

The Manchester Experience

Our store in Manchester was one of the largest in the North West of England it employed over 500 staff and contained the regional administration offices for 5 other stores in the area.

SATURDAY 15th JUNE 1996 was the day before Fathers Day. It was the day when England played Scotland in Euro 96. In the South of England the Henley Regatta was taking place and strangely enough Marks & Spencer plc was undertaking a Major Incident Management Exercise for its corporate team in London.

The morning of The 15th June was bright, warm and approximately 80,000 people were shopping in Manchester. There were 21 police officers on duty in the city centre. We were at level 2 security status, which meant we were undertaking additional internal security measures but not to our highest level which would have meant permanent manning of our CCTV systems. At approximately 10am the police were alerted (via Samaritans and Granada Television through a coded message) saying there was a bomb in the City Centre.

At 10.04 am the Police instructed the Store Deputy Manager to move staff away from glass within the store and there was agreement with the Police that we would evacuate.

A total of 173 Marks & Spencer staff were working in the store that morning and were involved in the evacuation. They went to their primary assembly point in the Sub Basement Goods Reception Area, however when they arrived there it was realised that we were too close to the vehicle for safety and that we needed to move further away from the store.

We had a predetermined secondary evacuation point, outside the Gas Board Offices - approximately 350 meters from our store and so we moved all our staff to that secondary location. However, this was soon to be caught up within the wider police cordon. Whilst transferring staff from evacuation point 1 to 2 two staff went missing.

So as this secondary point became unusable and with no predetermined third option we moved into one of the largest spaces available on that side of the city centre, Victoria Railway Station.

In our lessons learnt all our Stores now have secondary evacuation points at least 600 – 800 meters from the Store.

At 11.16 the blast shattered the glass roof of the station causing injury to 240 of the people who were sheltering at the Victoria Railway Station including 10 M & S staff who required hospital treatment.

Amongst all the noise the store Deputy Manager and her team tried to re-establish some order to the chaos. She made certain that another member of the store team accompanied each member of staff who was being sent to hospital. These carers were given money for phones and transport as

well as the mobile phone number in our evacuation pack. This ensured a dialogue was maintained between the carer at hospital, the manager at the assembly point and thus into the corporate centre.

Subsequently this procedure has been incorporated into our planned response

The media were by now in the area and one reporter asked one of our Commercial Managers for an interview, his first question- 'Are Marks and Spencer going to open the Store tomorrow?'

Our Store Manager was in Manchester that morning but in another part of the City centre. He heard the explosion and identified the noise as coming from the part of the city where his store was located. He started to make his way against all the flow of people trying to get to his store.

What became clear very early in the situation was the need to get staff home (although some wanted to remain as they felt they would be safer to stay with their colleagues). This was a very difficult task as almost everyone had evacuated without wallet purse handbags or car keys, and Manchester City Centres transport system was severely disrupted. Multi storey car parks closed for 12 days, many cars unusable. In our evacuation pack, we had enough small change/phone cards for people to ring relatives or friends and for those who had no method of getting into their own homes we gave money to pay for locksmiths. However, this created the second traumatic event of

the day for these people to deal with. Before leaving, all staff were told to report to their nearest store on their next working day.

Back in London we were three hours into an exercise simulating the loss of our one of our Computer Centres, through the company's standard emergency communication procedures we received the information that the bomb had exploded, the exercise was immediately terminated to manage the real thing. In fact, one of the hardest tasks in those first few minutes was convincing everyone that this was not part of the exercise.

Initial reports were confused. One of the most important issues we had to face was the Manchester management team had never experienced the devastation caused by the two London bombs in St Mary Axe and Bishopsgate. In consequence, they had no relative scale of experience to the damage assessment and the devastation that they witnessed to the perimeter of our store.

The Media were seeking information; the first TV pictures showed the M & S Store as being very close to the epicentre of the explosion. Within an hour we had a call from a National Sunday Paper asking us to join them in criticising the Police for their lack of preparedness in the Manchester evacuation. Not only did we refuse to join in their criticism but also we made a statement positively supporting the Police efforts and stated that in our view their prompt action had been responsible for the fact that no one had lost their lives. Needless to say, our comments did not reach the print line of that papers Sunday edition.

At 2.30, our Corporate Press Officer carried out a 10-minute live interview with Greater Manchester radio. Significantly they did not only focus on the explosion but wanted to know about people issues and the long-term continuance of Marks & Spencer trading in Manchester.

