

UKWA CEO Peter Ward chairs successful 3PL conference

UKWA CEO Peter Ward, who chaired Day One of the 3PL Conference this week, reports that business leaders were in bullish mood following the shock Brexit result and were rolling up sleeves ready to meet new challenges for the industry as they emerged.

“As it became clear that the politicians on both sides of the divide had no real plan for a post Brexit world in the event of Leave winning the day – and neither did many companies,” he said. “While it’s pretty difficult to plan when the future continues to be unclear, delegates at 3PL conference were unanimous in their view that a ‘Business as Usual’ approach was essential to calm the panic being stoked by a media frenzy around the foreseen and unforeseen consequences of the vote. Our message is one of confidence in the resilience and resourcefulness of our industry; while we remain unsure of what post Brexit will bring, business leaders are ready to meet the challenges ahead and UKWA will be playing its part in lobbying the government hard to ensure that the concerns of the industry are heard, understood and addressed.”

State of the industry

Malory Davies of Logistics Manager opened the conference with an overview of the Top 50 companies, pointing out the mixed picture with a trend of increasing consolidation, growth in home delivery and lower margins for freight forwarders. Peter Ward highlighted the apparent contradiction in companies seeking to become ever larger through acquisition in an environment where agility and flexibility have become key to meeting rapidly changing consumer demand.

The new consumer

Ricky Wilson, Head of Operations for M&S said that Click & Collect had become a larger part of the business than Home Delivery, accordingly M&S were configuring in-store fulfilment and collection areas. Neil Ashworth CEO of CollectPlus confirmed the consumer appetite for

online ordering and collection in-store – or at any convenient location such as local post offices, fuel stations or shops. He said the business now had 6000 locations nationwide.

Returns Handling

Helen Beioley, Operations Director for Clipper Logistics outlined the company's 'Boomerang model' for returns. She said a robust returns process was a necessity for successful retailers, but represented a real 'headache', creating an opportunity for logistics partners to provide added value services, whether preparing goods for resale or recycling.

Darren Taylor, Logistics Director at City Sprint outlined the challenges of final mile delivery before he and Helen were joined by Head of Multi-channel Development for the Post Office, Michelle de Pasquale for a lively panel discussion.

The debate ranged from modern disrupters in the form of technology shaking up the marketplace to the need for more collaboration in urban areas. "Delegates agreed that there were too many 'white van men' delivering to addresses within close proximity; more consolidation centres are required to make such services more efficient and more cost-effective, easing congestion and reducing emissions," Peter Ward explains.

Room for smaller operators

In the final session, Adam Shuter, Managing Director of Exact Logistics, spoke about a deconsolidation project for German road hauliers delivering into the UK marketplace and underlined the role for smaller operators in the sector; while Mike Wallis, a Director of Keswick Enterprises explained how the 3PL industry formed around the growth of retail and the emergence of supermarkets in the Seventies and told delegates about his work developing the logistics industry in other areas including Ukraine.

Summing up, Peter Ward said the 3PL conference had provided a timely opportunity for industry leaders to gather, consider and discuss key industry issues and challenges, and to develop a shared strategy for moving forward. "The event was well-attended, with excellent contribution from high profile individuals and companies. The fact that it followed hard on the heels of the Brexit vote, gave the conference added impact and relevance."

ENDS