I HOLLAND®
TABLETTING SCIENCE

A Day in the Life of a Technical Sales Manager

Liam Preston is a Technical Sales Manager supporting customers with all of their tooling needs. He joined I Holland in 2015 as a Sales and Service Engineer, providing on site technical support for PharmaCare and has been key in the testing and implementation of IH-TMS.

At I Holland, our Technical Sales Managers play a key role in helping tablet manufacturers overcome production challenges, improve efficiency and find the right tooling solutions for their processes. We sat down with Liam Preston, Technical Sales Manager, to learn more about his role, his experience in the industry and what a typical day looks like when you're working closely with customers around the world.

Can you introduce yourself and explain your role at I Holland?

My name is Liam Preston, and I've been with I Holland since 2015. As a Technical Sales Manager, I'm responsible for both the technical and commercial aspects of customer projects. That includes technical discussions, negotiations and project management.

My role is really about understanding what the customer wants to achieve, then building a strategy around that objective and providing the right solution to help them get there.

What does a typical day look like for you?

There isn't one. It varies hugely depending on where I am and what projects I'm working on. When I'm in the office, I like to start early and review anything that's come in overnight. I check enquiries, make sure actions are assigned and ensure nothing slips through the cracks. We also hold cross-department meetings each morning to make sure everyone is aligned and has what they need to move quotes and orders forward.

A large part of my role involves visiting customers and taking a hands-on approach to solving problems. When I'm travelling, my days are usually filled with customer meetings. Some are focused on troubleshooting production issues, where we'll investigate root causes and discuss potential solutions. Others are with prospective customers, where I take

the time to understand their processes, requirements and goals.

How did you first get into the tablet tooling industry?

I fell into it. I'd just finished my qualifications at college when I spotted a job advertisement online. After researching the role, I found the industry interesting and felt it was something I could do, so I applied. I interviewed the following week and never looked back.

I started as a Sales & Service Engineer, supporting our PharmaCare equipment range. The role involved technical support, installations, training and helping implement what was, at the time, a new system — the IH-TMS. After five years, I moved into the Technical Sales Manager position that I hold today.

What are the most common challenges customers come to you with?

It's going to have to be the obvious one. Sticking. It's still one of the most common and challenging issues faced across the industry. The difficulty is that there are so many potential causes and solutions.

What's your key to building strong customer relationships?

Listening. You need to take the time to truly understand the customer, their products and their manufacturing environment. Every customer is different, so understanding their individual requirements is essential. Openness and honesty are equally important. Having an open dialogue opens the door to building trust and that trust gives customers confidence that the solutions you're recommending is genuinely the best solution for them.

Liam played a key part in bringing the IH-TMS to customers around the world

How important is understanding a customer's formulation and compression process?

The better you understand a customer's product and manufacturing process, the easier it becomes to establish a common language. It also allows you to draw on previous experiences and apply your knowledge more effectively to their specific situation.

What kinds of tooling issues do you help customers solve most often?

Corrosion is something we see regularly. Sometimes it's caused by aggressive formulations or tooling being left in the press for extended periods, but more often it's linked to incorrect cleaning and drying procedures.

Selecting the correct tooling specification is also critical. For example, tooling used in a wash-in-place (WIP) environment requires greater corrosion resistance than tooling used in a standard press. We also frequently encounter issues such as capping and weight variation. In some cases, these can be linked to tooling tolerances, particularly where alternative tooling suppliers may work to wider tolerances than those used by I Holland.

How do coatings and punch design influence customer performance?

What you'll find is that they all work together.

Generally speaking, coatings are used to improve corrosion resistance, wear

resistance or provide anti-stick properties. Sometimes they deliver a combination of all three. Matching the coating properties to the formulation's requirements is vital for trouble-free operation.

At the same time, design should never be overlooked. A well-designed tablet and tooling solution can often prevent sticking and other manufacturing issues before production even begins.

What's one tooling issue that is often misunderstood by manufacturers?

Again, I'd say sticking. There are far more potential causes than what many manufacturers will explore during troubleshooting. A common approach is to simply switch to stainless steel tooling, but that alone rarely addresses the root cause.

Another misconception is that polishing a punch until it's shiny will automatically solve sticking problems. While that may help in certain situations, sticking is often far more complex and usually requires a more comprehensive investigation.

How do you stay up to date with developments in the industry?

I use a variety of sources. LinkedIn has become a valuable source of industry information and discussion. I also follow industry publications and news outlets such as Pharma Boardroom to stay informed about developments across the industry.

How closely do you work with other departments?

I work with them daily. It might be for opinions; it may be for discussing design changes. It's always best to get multiple expert's input, especially when trying to solve an issue.

Close communication with customer service is key as all quotes move through them. The finance team is involved as I'll often discuss them payment terms, and of course despatch to ensure a smooth delivery process. Working with manufacturing is important in order to schedule orders so that we can fulfil urgent orders and our premium delivery guarantees.

What's the most rewarding part of finding technical solutions?

Seeing an idea become a success. It's incredibly satisfying when a proposed solution is implemented successfully. Above all I'm happy when the customer is satisfied. Converting that prospective customer into a loyal partner is hugely rewarding.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I genuinely enjoy being in front of customers. I enjoy that time spent with them discussing whatever their query may be and drawing up a solution and a plan. I've also been fortunate enough to visit places around the world that I might never otherwise have experienced, while building strong relationships with both customers and agents.

What skills are most important for being successful as a Technical Sales Manager?

Listening. Truly understanding the customer, taking the time to understand

what they need and not just trying to secure a quick sale. Also, you have to commit yourself to learning the products, understanding their benefits and continuously expanding your technical knowledge.

What keeps the role exciting and interesting for you?

Every single day is different. I'm constantly working on new projects and supporting customers across different markets and regions. I've worked with customers across Europe and the Middle East, and no two countries or markets are the same.

What makes I Holland different from other tooling manufacturers?

For me, it's our commitment to partnership. We're not just selling tooling. We genuinely want to help our customers improve their production, which lends perfectly to our compnay purpose: to help you enrich lives by optimising the production of health-improving and life-saving tablets.

What trends are you currently seeing in the pharmaceutical industry?

There's a definite move towards improving efficiency and increasing production output. This can be seen in the growing demand for multi-tip tooling, which allows manufacturers to significantly increase tablet output.

What's one thing you always keep with you during the workday?

When I'm visiting customers, I always carry a loupe on me. Being able to closely inspect tooling can reveal a huge amount about what's actually happening during the compression process. Often, you'll spot details that aren't visible to the naked eye.

If you could describe your role in three words, what would they be?

Exciting. Rewarding. Travel.

It's exciting because I'm always being faced with a new challenge. It's rewarding because helping customers solve those challenges is incredibly satisfying. And travel because the role has allowed me to see the world.

What advice would you give someone entering technical sales?

Listen to your customers and listen to your colleagues. Behave like a sponge and take in as much as possible, that way you'll be able to apply that to your own situations. Don't be afraid to ask questions to the customer, you'll learn so much more by doing that.

What's one thing you'd like customers to better understand about tablet tooling?

Not all tooling is stainless steel.

Different tooling steels contain different alloying elements, in order to match them with the correct product being compressed. Because tooling is the interface that forms the tablet, ensuring it's correctly specified, well designed, manufactured to precise tolerances and properly maintained can have a significant impact on tablet quality and manufacturing performance.