The damage to our store included the loss of our entire regional telephone network affecting 8 other stores in the area. We decided that our best option was to divert all calls for these stores

into a helpline at our Customer Ordering Centre at Warrington. Thanks to our contacts with British Telecom and with their efforts, this was set up within the space of a few hours.

We discovered that one of the members of staff in Manchester was a trainee for our new store that was due to open in Germany. She was due to fly home that evening, however all her travel documentation and luggage were in the store.

There was nothing that could be done immediately so she was booked into a hotel on the outskirts of Manchester with a member of the Manchester regional team acting as support.

Later in the afternoon the Regional & Store Management teams established a joint operating base at Old Trafford using the offices of our maintenance company.

By this time our staff at the hospital had been examined and all except one discharged. She was detained in hospital for a minor operation on her injuries and released after an overnight stay.

During the day we had alerted the Police that our in store CCTV system had --- as part of its normal coverage pattern --- cameras trained on the street area where the vehicle had been parked. At 9.30 p.m. a member of our Store Management Team was required to make an exploratory visit under Police escort to recover the CCTV Tapes to aid the police investigation. Little evidence was taken from the tapes.

The morning of SUNDAY 16th JUNE began with both the store and regional teams setting up in our regional offices in Salford. Still little was known about the true extent of the damage to our store. All we could tell the centre was that the store would be closed for a few days until things were sorted out. A posse of Head Office experts were starting to arrive to support.

During that second day we made contact with over 70% of our staff who had not been on duty the previous afternoon, largely through the helpline which had been set up the previous day at Warrington. There were frustrations in contacting some of the remaining staff. Having provided us with their emergency contact details for use in such situations we found that the information given was either out of date or related to their Next of Kin's work details which was not a lot of use on that Sunday Morning.

Cash was made available through local stores for those staff who had immediate needs. Particularly affected were those staff who were paid weekly and who had not collected their salary from the office.

The need to determine how we were going to maintain sales was important and yet the priority had to be given to dealing with the people issues and media interests.

Throughout the day work went on to ensure that the stock which would have been delivered into Manchester was redistributed appropriately throughout the region.

Counselling for our staff was high on our agenda and so we provided trained personnel to be available at all the local stores and we started the arrangements to open a Drop-in Centre for Counselling This was to be established in the Salford Offices and would open on Tuesday morning.

On MONDAY, JUNE 17th Manchester Staff started to arrive at their nearest store. We realised one of our initial mistakes in asking staff to go to their nearest store at this point when over 150

Manchester staff arrived in Salford Store where normally 36 staff work. We had no problems providing personal service for our customers in that store that morning.

The staff were informed of the Drop- in Counselling centres by noticeboard information in every store. Transport would be provided for anyone wishing to visit the centre whenever it was required. The service would be made available to everyone including contractors, and support was offered to partners/ spouses.

The German trainee was accompanied to London by a personnel Manager and met with M & S Head Office Management together they went to the German Embassy where replacement documents were issued to allow her to get home that day.

Media interest continued from BBC, ITV, Manchester Evening News, & Manchester radio and focused on the People issues and in particular the arrangements for our counselling centre. The Store Manager spent most of the morning being interviewed on Good Morning Britain Programme on TV. Incidentally he was given a crash course in media training of some 3 hours prior to going on.

We now have regular media training workshops for a number of people per year

We set up a team from all business areas looking at what we could do to support Manchester and recovery of our business operation in the centre. I don't think there was ever a question that we would never go back.

TUESDAY 18th JUNE 1996 was the first time that we were given access into to our store. At 11.30 ---three days after the bomb exploded specialist teams who had been assembled throughout the weekend went in to the building to assess the extent of the damage. Our efforts however were soon to be restricted when within a few hours the Health & Safety Executive of the Local Authority served a "Condemned Site" notice on our building. This restricted access into the tower block where our staff's personal belongings and records were still held.

Imagine the smell that had started to fill the store -- Food Stock had been without refrigeration for over 72 hours. Chickens were high -- Yoghurts had started to POP.

The process of removing it from the store began and took over Seven days and nights of intense manual effort before all of it was cleared. The conditions worsening as time went on.

Our store in Ashton was designated as the new Administration centre for the region. From there, the use of Space and Equipment was reviewed in local stores to ensure we could offer our customers the correct catalogue and stock levels. High Street stores in the region would receive priority for distribution.

