

Honest, transparent customer communication was key to our smooth transition through Brexit

Jacqueline Watson, Managing Director, Citrefine International Ltd

Following announcement of the results of the European Union (EU) Referendum back in 2016, it was hard to imagine that it would take five years for Brexit to become a reality. And, while the years of political toing and froing were unsettling, our team managed to navigate the uncharted territory with confidence, which is ultimately down to the skill and experience we have at Citrefine.

We are fortunate to have real experts responsible for managing different areas of the business and, while we, along with every business in the UK, didn't have prior experience of Brexit, what we could rely on was our expert knowledge of business to manage our customers' and suppliers' concerns; from Rebecca Davidson's import and export expertise, to Genevieve Faherty's perspective on regulations, and our Managing Director, Jacqueline Watson's knowledge of dealing with general business challenges.

Our success at overcoming all the obstacles that Brexit threw at us, came down to three things:

- Planning
- Customer support
- Communication

Preparation was key

From the day of the referendum, it quickly became clear that we were going to have quite some time to plan our Brexit approach; time to understand exactly what processes needed to be in place to ensure the smoothest transition for our customers and suppliers.

We know that reliability and consistency of supply is vitally important to our customer, so planning and flexibility was key to supporting them through the process of Brexit; from managing production schedules with our dedicated operations and logistics team, to managing demand planning, order processing and fulfilment.

Our expert regulatory team was also able to appease any customers' anxieties by keeping on top of all the regulatory changes and ensuring that our active

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substance, Citriodiol® and, therefore, our customers' products would stay compliant. This is even more complex now that the UK has left the EU; we not only have to work with EU Biocidal Products Regulation (BPR) but the GB BPR too, adding an additional layer of regulation. This was something that we planned for and actioned two years before Brexit.

Open communication goes a long way

Our regular, open communication (which is our usual way of doing business) with customers was vital in instilling our customers' confidence in us. Ahead of 1 January 2021, we wrote to all of our customers to advise them to plan well ahead for managing stock levels. We knew that there would be port congestion and customs problems in January, so requested that all our customers placed orders ahead of Christmas, which meant that we could distribute ahead of the end of the year too. We keep a high stock holding each year and, due to efficient planning, this meant that we were able to meet all of our customers' demands.

To take the onus and pressure off our customers, we also communicated the step-by-step processes they had to take to import stock from outside of the EU; explaining what was needed in detail, even directing them to the correct websites to apply for what was needed.

Since December 2020, we are proud to have been managing shipments and deliveries across Europe smoothly and efficiently.

Our customers are our priority

From manufacturers and brand owners, to formulators and agents, we worked with a range of organisations and individuals with various support requirements in the run up to Brexit. This is where our strong relationships with our customers and experience were key; all of our customers have faith in us and we have always been able to overcome any challenges that have come our way.

It is this experience that has meant that after more than a quarter of a century in operation, we have been able to remain true to the vision of our founders, serving the insect repellent market by providing a highly effective product that combines nature's wisdom with robust scientific testing, for the benefit for our communities and the planet.

