

Litho-Krome - Sheetfed Simulator Case Study

At Litho-Krome, a subsidiary of Hallmark Greeting Cards, the Sinapse Sheetfed Offset Simulator (SHOTS) is the cornerstone of the training program. Since SHOTS was installed two years ago, Litho-Krome has reduced its make-ready and spoilage significantly, while increasing net runs speeds on its presses.

"We are tracking very nicely to our key goals in all areas," observes Tony Walker, the company's lithographic technical trainer.

Litho-Krome keeps track of its progress by plotting production data on a weekly chart posted for all of its pressroom employees to see. "That way, if the data starts turning the wrong direction, we can start correcting the problem immediately," says Walker. "If we were to wait a whole month, the problem would take a lot longer to control."

Litho-Krome, located Columbus, GA, has very exacting training needs. It prints greeting cards, fine art reproductions, and high-end commercial work such as catalogs and financial reports. "We are a high quality printer," says Walker. "We even have a permanent example of lithography hanging in the Smithsonian."

Accelerated Training

Litho-Krome decided to purchase the SHOTS simulator in 1998 after switching from 60-inch to 40-inch presses. It needed to bring its 65 pressroom employees up to speed very quickly. "We could no longer rely on traditional apprentice programs because there was a need for speed that was not present before," says Walker. "Before, we could take more time with individuals, but with the transition, that was no longer the case."

The simulator was perfect for the job. "SHOTS is able to show a variety of printing problems in a much shorter time than what the operator would see day in and day out on the press," Walker explains. "It shows cause and effect extremely well and condenses a lot of training into a very short period of time."

Walker finds the training to be very realistic, as close to a press as possible without actually being on press. "Even someone that doesn't have any knowledge of printing can spend a short period of time with SHOTS and walk away with the feeling that they understand the printing process," he says.

For example, Walker uses SHOTS to show feeder operators how the press is affected when the feeders trip out. "That was one of the first things we addressed, allowing them to see it first hand," he says.

Comprehensive Training

The SHOTS exercises teach employees not only the technical aspects of the press, but also the costs associated with press stoppage and correction. "It sensitizes the operator to the fact that every single event, whether pausing to make a repair or adjusting the run speed, impacts the cost

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of the job," Walker explains. "They get twofold training - learning the cost structure while working on their troubleshooting skills."

Once the initial training is complete, Walker plans to continue the pressmen's training at least once per week for an hour. One or two operators will be trained at a time, during their shifts, in conjunction with GATF's sheetfed offset training course. "The ability to combine the two training programs is really great," Walker says. "Employees can focus on a problem in the textbook, then go straight to the simulator."

The employee response has been very good. "Many are very eager about the training," says Walker. "They want to improve their job skills and realize this is a great tool for doing that."

Additional Benefits of SHOTS

Now the SHOTS training has brought a new level of consistency to the pressroom. It also allows operators to advance to new levels more quickly. "With technologies changing daily, you can't invest six or seven years in someone before they move ahead," says Walker. "They have to hit the floor running. SHOTS allows them to do that."

Walker also likes that SHOTS helps employees adjust to the digital age by introducing them to modern consoles and press technology. "People have to be comfortable with computers, whether they are running a press or anything else," he says. "Computers have become an important aspect of their jobs."

Initially, Litho-Krome planned to focus on press and feeder operators, but once it recognized the versatility of the SHOTS program, it brought in employees from customer service, sales, quality assurance, and finance, as well. "They hear the terminology day in and day out, but they don't have anything to connect it with," says Walker. "With SHOTS, they learn very quickly."

Litho-Krome is also planning to take its warehouse personnel through the program to show them how to improve the press conditions through better paper handling. "SHOTS can do that in a matter of minutes," says Walker.

Measuring Improvement

SHOTS also provides Litho-Krome with an objective way to assess its employees' progress. After an employee completes a simulation, Walker prints out a "time sheet," or series of trace files, and goes through what the student encountered and how he or she approached the problem. "Because SHOTS captures every action, every decision, that the trainee makes, we always have a reference to work with," he says.

Eventually, Walker hopes to use the 3.1 version to load Litho-Krome's own press sheets into the system. This will allow its employees to look at jobs that have already run and prepare for upcoming jobs. "The fact that we can create our own exercises is wonderful," he points out. "You don't see that with a lot of computer programs. SHOTS is a very comprehensive tool."

Now that SHOTS has helped Litho-Krome to reduce its make-ready, waste, and downtime, the company plans to use the simulator as part of its long-term strategy. "Technology is changing on a daily basis, so you cannot train your employees and then walk away," says Walker. "You have to constantly look on the horizon and prepare for the future. SHOTS helps us do that."

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