

Smurfit-Stone - Sheetfed Simulator Case Study

If you are going to play "follow the leader" in the training game, your next purchase should be a Sinapse Sheetfed Offset Simulator (SHOTS). Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation, the largest corrugated packaging company in the world and the second largest folding carton company, purchased a SHOTS system for its Phoenixville, PA, plant two and a half years ago.

"We had a lot of people retiring and we needed a way to train new employees quickly," says Steve Barton, graphics manager for the facility, which specializes in folding cartons. "SHOTS is a great tool for demonstrating the basics."

Like many printers, Smurfit-Stone finds it difficult to find skilled press operators in today's tight labor market. For this reason, Barton appreciates the simulator's ability to bring trainees up to speed quickly. "It's tough to find someone who can just walk in and take over a press," he says. "That happens on occasion, but not very often."

To date, Barton has put 26 employees at various skill levels through Smurfit-Stone's SHOTS program.

Comprehensive Training

New employees start their training using Smurfit-Stone's specially designed, four-part curriculum. The program starts with an orientation, followed by four seven-week segments.

The first segment deals with ink and water balance. Each training session lasts one hour, during which the student is expected to solve between six and 10 problems. Students face up to three different sets of problems in each session. Once they are able to run good sheets for one set, they move onto the next. If they solve all 10 problems, they have completed the full exercise.

The second seven-week segment deals with press registration. The training is cumulative, so students continue to receive ink and water balance problems, as well. In the third segment, students are introduced to issues related to cylinders and packing. Again, the training is cumulative with the other two segments. The fourth segment addresses roller settings.

"I sit with the new employees for the first couple of times to help them get acclimated," says Barton. "Afterwards, I make myself available for questions, but SHOTS is a self-study course. I don't have to be there all the time."

SINAPSE Print Simulators

Bât. Epicure – Les Algorithmes – Route de l'Orme aux Merisiers – 91194 SAINT AUBIN CEDEX - France

Tél. : +33 (0)1.69.35 54 00 - Fax : +33 (0)1.69 35 07 15 - e-mail : info@sinapseprint.com

S.A.S. au capital de 419 400 Euros

www.sinapseprint.com

Training Equals Productivity

Once employees have finished their training, they are paired with pressmen to hone their newfound skills in a hands-on environment. Barton does not expect them to run a press, but from that point, they are able to learn more quickly.

In addition to teaching the basics, the simulator teaches trainees critical problem-solving skills. "With a loose blanket, for example, you get doubling, or more saturation of color," Barton explains. "Employees see this on the press 'sheet,' and they have to go to the 'unit' to correct the problem, whether it is a packing problem or due to a blanket or a plate."

Because of the strict color demands on packaging, Barton also likes that SHOTS reinforces the need for press tools such as densitometers. "Densitometers are important not just for solving problems, but also for maintaining a well running press," he says. "It helps us maintain the color consistency that is so important for making sure that all of our clients' packaging looks the same on the shelves."

The results of this program have been extremely positive. "We have seen a direct parallel between employees' success utilizing the SHOTS program and their performance on the actual printing press," says Barton.

Keeping Track of Progress

To keep track of employees' progress, Barton has set up a table that tracks the amount of time employees spend on their exercises and how far they advance through each. "I also look at the impressions, the cost per impression, and come up with an average at the end," he explains. "Employees are given printouts after each session, and the cumulative information is passed on to the supervisors once the training is complete."

Although Smurfit-Stone has not established formal criteria for the program's success, Barton regularly asks the supervisors and foremen about their perceptions. "They believe that it has helped," he says. "Many of the trainees feel it has been very helpful, too."

Down the road, Barton would like to use SHOTS to maintain the skills of Smurfit-Stone's lead pressmen and perhaps even bring in the employees from the prepress department to sensitize them to the press.

Employee Retention

Ironically, Barton believes that one of the most important benefits of the SHOTS training is not employees' technical training *per se*. It is the knowledge that the company cares about them.

"Our investment in our employees makes them feel good about themselves, which is very important," says Barton. "There is very little job satisfaction in the market today, and SHOTS makes their time here more than just come in, do your job, and go home. It has been well documented that learning programs pay off in the end. We certainly believe that, and SHOTS is an extremely important to us."

Copyright 2002 Sinapse Print Simulators

For more information, contact Sinapse Print Simulators, phone + 33 1 69 35 54 00

info@sinapseprint.com

www.sinapseprint.com