lift torque

Spring 2008

TRAIN FOR SUCCESS

One of the biggest challenges for a fast growing lift company is getting the right calibre of staff throughout the organisation. Nowhere is it more important than out in the field and because we recognise there is a limited pool of talent available at any point in time, we have invested very heavily in 'growing our own'. Not only does that give us a good strong pipeline of trainees, apprentices and improvers who will eventually take their place as fully qualified engineers but it also ensures that we can instil rigorous quality standards for both technical competence and professional performance.

Managing director Martin Bettridge: "Training has always been an important part of the business but in the last two years we've achieved a real step-change in this area. Substantial funding, a commitment to NVQ Level 3 as a minimum training requirement and expansion of formal apprenticeships has transformed our ability to resource a rapidly expanding portfolio.

"Bringing through new talent"

One of the keys to winning large national contracts is having the confidence in your team, that it is large and expert enough to deliver against targets and SLAs. By focusing on consistently bringing through new talent to supplement the experienced core of the team, we are doing our best to ensure that we have the right resources, the right capabilities to keep delivering for clients."

In the last month alone, five Apollo field staff have achieved their NVQ Level 3 so congratulations to: Michael Rich, Neil Jeffery, Ian Greenwood, Bradley Nelson and Paul Lyons. We also have two new apprentices on board, Callum Nye and Charlie Wilbraham, whose formal training involves both college and field-based work.

ON THE MOVE

Apollo will shortly be undergoing a major reorganisation as part of the operation moves into new offices and warehousing facilities. For some time, we've had a small satellite office on the same business park but with recent rapid expansion and strong future growth forecast, we took the decision to invest in over 4000sq ft of purpose-built space directly across from HQ. The entire installations and sales teams will be based there, and there is also provision for training and meeting rooms and a very sizeable storage area. The move will also free up the main office, enabling us to revamp the layout to better suit the needs of supervisory and field staff as well as the admin team. The infrastructure will see the deployment of the latest VoIP phones with power over Ethernet, with a microwave connection to HQ providing network and Internet access.

Operations director Garry Strange believes the move is essential if Apollo is to keep moving forward. "The new office gives us space to expand into, with a large modern stores area incorporated into the unit. It will improve organisational efficiency as well as enhancing the general working environment for all staff. We're bringing in extra resources all the time so it's essential that we scale up accordingly – it's another big milestone in the development of Apollo."

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NEW NATIONAL CONTRACTS

Over the past six months, Apollo has been steadily adding to its national contracts with a number of high profile wins. Retail is fast developing as a specialist area and we're pleased to announce that we've been awarded service and maintenance contracts by Next and Iceland, the latter returning to us after a gap of three years.

We're also building a strong reputation with housing associations, with the largest in the UK, Anchor Housing Trust, having been a client for the past two years. Now another substantial organisation in this sector, the Methodist Housing Association, has selected Apollo after a competitive tender, bringing a further 100+ units under contract.

PEOPLE NEWS

Recent expansion has seen a number of new faces join the Apollo team. With an ever increasing field engineering team, we're delighted to welcome additional supervisory resources in the shape of Jay Ahadian, Steve Mouser and Peter Snell. The service desk is boosted by the arrival of Sarah-Jane Coulson as a service/call out coordinator; Jan Peart has come in as a repair admin assistant; Lisa Baker has been promoted to service admin assistant, with Alison Wastell taking on Lisa's previous role of accounts/sales admin assistant; and Marie Mohit joins us as a typist.

In another development, Gary Jeffrey has moved into a more account management-led role, which will combine both supervisor duties and client care.

A BAD MONTH FOR…

Installations manager Peter McDaniel who got trapped inside the lift Apollo are installing in their new office. The lift was in the middle of testing when it got turned off...with Peter still inside. With the Autodialler yet to be installed, he used his mobile to call managing director Martin Bettridge. Martin was only too happy to go back 'on the tools' and deal with the trapping. As the new office is directly opposite HQ, his response time was an impressive two minutes!

A GOOD MONTH FOR…

Bob Allison, who left Apollo for another lift company last year, but has now returned to his previous position as an installations supervisor. The time away helped Bob see the strength of the Apollo offering and the determination of the team here and we're delighted to welcome him back - for good, we hope.

NEW OFFICE IN PICTURES

Left Apollo's dedicated entrance to the 2-storey office with the stores to the right

Right The new office is pictured with Apollo's HQ in the distance on the left

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Introducing Supervision

One of the tricks support desks and call centres use to improve performance is to keep targets very much front of mind – that often results in large screens flashing up KPI data to help team leaders and individuals ensure that response and service delivery meet the required standard. We've borrowed from that idea a little by introducing SuperVision – a large plasma monitor displaying the status of individual supervisors' portfolios.

