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## **Quebecor Overhauls Pressroom Training With Heatset Simulator**

It's no mystery. Skilled press operators are difficult to find these days. Quebecor St. Cloud, part of Quebecor's Magazine Group in St. Cloud, MN, decided to do something about it.

Like many printers, Quebecor St. Cloud is facing the challenge of an older, highly skilled press crew that, through gradual attrition and retirement, it will have to replace in the near term. So plant management, with the cooperation of the employees, worked together to overhaul the company's training program so that it could more quickly and easily train new press operators from within.

As noted by Jerry Mattern, human resources manager, "Many of our press operators are in their late 40s and early 50s. So the natural question we must ask ourselves is: Where will we find new people? We need a consistent, highly-effective program in place so we can build to the future."

### ***Visual Learning***

The new training program started with an investment in a Heatset Simulator from Sinapse Graphic, purchased through the PIA-GATF. The simulator offers a series of graduated exercises that train operators to analyze and solve basic print problems. The simulator comes with a series of pre-defined problems, which Quebecor can supplement with its own problems and challenges as the training program goes along.

"I've worked with training programs for years, and one of the things I've noticed about pressmen is that they are very visual learners," says Mattern. "This makes press operator training very difficult, since most training is based primarily on book learning. The simulator is a great visually-oriented tool that plays to press operators' strengths."

Quebecor St. Cloud is also one of the first installations to use the Heatset Simulator's new MAN Roland interface, so that it looks and acts like a MAN Roland press console. Since the site is running a lot of MAN presses, this makes the simulator even more applicable.

### ***Customized Workbooks***

In addition to the training that comes with the simulator, Quebecor St. Cloud also invested in the expertise of Sinapse Graphic consultant and training specialist Dr. John Anderson to produce custom workbooks for its trainees to reinforce the computer-based simulation. The workbook includes five levels of training, from basic to expert, with 120 exercises over all five levels.

The first two levels serve as an introduction to printing for all plant employees, including customer service and sales personnel, as well as press operators. From the third level on, the exercises are designed for the press crew only, with graduated levels of difficulty and challenge.

"The workbook is designed to get trainees to think about the process, not just get the desired results," says Mattern. "A lot of operators do things automatically, but they don't necessarily know why they are doing them. The workbook asks the 'why' questions. Why are you doing this? Why are you doing that? This way, they know how to troubleshoot, especially when the usual fixes aren't working."

### ***Levels of Reinforcement***

Quebecor St. Cloud also developed a series of multimedia tools to complement the simulation. These include images of the actual presses in the plant, video of press operations, such as changing the blankets or the substrates—anything normally done on press—and then integrating them into the simulator as a reference tool to show SOP for each operation.

Now, if a trainee goes through an exercise and the simulator tells them to change the roll of paper, for example, and they don't know how to do that, they can click on a simulator media button that plays a video demonstration. Because the video was shot on the floor of their own plant, the demonstration is extremely relevant because it was conducted on one of their own presses.



"The videos are fully commented, with step-by-step instructions," says Mattern. "We can zoom in, zoom out, even link to text from the workbook. The ability to tie together a variety of components creates a super training program."

The multimedia solution has been so successful, in fact, that Quebecor has expanded the concept into training in other areas, such as prepress. "The videographer (see above) is known around here as the Steven Spielberg of St. Cloud," jokes Dr. Anderson. "He's out video-ing everything."

### ***Training Anytime, Anywhere***

Trainees in Quebecor St. Cloud's program enter the program four at a time for a week at a time. Mattern calls it "total immersion." "If you are going to take employees off the crew, you may as well take them off the crew," he reasons. "So we have them training eight hours a day — four hours working with GATF or other written materials, then four hours on the simulator."

Quebecor is also the one of the first installations of the simulator with a local network key. The key protects the software from being stolen and shuts down 80% of its functions if the hardware is removed. This allows the company to make the simulator available, 24 hours a day, at multiple workstations.

Trainees, therefore, have unrestricted access to training. Before, they could train only during the eight hours that the trainer was on-site. Now they can train during their shift, after their shift, or if a press goes down for any reason. "One of the challenges of traditional training is finding time for employees to spend in the classroom," notes Mattern. "This removes this barrier completely."

### ***Results to Date***

Feedback from employees has been outstandingly positive. "The Heatset Simulator is a neat learning experience," says Mattern. "Every person who has gone through it says, 'This is awesome.' It has a nice 'wow' factor."

Employees also feel that the exercises they do are very true to life. "The workbook, in combination with the simulator, gives them the feeling of actually printing a job," he concludes. "It's like working on a real press."

While it's still too early to see all the benefits, Mattern expects to see "big dividends" by the time 50% of the plant's employees have been through the training. He is also working with other divisions of Quebecor to replicate this training process at other plants around the country and even around the world.

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