

Shorewood Packaging Formalizes Press Training With Gravure Simulator

It's not easy to find trained gravure operators in Newport News, Virginia. All of the operators in the rural Shorewood Packaging plant have come up through the ranks, trained by existing staff while on the job. With gravure presses running at \$900 per hour, the plant has found this to be a very expensive learning curve. So when it began putting together a formal training program for gravure operators, the plant turned to a PackSim press simulator from Sinapse Print Simulators.

The Shorewood Packaging plant had very little prior exposure to press simulation training, but when the Gravure Association of America (which distributes Sinapse simulators in the United States) made contact about doing a PackSim presentation, the response was immediate.

"Absolutely, yes!" said Myron Braggs, gravure shift coordinator. "At the time, we had no formalized training program at all. Operators were training other operators, so if problems arose, we were running a lot of waste. The value of press simulation training was clear right away."

Braggs also liked that, in addition to the standard set of problems such as bleeding, control controls, and chatter, the PackSim allows trainers to create their own sets of training problems unique to the plant's 1150 Bobst Champlain presses. Recently, for example, operators faced the failure of the electrostatic assist, which showed up as screening on press.

"Something like this doesn't happen on a daily basis, so when it does, the operators have no idea what to do," Braggs explains. "PackSim gives them the skills to start working through the problem. There have been a couple of exercises where the operators later said, 'I wouldn't have even thought to check that!'"

Slashing Makeready and Waste 15%

The Newport News plant felt that the value of this training was sufficient to justify the purchase of the simulator, even without a formal cost analysis. It was quickly apparent that the decision was the right one. In combination with the development of waste teams and makeready teams, the plant's turnover has dropped and its waste and makeready have been slashed by 15%.

To date, Braggs has trained eight of his 16 operators on the PackSim. The rest of the training will resume once the plant finishes a paper-based skills program being developed in conjunction with the simulator training. The entire program is scheduled to last 40 hours, with operators training eight hours per week

Braggs is very enthusiastic about the results. "The realism of this simulator is great," he says. "Initially, I spent days just playing with it, trying to get the hang of it. The accuracy of the problems and the results are amazing. It's like working on a real press, but without the waste."

To his surprise, the operators love it, too. "They actually enjoy this kind of training," he says.

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Braggs is especially enthusiastic about the ability to create his own exercises such as hazing, screening, ink lines, and missing print. Even just working from the manual, he has found the process to be very straightforward and seamless.

“Confidence Levels Are Up”

The positive results are apparent, not just in the reduction in waste and downtime, but in the operators themselves. Braggs see them being much more engaged with the press. “Their confidence levels are way up,” he says. “In the past, if one fix didn’t work, they didn’t know what else to do. Now, when something goes wrong, they start troubleshooting themselves rather than immediately turning to someone else to fix the problem.”

Braggs finds it very rewarding just to watch the operators grow and learn. “You watch them struggle, and instead of jumping to do what they know, you see them thinking things through,” he says. “But it’s also nice that they think it’s fun. How many other training programs can you think of where your operators say, ‘Hey, is it alright if I go do my training now?’”



A typical Bobst packaging gravure press.

Note : higher resolution images of these presses are available for publication

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