



Fecc

INTERVIEW



StortGroup

Fecc's interview
ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

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FECC ANNIVERSARY INTERVIEW: 40 YEARS STORT GROUP

- 1. Huge congratulations on your 40th company anniversary – what an impressive success story! We would like to take this opportunity to learn more about your achievements over these years. And what are or were the biggest challenges your company has been faced with?**

My parents founded our company 40 years ago in a very different world. My father (who is now our Executive Chairman) has always taught us that the relationships with our Principals were paramount. This is as true today as it was then, and we work hard to maintain and nurture these relationships every day.

More recently we have been faced with three external shocks to the UK & Global economies – Brexit, the COVID pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. It is a testament to the resilience, flexibility and long-term thinking of Stort and the wider chemical distribution sector that we have collectively emerged from this period of turbulence as strong, if not stronger than before. We completed the acquisition of a smaller speciality distributor (including an EU-based entity) in 2020 and we have doubled our Group turnover since then. We must be doing something right!



Richard Gilkes
Managing Director of
Stort Group

- 2. Which further challenges do you foresee in relation to the current and future supply chain situation?**

Fortunately, for the whole supply chain, supply of products has improved in 2023 following the challenges of 2021/22. However, a reduction in customer demand, de-stocking & stronger competition are now the biggest challenges. By their nature, these are Global challenges although, for our domestic market, they are exacerbated by the lingering effects of Brexit here in the UK.

I don't think we have yet seen the real damage leaving the EU free trade zone will have on the long-term health of the UK economy. The constant delays to the implementation of UK Reach are not helping us to plan for the future. Clarity is needed urgently.

- 3. How do you see the chemical distribution sector evolving in the future? How can distributors possibly add (even) further value to their partners?**

Chemical distributors exist to add value to both suppliers and customers. Our core business is to make sure we are able to meet our customers' demands with the right product delivered at the right time at the right price. If we continue to do this well then, we will be in a strong position to respond to the trends which will shape our sector over the next few decades such as an increasing move towards digitalisation and a focus on sustainability throughout the chemical supply chain.

- 4. Sustainability and circular economy are very high on the European agenda – how do you see chemical distributors contributing to these key aspects? What is Stort Group in particular doing in this area?**

The whole chemical distribution sector is acutely aware of the need to stay abreast of the demands of the Chemical Industry. It is more challenging for smaller companies in the sector to be overly proactive in pursuing a sustainability agenda and we rely a lot on the excellent work our Trade Associations in Europe (Fecc) and the UK (CBA) do in this space. It is about learning about best practice in the sector and incorporating measures appropriate to our business model. We have started

to work closely with our third-party logistic partners and customers to minimise the carbon impact of the products we import and subsequently move around the UK and Ireland. We are also exploring installing solar panels at our headquarters which is particularly important as we transition our car fleet to electric vehicles.

5. What's your vision for Stort Group for the next decades

I would like to think we will continue to grow profitably despite the challenging environment. We now have third generation family employees in Senior Management which gives us comfort that our values and work ethic will continue for many years to come. We are extremely lucky to be working in such a successful and vibrant sector - in my time on the CBA Executive and since we joined the Fecc as one of the first SME members, I have been privileged to meet many peers from big and small chemical distributors. Although we are competitors there is a strong will to be collaborators as well and, when I eventually leave the industry (hopefully in many years) I will have made a lot of good friends.



Stort Group is a leading independent speciality chemical distributor to the Coatings and Flavour & Fragrance Industries in the UK, Ireland and Europe. Formed in 1982 and celebrating 40 years trading in 2022, Stort Group is still 100% family-owned and managed.