



lift torque


Autumn 2005

Northern office on the up

Just over a year ago, Apollo opened its first regional office, an operations centre near Leeds to service its growing northern customer base. The management team was also aware that there was a potentially very rich seam of new business to be mined so expectations for the venture were high.

Twelve months on, staff numbers have quadrupled, 17% of the lifts on contract with Apollo are now run out of the Leeds office and some notable acquisitions on the client front demonstrate that we appear to be going the right way about things.

Interestingly, we have just taken on our first three power stations – Eggborough, West Burton and Cottam, while also adding more hospitals to our extensive healthcare portfolio. These include Countess of Chester Hospitals Trust, Pilgrim and Boston Hospital Trust and the Chesterfield Royal Hospital. In a significant and related development, Apollo has recently been awarded a £1million installation project for Europe's largest teaching hospital, St James's in Leeds, better known as Jimmy's.

The Leeds Teaching Hospitals 
NHS Trust

On the personnel front, Adrian Graham has been promoted to the post of operations manager and Keith Whitham has joined Neil Smith in sales. Keith brings with him over 30 years of industry experience and is already proving a valuable extra resource as we continue to cultivate what is proving to be fertile ground.

The office itself has seen further investment in the upgrading of its communication links with head office, a high speed SDSL line now ensuring even faster access to the central network and Mercury Service Management System as well as free, Voice over IP intra-office calls.

We are hoping to hold another open day before the end of the year where we can update clients in more detail as well as outline our future plans. Keep an eye out for the invite.

Plutos rolled out to all

Last year Apollo introduced Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) for its call out engineers. Christened Pocket Plutos, these smartphones allowed engineers to have real-time access to the Mercury Service Management System, where they could access call-out information and update and close their own calls without needing to speak to one of the helpdesk coordinators. Over the past twelve months they have had a dramatic effect on efficiency and communication and we're pleased to announce that the latest phase of the Pluto project is now well under way.



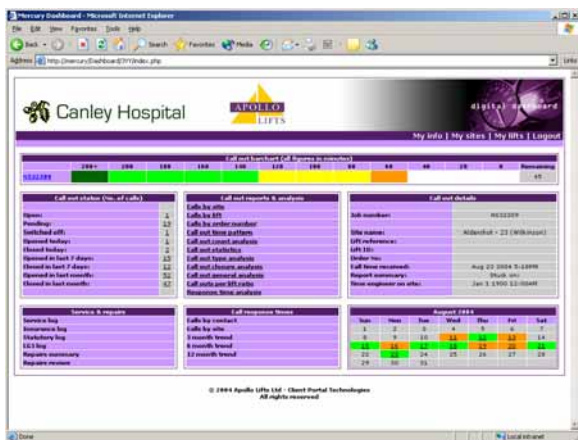
Service engineers have been trialling the new service module, which allows them to see their schedules for the month and all the visits still outstanding, all personalised to a particular engineer. Again, with service visits now being entered into Mercury as they happen, not only is bang up to date information always available but helpdesk personnel are freed up to adopt a more proactive, client-centric approach to query handling, planning and analysis. By the end of the year, it is expected that every call out and service engineer will be equipped with a Pluto.

Additional features such as a parts database are scheduled for development throughout 2006.



Dashboard update

We're delighted to report that The first version of Dashboard is now in use by some forty organisations. If you're not familiar with this Apollo offering, it's a web interface, or client portal, that has been designed to put you firmly in control. One of the most annoying aspects of managing a lift portfolio for any client is the constant need to ring or email your designated contractor for information – call out progress, service reports, repairs updates or more in-depth performance and management reports. It's time consuming, inefficient and you have got much better things to be doing with your time – why can't it all be available at your fingertips? Well with Dashboard it is and it is proving so successful that plans are now well advanced for a new version of the portal to be released, hopefully, in the spring of 2006.



A questionnaire was sent recently to all Dashboard users soliciting feedback on such aspects as usability, connectivity, most useful features and asking for suggestions as to what functionality they'd like to see in version 2.0. A final specification will be agreed with the Apollo directors and then programming will begin in earnest. If you haven't received a copy of the questionnaire and have some comments for us, please email martin.bettridge@apollo-lifts.co.uk

If you would like to organise a demonstration of Dashboard, then please contact Martin Weekes at martin.weekes@apollo-lifts.co.uk

Disabled access

Over the past 26 years, we have been providing a broad range of solutions to the disabled – from stairlifts to bathlifts to through-the-floor lifts. We can install and service many of the leading brands, including:

- Bison Bede
- Stannah
- Minivator
- Freelift
- Wessex
- Terry
- Pollocks

Working across both the public and private sector, we undertake installation projects across the UK; these are subsequently serviced and repaired out of our London and Leeds operations centres. Dedicated engineers are fully trained on manufacturers' equipment and clients have the reassurance that they are dealing with a large, well-resourced service provider. We have also developed a number of specialist areas such as local authority housing, housing trusts and hospitals, as well as supplying the domestic market.

DDA UPDATE

With Debenhams becoming the first major retailer to be prosecuted under new DDA legislation, it is perhaps a good time to remind clients that Apollo has a dedicated DDA team to help advise on the requirements under the law and to fast-track remedial works. It would appear that universal compliance with the law is a long way off but the fact that a high street name has now come under the spotlight for failing to provide physical access for all should prompt property owners and estate managers to review their portfolios. To talk to one of our consultants please contact Head Office on 01708 377088 and ask to speak to the DDA team. Alternatively, email martin.weekes@apollo-lifts.co.uk with your questions or DDA project scope.



