



**Willow
Starcom**

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Global Chemical Manufacturer, Stepan, relies on Willow Starcom to maintain their UK hardware.

Stepan 

Stepan is a global manufacturer of specialty and intermediate chemicals used in consumer products and industrial applications. Key manufactured Stepan products include surfactants, which form the main ingredients in consumer and industrial cleaning compounds including household detergents, shampoos, lotions, toothpastes and cosmetics to achieve the foaming and cleaning qualities. Other applications include lubricating ingredients and emulsifiers for spreading of agricultural products, and germicidal quaternary compounds. Stepan's UK factory is based in Stalybridge, in the foothills of the Pennines. Globally the company has over 15 locations.

Darran Wilde is the IT Manager at the Stalybridge site which spans 9 ½ acres. Darran's remit is to look after all IT functions for the 127 employees onsite across manufacturing, accounts, sales, after services, HR, planning and logistic departments.

The supporting role entails cover for everything from PC Support to maintenance of the business critical systems and servers including the SAP database. The site is securely linked to US Head Office in Illinois where core data is replicated on an ongoing basis and has links to the European Stepan office network via a VPN link to France.

This core data includes everything to do with the SAP system including invoices, sales, purchasing, accounts ledger and information about manufacturing and key data that is recorded throughout the manufacturing process.

With this extensive role and infrastructure to manage and operating in a team of just two,

back in 2004 Darran enlisted the assistance of local resellers to provide comprehensive support and maintenance for the hardware infrastructure.

The Problem:

Darran wanted to locate a service provider who could flexibly and agilely take on maintenance support for elements of hardware within the infrastructure. The emphasis on flexibility whilst adhering to Service Level Agreements is reflected in that various ages of the hardware to be maintained with some falling outside of the warranty period. At the start of the project, Darran identified that he wanted full response and fix support for ten of the companies' business critical servers and all printers and laptops that fell outside of the initial warranty support period. He invited several companies to tender for the business and selected Willow Starcom due to their affordable pricing, flexible and friendly attitudes and on the strength of the technical skills demonstrated.

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The Willow Starcom Approach:

Darran takes up the story, "We were looking for a team of players that could flexibly sit behind the IT department at Stepan and literally step-in where required. That was four years and many incidents ago. It's become a true partnership - we know each others skill sets so well that we know what is achievable over the phone or what will require an immediate on-site fix by an engineer."

The Relationship in Action:

A recent critical situation highlighted the strengths of the agreement. A critical server running the software that controls the plants temperature regulation for production of chemicals became inoperable. Loss of the server immediately dictated that the entire plant's manufacturing capabilities close down.

Officially the server fell under the remit of engineering so was not covered by Willow Starcom, but Darran placed a call into the team and Willow Starcom were assigned at 3.15pm on a Friday afternoon to resolve the issue. As the plant runs 24x7, every hour of lost production would cause a significant impact to the business, even over the weekend period.

Following initial discussions via a telephone conference with Willow Starcom it was determined by Darran and the engineer that the motherboard had failed in entirety, and that the only course of action was to source a replica of the machine and port the data across – but a challenge indeed, late on a Friday afternoon. The Willow Starcom support team dug deep and located a machine and had it expressed shipped to the Stalybridge plant for 9am on the Saturday morning where the temperature data was duly

replicated and production could recommence. Darran takes up the story, "What would have aken many suppliers 5 days to locate, source and fix, was sorted within 12 hours through Willow Starcoms calm, prompt and efficient approach. The resultant impact to our business had we not had the agreement with Willow Starcom in place, could have been tens of thousands of pounds worth of delayed orders and lost production time."

Other less dramatic call outs include around 12 call outs a year ranging from an engineer attending to re-install particular patches to upgrade patch information and parts being shipped across over the phone.

As with all successful business relationships, feedback and progression remain key. Collectively the team have moved from having annual reviews to open quarterly reviews that discuss improvements to the SLA and provide suggestions as to how Stepan may improve the infrastructure.

Darran concludes, "We all sleep sounder knowing that we have the support of Willow Starcom behind us. They continue to impress even after four years with their determination to go beyond the whole job."

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