

# NEWSPAPERS & TECHNOLOGY

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## Simulators help papers prepare for real thing

By Peter Herman

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U.S. publishers are coupling their investments in new press technologies with training programs aimed at helping operators learn how to use the sophisticated and expensive machines.

One training tool, printing simulator software, has become an almost standard item bundled into the overall press purchase contract.

While most newspapers use simulators to help operators make the transition from their legacy machines to new presses, some newspapers are using the app to support other goals. North Jersey Media Group, for example, is using its simulator for cross-training. Another publisher, Newspaper Agency Corp. in Salt Lake City, wants to base a guide of standard operating procedures on the software. And the Rockford (Ill.) Register Star is using its simulator to help its staff cut newsprint waste.

All these newspapers use training simulators from Paris-based Sinapse Graphic International to help them achieve these goals.

### Cross-training in N.J.

The North Jersey Media Group, which publishes dozens of daily and weekly newspapers including the Record and the Herald News, currently has five presses that are 12 to 24 years old.

In 2004, when the publisher opted to upgrade its press infrastructure by purchasing an OF 371 evolution press from WIFAG, it also ordered a simulator that would be meshed with the ABB controls used to manage the press. The goal: to have all of its 120 operators trained to



Photos: Sinapse Graphic International  
Left: Steve Rock at the console at the Rockford (Ill.) Register Star.

Below: Keith Horens and Tim Calligan of NJMG fly the press on their Sinapse simulator.



run all of NJMG's presses, said Brent Woodman, production director.

"Cross-training is a core value for us," he said. "To this end, the simulator is a really great tool."

The software also helps NJMG meet another goal, Woodman said: continuous improvement. "Simulation is part of our fundamental philosophy of continuous improvement," he said. "It's about getting work habits to change."

NJMG installed two simulators to properly train its operators and to address productivity goals.

"When operators have a problem, one of their big mistakes is trying to implement a solution before they understand the problem," he said. "Simulation changes this mentality. By doing process mapping and taking processes apart, they begin to understand why they are doing things and (determine if) there is a better way. This has allowed us to make big improvements in our workflow and engage people at all levels of the organization."

The technology has also helped NJMG achieve good copy faster. "If we can get good copy within six minutes of start-up instead of 16 minutes, there is a significant improvement in cost," Woodman said, adding that the pub-

lisher spends 15 cents in newsprint for each 56-page paper it produces.

"Another benefit (of boosting production efficiency) is to be able to start running 20 minutes later when editorial needs to," he said. After a year of working with the simulator, Woodman said he's pleased with the results. "It's a well thought-out program."

### Waste reduction at Rockford

The Rockford (Ill.) Register Star faced a formidable challenge when it decided to replace its decades-old letterpress with a new 4-by-2 Colora offset machine from Koenig & Bauer AG: How would the daily prepare its operators to adapt to the new press' color, speed and automation capabilities?

Simulation was a large part of the answer, said Steve Rock, press operations manager at the Register Star. As with NJMG, the Register Star integrated its press simulator into its press

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console, in this case a control system from EAE Inc.

This approach allowed the paper to train operators in the same environment to be used in production when the press goes on-edition this month, Rock said. "That was key for us."

The Register Star installed an advanced version of the app that includes tension and folder points, in addition to print production exercises.

In addition, the simulator enables operators to view pages in three dimensions, thus allowing them to see how pages are folded for different sections.

Hundreds of potential problems can be displayed on the simulator, but Rock said he wanted to focus on those likely to occur during the transition, such as uneven inking, scumming, blanket linting, web alignment, fountain conductivity and temperature levels.

Training kicked off with an eight-hour classroom program for all press staff. Operators were then encouraged to practice individually and were offered overtime pay as an incentive to get them to spend two hours a week on the simulator.

The simulator training lasted nearly three months and was completed before KBA's training, in the process giving operators a significant head start, Rock said. "A lot is on the line, and thanks to the simulator, I expect the transition to be much smoother than it otherwise would have been.

"Nothing can completely substitute the pressure on operators when they are in live production, but simulation sure

beats having them going in cold," he said, noting that hourly costs are not only higher on the new press, but they rack up much more quickly.

Rock said he now wants to use the simulator to help operators cut waste. "One of our goals is to cut at least 1 percent of our newsprint waste; that's hundreds of thousands of dollars."

### Cross-training at NAC

Newspaper Agency Corp.'s multimillion-dollar investment in three Color Top 5000UD presses from TKS (USA) gave the publisher of The Salt Lake Tribune and Morning Deseret News a new production technology as well as an opportunity to create a set of standard operating procedures to be shared among press operators and maintenance staff.

As part of the purchase, NAC specified that a simulator be bundled with the press. TKS worked with Sinapse to develop a version that reflects the Color Top's 4-by-1 press configuration and could be meshed into the TKS control console.

NAC began its training far in advance of this year's planned start-up of the machines because the Color Tops are more advanced than NAC's former press infrastructure, said Michael Herrera, NAC's maintenance and training instructor.

"The integration of the simulator software with the actual press console is a drastic change from previous versions" of the app, he said. That allowed NAC to craft a training regimen that projects the image of the newspaper on the con-

sole "where you would lay your paper out as if you were running a live press," Herrera said.

"It's like looking at a real newspaper and exactly what our operators need to provide them with the level of realism that really makes a difference."

Sinapse supplies customers with an extensive library of training exercises accessed via the Newspaper Association of America's Web site ([www.naa.org](http://www.naa.org)), but the software also enables customers to create their own what-if scenarios.

"It's not too hard (to create customized exercises) once you understand the system," Herrera said.

NAC is also using the simulator for cross-training. Since last November, NAC has put not only their press operators through training, but maintenance staff and upper management as well, for a total of 60 people, Herrera said.

Simulator training will not end once the press has gone live. Herrera plans to use the software for new press-operator training and to reinforce skills where necessary. "By its nature, training is ongoing," he said. "We will run our trainees through the simulator, and if experienced operators have trouble with certain functions, we can give them additional support. That is the purpose of the simulator — having a continual, readily available source of learning."▲

*Peter Herman is chief executive officer of Sinapse Graphic International. He can be reached at [peter.herman@sinapse-graphic.com](mailto:peter.herman@sinapse-graphic.com).*