

Sinapse Simulator Speeds *Rockford Register Star* Transition from Letterpress to Offset

When the *Rockford Register Star*, Rockford, IL, purchased a new KBA Color press, it was faced with a challenge. The paper, which has a 65,000 daily circulation and 77,000 on Sunday, had been produced letterpress for the last 39 years. Now, with the paper moving to offset, it wanted to give its press operators a way to prepare for a host of changes: a switch in print process, a high level of press automation, double the press speed, and a substantial increase in color capability.

The solution? The Newspaper Simulator from Sinapse Print simulators (SPS). The simulator allows press operators to simulate the experience of running a press, much as flight simulators allow pilots to simulate flying a plane. The simulator connects through the press' EAE console and creates a variety of press problems, from ink and water balance to web alignment. The operator analyzes each problem and makes the corrections on the console. The results are displayed on the screen.



Steve Rock in front of Sinapse-EAE Simulator.

Because the simulator runs through the console rather than the Sinapse monitor, the press operators are trained in the same environment that they will use for production. "That was key for us," says Steve Rock, press operations manager for the *Rockford Register Star*. "I use the Sinapse screen to set up the lessons, then my operators use the EAE console to run them."

REFLECTING REAL-WORLD CONDITIONS

This version of the Newspaper Simulator is an upgrade to older generations that includes, not just exercises relating to the print production, but to the tension and folder points, as well. Pages are also viewed in three-dimensions, the way they come out of the folder. This allows the operators to view how the pages are folded for the different sections.

Hundreds of problems are available on the simulator, but Rock wanted to focus on the kinds of problems most likely to occur during the transition, such as uneven inking, scumming, and blanket linting. Other common problems, such as webs being out of alignment and conductivity and temperatures being too high or too low were also included in the program.

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 400 300 Euros - RCS. EVRY B 432 377 604 – TVA Intra. FR 33 432 377 604 – Code NAF 5829C
www.sinapseprint.com

Not only does Rock like the realism of the simulator, but also the level of detail. When problems relate to the adjustment of color, for example, the simulator allows the operators to check their work with the densitometer function. “If I raise or lower ink on a color, I can use the ‘densitometer’ to see the new ink levels,” says Rock. “If you move an ink key down from five to three, then go back and check it with the densitometer, the results change.”

A similar function is available for checking register, allowing the operator to see with precision how the dots line up.

Initially, there was an eight-hour classroom training program for all press operators. The simulator was located in the classroom, so the instructor demonstrates during the lessons. Once the classroom training was complete, operators were encouraged to practice on the simulator before or after work. Rock offered overtime pay as an incentive, with the goal of each operator spending at least two hours per week.

The simulator training lasted nearly three months and was completed before the KBA press training. “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,” says Rock. “Already, some of the questions the operators ask are based on training they received. That’s very encouraging.”

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ADJUSTING TO FASTER SPEEDS AND NEW PRODUCTION COSTS

One of the biggest expectations for the training is to help operators adjust to the much higher speeds of the new press. The newspaper’s old Hoe Colormatic runs at 45,000 – 50,000 iph, while the KBA runs at 75,000 iph. To help operators get used to these speeds, the simulator calculates the costs associated with the time each operator takes to fix each problem.

While nothing can replace the exhilaration of running a real press, Rock says, this keeps operators mindful that, when things go wrong, the clock is running. “Nothing can substitute for the pressure of a live production environment, but it sure beats having them going in cold,” he explains, noting that hourly costs are not only higher on the new press, but they rack up much more quickly.

Rock also hopes that the simulation will help the paper gear up for another new challenge, the transition to more commercial work, especially with the paper’s new ability to run color on every page. “With the additional color capability, there is much more for the press operators to keep an eye on,” he says.

“I JUST WISH THEY HAD MORE TIME ON THE SIMULATOR”

The new KBA press will be producing test runs by mid-March. At that time, the Rockford Register Star will see the benefits of the simulator training in practice. Until then, Rock is confident that the training has been an excellent foundation.

“If I were to do it over again, I would do it exactly the same way,” he concludes. “Not only has the Sinapse Newspaper Simulator been extremely helpful, but our press operators really enjoyed it. I just wish they were able to spend more time on it.”