Twenty Questions - Martin Weekes, Sales

Name

Martin Weekes

Role and responsibilities

My role is quite varied, although it is generally sales, involving not only trying to increase our portfolio but also strengthening our position with existing clients. This would include small to medium repair quotations (or as the repair section would say... Stab-in-the-dark)

Your ambitions for Apollo

I'm sure it's not only mine but the whole management team's ambition, to make Apollo Lifts one of the largest independent lift companies in this country. Since the MBO, I have seen a much more aggressive approach by the directors to reach this target. Obviously to achieve this, there must be increases in sales and productivity and with that comes the stress, but no one achieves success without 100% effort.

Your view on the company's strengths

I feel our two main strengths are the Digital Dashboard and the continuity of our management and supervisory teams. We went through a spell of changing office staff, which risked reducing managerial direction of our engineers and jeopardising relationships with our clients. Now we are reaping the fruits of stability. The introduction of Dashboard has allowed me personally to get a foot in the doors that may otherwise have been shut. Once I'm in there, they can't get rid of me.

Current challenges for independent lift contractors

Having a level playing field with the major international lift companies. We are all supposed to adhere to the LEIA fair trading terms, although this is not always the case. To persuade the buyers of major contracts to put their faith in an independent lift company. At present, rather than risking their reputation they would prefer to employ one of the majors. It doesn't matter if they perform or not.

The keys to being successful in today's industry

GOOD SERVICE. Old fashioned I know but I may

be able to persuade clients to give Apollo Lifts a try, but if the engineer fails in his task of maintaining their lifts, we will be shown the door. The same goes for how we perform in the office, how we respond to our client's requests, how we report on defects etc. There is no short cut to success, it takes commitment by us all.

The thing you'd most like to change about the industry

The perception that if one lift breaks down, every lift on the site is not being maintained properly. However, since the introduction of Dashboard, we are able to give our clients a much more realistic overview.

The best piece of advice you'd give someone coming into any business

From the very first day of your business, you must have established your running procedures. It may seem over the top giving every job certain numbers, creating a filing system for everything, getting all the recommended standards, but once the company's structure is in place, if a large job comes your way, you can accept it without breaking stride. Our service management system is justification in itself. We were able to take on a contract with Anchor Trust of over 350 lifts and have it up and running in a matter of weeks.

Most painful business lesson learnt

When I first became a Project Manager for another lift company, I was told to go and get the subbie we were employing to "get his act together and push the job on", by my then employer. This I thought I could do by being bossy, loud and probably obnoxious. He downed his tools and his mate proceeded to tell me where I could stick my clipboard. I drove back to the office, thinking I handled that rather well, they won't mess with me again. Unfortunately, by the time I got back to the office, my boss was spitting blood, He told me in no uncertain terms that he needed them more than me, and to get my backside back to the site and apologise, or pick up my P45. The lesson learnt was always treat people as you would like to be treated, you get so much more out of them.

.../cont

Proudest personal achievement

Apart from having something to do with bringing two fantastic children into this world, it would be joining the Army as an 8 1/2 stone weakling, albeit a fit weakling, and returning 10 weeks later as a 11 stone lean mean fighting machine.

Alternative career

I suppose it has to be being in the SAS but I'm not allowed to talk about that.

Unfulfilled dream

To be a footballer or a rock star and to be rich. If I have to be rich without being in either profession, then that's ok with me.

Most useful desktop gadget

My phone and laptop synchronising gadget. Keeps me in-touch at all times. (Maybe not quite such a good idea after all)

Favourite place to be when not at work

Working out in the gym, watching West Ham play at Upton Park, getting frustrated watching my son's football team lose or riding my bike on a hot summer's day in the countryside.

Secret vices

I packed in smoking about 16 months ago but have replaced that with chocolate, vast quantities of it.

Likes and dislikes

Chocolate I like, foreign food I don't. I'm the obligatory Englishman who goes to the Chinese restaurant and orders chicken'n'chips (with no sauce please). My wife has been close to divorcing me due to my boring, bland palette but I am improving. In the last year I have started to eat mushrooms and cauliflower, and, after 44 years of telling everyone "No baked potatoes for me, please" I tried one and found I love 'em.

Music on your car stereo

All sorts. Pink Floyd, Jamie Cullum, Joss Stone, Barbra Streisand or Robbie Williams. I even like some of my kids' techno stuff.

Three things you'd take to a desert island

My mountain bike, Sky Sports and Angelina Jolie

Three words you'd use to describe yourself

Funny, loyal and impetuous

Three words you think your colleagues would use

Conscientious, temperamental and pragmatic

Our Man in the Van

Field staff don't always get the plaudits these days but Apollo is absolutely dependent on the quality and reliability of its engineering team. Here we put one of our frontline staff under the spotlight>>

1. *Name*
Steve Pullen
2. *Job*
Call out engineer
3. *Years with Apollo*
Three
4. *Best things about the job*
The sheer variety of the work
5. *Funniest thing that's ever happened to you*
Attending a trap-in and finding the 'passenger' was a consignment of gold bullion. Then I was told in no uncertain terms that I could not go onto the lift, into the lift or touch the lift in any way until the bullion was removed. Which led to a bit of a stalemate...
6. *Worst thing that's ever happened to you*
Having Gary Strange's [operations director] name appear on my mobile and wondering what it is that I've done wrong
7. *The qualities that make for a good lift engineer*
Listening to clients
8. *The biggest change you've seen in the job/industry*
The belt and braces approach to health and safety
9. *Your van - tidy or tip?*
Tidy on a Monday, not so tidy by Friday!

TRAINING UPDATE

Most lift companies boast that they have fully qualified personnel but what does that mean precisely? At Apollo, every engineer has to attain as a minimum the NVQ Level 3 standard, as well as undertake all relevant equipment training and health and safety refreshers. Our congratulations to Matt Torrence, Tom Howland and Richard Hollins who have all recently gained their NVQ qualification.