



Simulators & Software for the Graphic Arts

Sonoco Flexible Packaging - Flexo Case Study

Press Simulator Training Speeds Production, Betters Productivity

At Sonoco Flexible Packaging, Charlotte, N.C., the Sinapse Graphic's FlexSys Press Simulator is forging a rock-solid reputation as "a really valuable training tool." Steve Long, production supervisor and trainer at the plant recently assessed its impact in the following way. "Critical and costly mistakes are being avoided. Learning curves are better controlled. Proper technique and press operator skills are being learned and polished. Downtime is decreasing.

"Morale levels are on the rise," he proclaimed. "People who work here believe that this company is on the cutting edge of technology." The Press Simulator is an important ingredient in Sonoco's training turnaround strategy. It's just now being incorporated into a program that includes on-site training courses, the National Council for Skill Standards Press Operator program and internships at the Charlotte, N.C.-based Flexographic Trade School.

Long attributed acquisition of the Charlotte plant's--one of nine flexible packaging production sites in the Sonoco organization--Simulator to Ed Lieb, manufacturing/technical manager at corporate headquarters in Hartsville, S.C. He credited Lieb with recognizing the need for a corporate-wide press operator training program and then actively soliciting support for the investment in the state-of-the-art training system.

Standardization and the Press Simulator come in the same package, according to Long. A trainer working with the Simulator can deliver the same message and encourage the same behavior or action time and time again. "By the end of the year, we will have a Simulator curriculum in place," Long reported. "This is crucial for us because we are in the hiring process now and we're not getting many applicants with experience. It speaks volumes to potential employees when we tell them the company will invest to support their learning needs."

Sonoco's Flexible Packaging plant in Charlotte contains six wide-web central impression presses, but due to labor shortages, it is currently running only four while management focuses on trying to get staffed up. The Simulator is expected to prove to be a great assist in that effort. "With the FlexSys Simulator, we can hire the untrained, then reduce

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the learning curve by getting trainees exposed to problems faster, so that they can gain actual hands-on experience,” Long said.

Elaborating on that point, he stated, “The Simulator really speeds the process up of getting press operators trained. We will move from having operators running equipment when they don’t have the proper skills, to having highly skilled and knowledgeable operators, once we fully implement our Simulator training curriculum.”

Advantages associated with the Simulator are far reaching, according to Long. “Results I have seen so far indicate that the system encourages and creates debate and good communication among the press operators that have gone through Simulator exercises. When they see something on the Simulator that they have not seen on press, they will bring it to the pressroom floor to discuss it.” In other words, trainees take their personal experiences and use them to educate colleagues.

Long illustrated the point this way. “ Let me give you a perfect and typical example of what currently happens. We had a trap problem on third shift. Pressmen thought it was related to the screen in the plate. The real problem was that the yellow ink was not drying fast enough and when the black ink was printed on top of the yellow, picking was occurring. Earlier training on the Simulator that addressed that same problem may have eliminated three or four hours of downtime on that press. We are always looking for ways to speed up production and the Simulator is helping us identify them.”

“The quality of the Simulator, as well as its capabilities, have definitely exceeded our expectations. One of the most important benefits associated with the Press Simulator is its guarantee to create consistency in training,” Long observed. “There are consistent solutions to many problems and we should train that way. If we had a curriculum, with Simulators at every location it would improve our productivity.”

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*Additional details on the FlexSys Press Simulator can be obtained by calling
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