

### **THE UK SCREEN PRINTING INDUSTRY IS BOOMING AND PROFITS ARE ROLLING IN.**

The industry has a highly skilled young workforce that is up to date with the latest techniques. Profits are continuing to rise and there is a shortage of capacity to meet the needs of a buoyant market. Is this guy on some illegal substance? Or are the men in white coats approaching?

An outsider would say that there must be no shortages of skills and the industry is doing very nicely thank you. Printing companies must be happy with their skills and performance, as they are not investing as they have been in training. When times are tough the easy target for budget pruning is training.

Many companies are now into a new financial year hopefully they will all have budgets for the coming year. How many have a training budget and what is that budget as a percentage of turnover?

In the Graphics Sector it is 22% of companies, Industrial 43%, Textiles 20%, Other Sectors 63% have a training budget. The Other Sectors are where screen printing is part of a manufacturing process. For the most forward thinking the size of the budget is only 2.5% of turnover. Also of interest is the fact that as the number of employees increase the percentage of companies with a training budget increase.

### **TRAINING IS UNNECESSARY**

On this basis it is reasonable to argue that with the exception of Other Sectors the majority of printing companies do not budget for training, therefore it could prove the point that training is unnecessary. The reality is that those without a budget often use informal means of training that do not show up in the accounts. Alternatively they acquire money from other budgets to carry out reactive training where a problem occurs and training is the only solution. Some unfortunately do no training at all. Add this to the downturn in the economy and the industry is putting itself at even greater risk by eroding its skill base.

### **ONLY TRAIN IF THERE IS BUSINESS CASE TO TRAIN**

The only reason for training is if it gives adequate return on investment. There are four specific ways of measuring the effect of training in a production environment. Reduced machine down time. Reduced rejects. Increased running speeds. Reduction in the usage of consumables. Any or all of these will result in increasing profits.

### **DON'T TRAIN IN UNSOUND TECHNIQUES**

Training is about developing improved techniques. A comment often heard is: "We train our new people on the job with existing staff. Then they can learn by their mistakes." No, the company pays for their mistakes and that can be very expensive. In a world where techniques are changing so fast "Watching Mabel" means that your skill levels are decaying not growing. Eventually people become skilled at resolving problems of their own making. They effectively become conditioned by bad practice.

### **INITIAL ENTHUSIASM TURNS TO COMPLACENCY**

When that new equipment arrives the novelty factor means that often best practice is applied, motivated people are given responsibility for it and things can look very positive. The first hurdle to be overcome is have they been trained adequately in its operation? If not disillusion sets in and very quickly performance is compromised, the costs can be huge. Individuals will naturally retreat into their old habits and will erode performance even more. Suppliers to the industry know that the majority of callbacks in the first year are due to operator error or lack of process control. Of course customers claim that the supplier has not trained their staff properly, suppliers assume that once they have shown the client how to operate the system the client should be capable of taking it on from there. This is not always the case but in general it is true.

The analogy of course is when you buy a car you don't ask the salesman to teach you to drive and equally you don't buy cars from a driving school. In our industry of course there are exceptions where companies like Sericol, Coates, Nor-Cote and Autotype etc. have excellent training facilities. These quite rightly are aimed at promoting their own products but more importantly they stimulate best practice.

### **THE FEAR OF TRAINING**

There is a fear of training in industry. This is shown by the way we camouflage it under a range of terms: Skill enhancement, Human Resource Development, Management Development, World Class Manufacturing, Technology Transfer, Team Building etc. etc. It seems that whatever you do don't infer that an individual or organisation is not fully competent and up to speed on every aspect of their business. This is particularly predominant attitude in the UK. In the US or Eastern Europe or the Far East the attitude can be completely different. They really want to learn from the very start and it is a matter of restricting audiences rather than getting them in. At one particular event in Eastern Europe the hall was packed on Saturday and Sunday, the audience ranged from Owners to Print Assistants and the questions continued into the evening way after the sessions had finished. In the US just sit in at one of the Seminars at the SGIA exhibition and see the enthusiasm that is shown by the audience. At a recent seminar in the UK one of our most eminent experts had an audience of two and one of those left part way through the topic. However it was about Health and Safety and that is even more contentious.

### **WE TRAIN WHEN IT SUITS US**

Those of us who are hooked on the all-consuming game of golf actually look forward to our golf lessons as the whole ethos of the game is aimed at getting the best out of our resources no matter how inadequate. Setting targets aiming for continuous improvement and investing in the best equipment we can afford. We watch videos, read books, buy magazines, play computer games, go to the gym, some even have hypnosis. Tiger Woods has guidance every day and he is at the pinnacle of skill.

So why do we think that some dysfunctional youth can be turned into a skilled member of staff with a few weeks watching others making a pigs ear of the job he has been taken on to do. When he gets it wrong and loses several hours of production we fire him complaining that these youngsters are hopeless.

### **TAKE THE RISK OF GETTING IT RIGHT FIRST TIME**

Any investment is a risk but investing in training is the safest risk you can take. The simple act of starting to plan for training is in itself instigating a training culture. If a company has a culture of training it is no longer considered a threat, people are not indicating that they do not know, they are showing that they want to know more.

Firstly decide what you want to invest. If you are buying new capital equipment allow approximately 10% of the price for training. That is not just what buttons to press. If for example you are intending to buy a UV curing unit your staff need to know about UV ink technology and use, the advantages and disadvantages, how you need to alter your stencil requirements, print machine setting and operation, substrate compatibility etc. Lack of consistency is the biggest problem in our industry this is where even the most experienced practitioners can gain. Get everyone using best practice. Ideally the minimum you should allow for a training budget is 2.5% of turnover. This investment will be more than recovered by better utilisation of equipment and systems if you add to this reduction in rejects, reduction in machine downtime, improved quality increased staff morale and improved staff retention. You end up with the most effective way of increasing company profitability.

### **IS THERE FUNDING FOR TRAINING?**

It all depends on whether the providers of financial support in your geographical area have a scheme into which your requirement fits. The sources are Business Links and Learning Skills Councils. LSC's. They have taken over from Training and Enterprise Councils TEC's. The jury is still out as to whether they are simply repackaged bureaucracies or a step change in funding for training in industry. Along with Business Links they are spread about the UK. Their aim is to stimulate and promote industry particularly Small to Medium Size Enterprises SME's, that's most of us, along with developing a "Learning Society" and a culture of "Lifelong Learning". We have a list of all these on our web site [www.pdsinternational.com](http://www.pdsinternational.com) and click on "Links". If it comes under the title of Business Development or Process Improvement then Business Link is your first call. If it is pure training or Qualifications the LSC is whom you contact.

### **QUALIFICATIONS**

Be clear that Qualifications are not training. The work based qualifications available to the screen printing industry are National Vocational Qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3 along with Foundation Modern Apprenticeships and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships. Full details of these are available on the above mentioned web site. Modern Apprenticeships attract substantial funding. They are applicable to people aged between 16 and 19, they must be completed by the age of 24. NVQ's sometimes attract funding depending on the geographical region and the condition of the LSC budget. If you are involved in Investors in People you are far more likely to attract funding. Some Colleges and Universities have access to funds that will subsidise qualifications but I have to admit the whole thing is a bit of a lottery. Your training provider should be able to help you. If you need help through the funding jungle contact the FESPA UK Association, or us through the above website.