On this Tuesday morning, our Director of HR visited the regional office and two of the stores used for staff relocation. The drop in Centre opened and was manned by 4 trained counsellors as well as Store Management and Doctors from our Occupational Health Department in Head Office. 12 members of staff visited in the first session alone.

A Reception Desk manned by Manchester HR managers ensured those visiting gained sight of familiar faces. The staff who had been injured in the explosion attended the centre and were seen individually, this gave an opportunity to be updated on their progress. Management & Supervision who had been involved were seen and everyone was given leaflets on the Helpline and Coping with Loss

Strategies were put into place to maximise developing sales patterns in the other M & S stores in the Northwest. Additional personnel were drafted in to help in the recovery strategy particularly salvage management and resourcing decontamination specialist for tilling & I.T. equipment.

FRIDAY 21st JUNE 1996 saw a visit from our Chairman who had been out of the country when the explosion occurred. On his return to the United Kingdom, one of his first tasks was to visit the damaged store and he attended a meeting where all of our Manchester staff came together for the first time since the bombing.

It was held in the Piccadilly Hotel and HR Managers from local Stores attended for we recognised that this would be a very emotional occasion. This was the first time all the staff had come together since the bombing and highlighted that the incident for many---- was a spark for other problems to emerge.

For example, those staff who had domestic issues outside of their work environment had used their job to act as a haven of peace for their feelings-- the loss of their work environment caused their one support mechanism to fall over. This reinforced the need for an ongoing support mechanism for staff who would be requiring longer-term welfare and personnel contact.

Nearly a week now since the bombing and all cash from sales floor tills and the cash room was removed from the store. 300,000 leaflets promoting M & S shopping were distributed from local stores.

One week after the bomb on SATURDAY 22nd JUNE 1996 specialist teams commenced the removal of staff possessions. Because of possible contamination from amongst other things Asbestos ---they were removed from the store and held under controlled conditions.

Four Contractors were dismissed for attempted theft from the site.

BY WEEK ENDING 6th JULY 1996, three weeks after the bomb, our recovery efforts were still centred on two focal points. Our staff who were displaced by the bombing and maintaining a range of goods for customers of our Manchester store who were now of course unable to shop in the city centre in their chosen alternative M & S stores.

As the salvage operation, continued only 58 out of over 500 staff had been reunited with their personal possessions. An average of £35 was paid to each member of staff as compensation for loss of personal items, which it was impossible to recover. As you would expect, once again the people issues arose, when reuniting staff with their valuables and sentimental items.

All stock and equipment were cleared from our sales floor. All the computer equipment had been removed and sent to a specialist for cleaning and recovery of data. The CCTV equipment was recovered and examined. With the exception of one or two cameras, it could be used again in another store.

On the 13th JULY 1996 Four weeks after the bombing 4 members of Manchester staff had attended the AGM in London where our Chairman announced that we were to open two sites in Manchester to re establish our trading position. The announcement of the new stores gave us the opportunity to focus our efforts to get the Manchester team together again whilst we knew it was going to be a very hard 13 week period.

Central efforts now focused on achieving supplies of equipment and co-ordinating our contractors for a very ambitious 13 week two site opening programme. Everyone had focus and the ultimate aim 'lets go back to the city centre'.

Staff were allowed to work anywhere in the U.K. during this 13-week period. This resulted in 548 staff using different locations given the opportunity to go to any store across the U.K. until the stores were to open. This resulted in 19 "semi-permanent" locations used the furthest being the Isle of Man.

In this case study we have tried to give you the M & S perspective to the recovery of our business in Manchester but I would stress it was not just Marks & Spencer's crisis. This incident hit Manchester the city and everyone who lived there.

If asked to summarise the four key learning points for Marks & Spencer we would use the 4 P's that the Manchester Team used throughout their recovery efforts.

The first P is for the People Issues-- They are complex and will be with you for a longer period than you originally think.

The second P is for the press ---They will come up with many issues -- some which are totally unexpected but they can also be proactive on your behalf

The third P stands for your product --- not what you sell but ensuring that you're corporate reputation remains intact throughout your response.

Our final P is for the premises—understanding what is in each location in terms of possessions equipment and stock is essential to the salvage efforts

As a result of the 'Manchester' bombing we have enabled ourselves to develop our continuity plan.