It highlights opened and closed calls, pending calls, switched off lifts and incomplete technical visits and gives an at a glance overview of how well they're performing against given objectives. SuperVision also rotates screens regularly, moving from supervisor stats to the call out bar chart (a visual, colour coded time-snake showing progress against a call) and to other information based pages, such as external news, safety bulletins and letters of commendation.

MEN ON MARS

Trials are about to start on the latest addition to the Mercury Service Management System, the Mars bar. No, it's not a well known chocolate and caramel confection but a PDA interface designed specifically for the Apollo team of technicians. In the same way that engineers have Plutos and supervisors Saturns, technicians will now have Mars. The Mars module has been developed to enable supervisors and technicians to interact more seamlessly, to allow technicians to more proactively manage their own workloads and to secure a complete audit trail of activities and times for when technicians are on site in lieu of engineers.

The module gives the option of raising a new technician's visit directly from an open call or from another external prompt such as a service report or client request. The visit is then allocated to a technician who picks up the job via his Mars bar PDA; he can access all the necessary site/job details plus any extra information that has been entered by the supervisor. Real-time status ensures the supervisor remains aware at all times of the overall job progress while the recording of site arrival and departure times enables the generation of timesheets and performance metrics.

Commenting on this latest IT initiative, managing director Martin Bettridge says, "Our investment in enabling technologies, such as Mercury and the Digital Dashboard client portal, has given us a real competitive edge in recent years. But you can't afford to stand still and rest on your laurels, so we need to be continually looking at new ways to boost operational performance and to sharpen that edge further. The Mars module is the latest example of this innovative approach."

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the collection for Tommy Howland, son of Apollo engineer Tom Howland. Tommy underwent successful heart surgery at the end of January and Apollo were delighted to do their bit at this very stressful time for Tom and his wife Emma. We're pleased to report that Tommy is doing very well.

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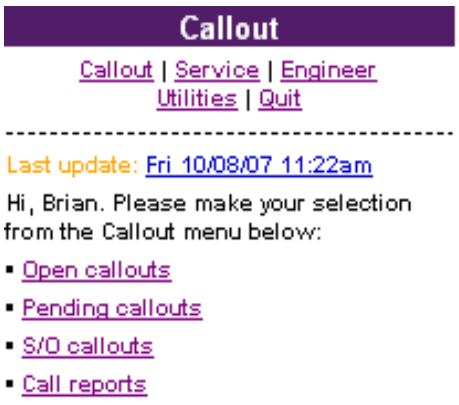
APOLLO IN SATURN MISSION

For the past couple of years, Apollo field engineers have been equipped with handheld Pocket Plutos, a PDA-style device that allows them to connect to the Mercury Service Management System and process all their call out and service work electronically. Now a three-month trial has just been successfully concluded of the latest extension to Apollo's cutting edge technology – the Supervisor Saturn. The Saturns enable each supervisor to keep abreast of their work and their engineers' activities when out of the office – either on site or at home.

Supervisors are able to view and access details of all current open calls assigned to them or their colleagues; to view all pending calls; to monitor service visits; to see the current status and location of any particular engineer; to check the night roster; to analyse call histories and to send emails from anywhere.



Operations director Garry Strange is delighted with the outcome of the trial. "Our supervisors have a heavy workload to manage and until now, that could only be done in the office. Consequently, there were times when they were out and about and not able to take decisions or be as proactive as necessary as they didn't have access to the relevant data.

With the Saturns, they can remain in constant touch with exactly what is happening in the field, are able to respond promptly, to manage people and resources more effectively and to relieve the stress that was an inevitable consequence of being out of the loop for periods of time. With every engineer now equipped with a Pluto and every supervisor issued with a Saturn, all communicating via Mercury, we've secured unprecedented levels of connectivity – key to an efficient, joined-up approach to service management."

THE LAST WORD...

Japan's Mitsubishi Electric Corporation has opened what it says is the world's tallest elevator testing tower.

The 173m-high (567ft) structure is called Solae and dominates the skyline of Inazawa City. The company says it will use the tower to conduct research into high-speed elevators to serve the next generation of super-tall buildings. The 5bn-yen ($50m;£25m) project will allow Mitsubishi to test new drives, gears, cables and other lift systems.

Super-tall buildings have become vogue again in recent years. The world's current tallest building, the Taipei 101 (508m; 1,666ft), will soon be dwarfed by towers in cities such as Dubai, Shanghai, Moscow and Chicago.

The Taipei 101 lifts - built by Toshiba Elevator and Building Systems - have a top speed of 17m/s (61km/h; 38mph) and are recognised as the fastest in the world. They incorporate a pressure control system that stops riders' ears from "popping", and streamlined cars that reduce the whistling noise that blights some fast lifts as they are pulled through narrow shafts.

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