



If the SPA Forum is anything to go by there are still plenty of people wanting to use screen printing as a production process or a career. Printing signs, T-Suits, glass, chest freezers etc etc. It is easy to forget where most of us started with a single hand bed and in my case a pint of Crown Gloss paint. You may have been one of the fortunate few you worked through courses at the London College of Printing with the ever enthusiastic John Stevens. Or at Gloscat with the inimitable Bill Appleton. Both men have been the cornerstones of education in the screen printing process are still about John in the heady heights of Dean of the now august London Institute and Bill continuing to share his encyclopaedic knowledge with colleagues and clients of Autotype International.

The problem facing newcomers the industry is where to go for affordable training in screen printing within a college environment. For other than the most basic hand bench work the opportunities are so few as to be non-existent. Manchester City College has now shut its doors. Who is to blame? The industry, all of us.

For years industry was canvassed to send trainees, with limited response. Colleges were able to hang in until the bean counters dictated more efficient use of space. You can get a large number of PC terminals in the footprint of a 60/40 with integral dryer. 'Twas bums on seats they wanted and that's what they got. The equipment and decades of expertise was abandoned and replaced with work-stations. Some would claim and to a point they were right that the colleges were not commercial enough. Preferring to provide standard packages rather what industry wanted, but then it was simply not economical to produce a course for a handful of students unless the employers would pay a commercial rate. That is where it fell down.

So what are we to do? Sorry what are you to do? Develop your own people is the only option. Fortunately suppliers still recognise the value of training and education. Some may claim it is self promoting but why not. If a company is willing to invest in providing such facilities why shouldn't they gain a commercial advantage. Sericol, Coates, Autotype, Nor-Cote and others all offer invaluable training at little or no cost. The SPA Print Qualifications Centre provide excellent bespoke in house training and qualifications.

If you feel you can go it alone that is fine but you must not fall into the trap that so many self-trainers suffer, that is being conditioned by bad practice. The "watching Fred" technique is fine if Fred is applying best practice at all times. Developing a training package for your production team if done correctly is very time consuming but can provide enormous benefits. The first thing you have to do is ensure that your Standard Operating Procedures are valid and the actual procedures are correct. If you don't have SOP's or what you do have are incorrect your process is out of control. You can be certain that there will be a range of methods applied by different operators. In a production environment you are aiming for consistency. Not the consistency of mediocrity but peak performance. This can only be sustained if there is an ongoing drive for continuous improvement.

Already with your first look at training in house the reality of the situation is starting to dawn. People are "making it work," "keeping it going," even "struggling through." Unlike

Baldrick in Blackadder you don't need a "Cunning plan" at this stage what you do need is everybody using the same methods. Once you have that you have a foundation for moving the process forward and system onto which you can base your training. Then the realisation comes that you need to know what they should know. Well, a bit about setting up, something about problem solving, throw in some Health and Safety and Bingo there's your training plan. No lets try again. Unless you are experienced in delivering training to this industry at this point you do need "a cunning plan". The ideal structure around which you can base your training is the National Vocational Qualification copies of which you can view on <http://www.spauk.co.uk/SPAPQC/NVQ/Index.htm> and click on the relevant qualification in red on the left hand side of the page.

If you consider the Screen Printing Level 2, an individual who achieves this qualification is a skilled screen printer. What his responsibilities are and what he/she should know are detailed in the qualification. The NVQ itself is not training it is a series of national standards that the individual has to meet. Of course working through the qualification and obtaining Certification is the best route but in this instance we are using it as a framework on which to base your training package.

Reduce the risks to Health and safety in the workplace  
Develop yourself in your job  
Contribute to maintaining machines in working order  
Prepare equipment and machines for screen printing  
Operate screen printing machines  
Operate ink drying equipment  
Prepare Inks  
Prepare stencils for printing

These are the headline units within them are specific tasks and what the person needs to know about these tasks.

Use the standard as a guide to take you through the training requirement. There are also standards for digital printing and print administration (commercial.)

Many people get stuck on Health and Safety but the SPA CD on Employers Liability Insurance Health Check is a mine of information. It is an excellent investment at £50.00 for members of the SPA or £100.00 for non- members. As with many areas of life the threat of litigation is around us none so more than in the area of Health and Safety at Work. This CD deals with all aspects of the regulations that impact on screen printing companies. Authored by Paul Machin and the SPA it is easy to read and digest. It could make the crucial difference in our continuing struggle to interpret regulation and guard against the less scrupulous members the legal profession who see a profit in others adversity.

My experience and that of many companies is the Screen Print NVQ is an ideal structure on to which best practice can be built. What never ceases to amaze me is the enthusiasm with which experienced printers adopt the standard as their operational road



map. Guys who have not worked for a qualification since they left school find a whole new motivation for their job. Rather than the narrow view of the process they developed over the years now they see the effects of all aspects of production. They are now able to speak with the confidence that learning brings when problems are likely to disturb the efficiency of production. Then of course there is the element of competition as to who can gather the best evidence. This is allied with co-operation when a colleague wants a Witness Testimony or needs some more under pinning knowledge. When was the last time you heard printers in the canteen talking about improving machine efficiencies by using doped bulbs on the UV, or sharing process development ideas. Once they are into the NVQ it happens!

The cynical amongst you may think I am promoting NVQ's, well I am, but what is more important is bringing a strong element of control and direction into how we develop our staff. It isn't just National Vocational Qualifications in Screen Printing that are available to us. Virtually every discipline involved in running a business has a suitable NVQ. I know market share and turnover are the bright lights that attract some business people but by improving the performance of individuals we make the gains that don't hit the headlines, they just build the bank balance. Do you know, people who have a greater understanding of their work and hence more confidence will want to improve their own performance and stay with the team. It is easy to forget that with every person employed we get a brain for free!