by an excellence in worldwide logistics. Lancaster Fastener's stock profile is geared to meet the demand for 'fast moving' products and to offer peripheral sizes that are outside other ranges available within the industry.

Lancaster Fastener is continuously listening to the industry and developing its product range to meet the requirements of its customers.



“Our existing stock ranges are reviewed regularly to identify gaps within each product group from which to formulate future stock investment. As well as adding hundreds of new sizes to our range over the last 12 months, our enquiry tracking software has identified an increase in demand for our now established range of ISO Tap-Fix® Threadforming Screws for Metal Applications,” explains Elaine.

Navigating CBAM

As a distributor supplying both UK and EU markets, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) presents Lancaster Fastener with a challenge not least due to the complexity of the manufacturing supply chain within the industry but also with Lancaster’s status as a 3rd country intermediary supplier into the EU.

“We are already reporting default values to our European customers, and we are working with our suppliers in Asia to establish their individual CO₂ emission values,” explains Bill Jambor, commercial director at Lancaster Fastener Co Ltd.

“Obtaining accurate data from our suppliers is only one part of the challenge we face. Our IT system has therefore been upgraded so that we can generate CO₂ reports that provide a summary for multi-line customer stock orders. The issue here is that such orders are typically made up of items that have been sourced from different suppliers at widely differing times. We are however confident that the work we are doing now with EU CBAM will ensure that we are well positioned to meet the requirements of UK CBAM when it comes into effect in 2027.”

Sustainability and the year ahead

Lancaster Fastener is committed to operating in an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable manner. In response to the



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ongoing energy crisis, Lancaster Fastener has been successful in implementing strategies to mitigate its impacts and ensure sustainable energy management. “We are always looking to save energy and as a result lower operating costs,” explains Elaine. “We have recently decommissioned oil burning heaters throughout our warehouse facilities and replaced them with infrared heaters. Motion activated lighting has also been installed throughout our warehouses, so energy is only used when it’s needed.”

Elaine concludes: “While there are undoubtedly challenges ahead, overstock, subdued demand, CBAM, to name but a few, we are committed to navigating these with resilience and strategic planning. By focusing on product development, quality, innovation and a customer centric approach, we will continue to meet the needs of our customers throughout 2024 and beyond.” +

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