

Field Container - Sheetfed Simulator Case Study

If you don't think that training translates into productivity, you haven't talked to Mike Schmidt at Field Container's Elk Grove Village, IL, facility. Schmidt has been operating Sinapse's Sheetfed Offset Simulator (SHOTS) for training the facility's press operators since 1997.

"We heard about SHOTS through our blanket supplier, and when we looked at the system, we were very impressed," recalls Schmidt, the company's printing manager. "We presented the information to our corporate steering committee, and since then, we have used it to train all of our press crews at this facility."

Schmidt was particularly impressed that the simulator looks and acts like a real press. Its dual monitor system shows the press controls on one side and the press output on the other. "You have a full set of tools, including a scanning densitometer and lobe for checking register and dot gain," he says. "You can even go into the 'shop floor' and examine the configuration of the press. It's as close as you can get without actually being on press."

SHOTS also offers detailed views of the final output - the top view, bottom view, and corner views - for detailed analysis.

Training for Complex Press Operation

Using conventional methods to train pressmen for Field Container's high-end packaging work was no picnic. The company produces complex, multi-color process jobs using waterless offset, often with high-resolution screens. High-gloss LTV coatings, specialized processes such as tinted and pearlescent coatings, and even holographics and embossing, made conventional press training a challenging and time-consuming process.

SHOTS allowed Field Container to simplify this training dramatically. Once the simulator was installed, Schmidt put all of the facility's 70 printing employees through the training around the clock- all shifts, 24 hours a day. "We had a very aggressive schedule, with at least one person in training all the time," he says. "Because the training took place offline, it didn't take away from our presstime and there was no waste involved."

In particular, Schmidt likes the simulator's ability to teach the operators how to troubleshoot and think critically. He has already seen several cases in which the SHOTS exercises came up on the press soon after the operator's training. "In one case, we had excess water on the press and the pressman recognized it right away," he says. "He was able to make the adjustments a lot faster than if he had been starting from zero."

SHOTS has also been an excellent tool in helping Field Container solve one of its greatest challenges - finding good operators to run its presses. "The perfect pressman doesn't just walk in the door," says Schmidt. "You have to develop the people you have. Even if you do get good pressman from the outside, they won't know your business. You still have to train them."

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SHOTS Is for Everybody

To help with ongoing training, Schmidt selected one of his pressmen, Victor Swirecz, who participated in GATF's print training at Triton College. Swirecz is now Field Container's in-house trainer and has rewritten most of GATF's print manuals to be specific to packaging.

Currently, Field Container is putting its feeder operators through its upgraded SHOTS program. Each shift comes in twice a week for an hour and goes over a standard curriculum. A printing press is available to provide employees with additional hands-on training.

Schmidt has even put the company's customer service representatives through an accelerated version of SHOTS. "I wanted them to run a press so they could see how technical the job is," he says. "From the outside, it is easy to underestimate printing, but this program helps them to understand."

Marks of Success

In purchasing the simulator, Field Container's goals were to reduce waste, improve job quality, and enhance the pressmen's problem-solving abilities, thereby speeding make-ready and improving overall productivity. Schmidt believes that the company is achieving those goals.

"We document every time the press stops, both at the feeder and the delivery, then break it down into sheets per stop," Schmidt explains. "SHOTS, in combination with other make-ready programs, has enabled our presses to run longer in between trip-offs on the feeder end. If we were running at 4,000 sheets before, we've seen an increase in the area of 4,500 or 4,600."

Schmidt believes that the SHOTS program has unlimited potential. "The more effort you put into it, the more benefit you get out of it," he says. "SHOTS will be more and more incorporated into what we are doing."

Unlimited Potential

Eventually, Schmidt hopes to take advantage of the program's upgrade capabilities, which will allow him to individualize the program for Field Container. "We may have problems that are taking our pressmen too long to solve on press, and we will be able to recreate those problems in off-line training," he says. "As soon as I'm at the point that I am writing our own programs into SHOTS, I'll put all of our operators through there again."

For Field Container, training is not a one-shot deal. It is an ongoing process that sets the company apart from its competitors.

"In today's competitive print market, you have to use every edge possible to attract new customers, keep the customers that you have, and do a quality job," Schmidt says. "You have to use every edge to improve your market position and SHOTS helps us to do that. I just wish we were the only ones that had that edge!"

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