

The Value of E- learning

By Keith Jennings a Printer at SMP Group London

When I first joined the screen printing fraternity as a trainee 26 years ago the attitude toward a new trainee was nothing less than contemptuous. Responsibility for training was given to an older more experienced printer, (*usually not having been properly trained themselves.*) The trainee was given the label of racker and did all the filthiest jobs, empty the bins, wash the squeegees, scrape up the ink, all of the loading and unloading of the press, the trainee would have to make the tea, go round the café when it was chucking it down and the printer didn't fancy getting wet.



The trainee and also had to be a receptacle for all manner of abuse and blame when the printer got it wrong, and bugged up the job.

In between these mundane tasks if you were lucky you might get to learn something.

To actually learn enough to be left alone on a press could take as long as a couple of years. Part of the reason for this was the old idea that a new trainee that learned too much and showed too much promise would end up taking the job of the person responsible for training them. If you were privileged you might be sent to print college on a day release scheme.

There was a training manual I was given during my first week as a trainee, but this was woefully inadequate and full of falsehoods, some of the bad advice given in this manual I still see being employed by some printers even today. Thankfully things have changed and there is a new way of thinking amongst many print companies. There is still a lot to be done with regards to training but unfortunately there are still companies that have that same old stale attitude.

We now live in the age of technology and information and there is no excuse for tardiness where getting the proper training for your company's employees is concerned, but still we find an attitude of "it will cost too much!" I have seen this first hand where a new machine was purchased and the printer was told to get on with it, being given a very difficult job to print in order to test the performance of the new press.

When the job went wrong the printer was ordered to explain himself "I don't know how to get it to work!" he replied. The operating manual was very sketchy at best and the printer tried his best with the information at hand, the Managing Director told this printer "we would love to send you on a training course but we can't afford it."

How can you afford not to train somebody how to do his or her job properly? This happened some 15 years ago. Unfortunately this attitude still exists in some upper management throughout the industry.

Knowledge is a priceless commodity.

To say that training is too expensive is very short sighted and costly indeed, just think of the ways your company can expand its horizons and product range if the staff are trained properly and comprehensively. How much can you save on waste?

I have just completed a screen-printing training course run by PDS consulting called **“World of Print E- Learning Technical Screen Printing Course”**, it covers every aspect of the screen printing process in depth from the history of screen printing going through the basics of the process, in a way that helps you to understand the physics at work under the squeegee tip. It goes through origination, stencil making and reclaiming, and gives information on the types of equipment available to the screen printer. This course is very informative and goes just as far in depth as the current NVQ 2 qualification but only takes a fraction of the time.

The course takes you through the whole range of the process using lessons containing video clips, lots of useful links to printing based websites, and loads of downloadable documents.

Each of the lessons end with a test, each test allows you to backtrack through your notes, you get ten attempts at each test, you must score 100 % on each test before you can move on to the next lesson. There are exhaustive sections on health and safety and the environmental issues which are becoming so much more important with every new piece of legislation “Euro Land” decides to throw at us, and once again all of the relevant legislation is available in the form of downloadable PDF files.

The course covers the four colour process in depth and briefly touches on the hexachrome process. The other courses that will be available soon are stencil production, pad printing and digital printing. I understand there are plans for a separate exam for the four-colour process in the near future.

The format of the lessons and the tests are very user friendly and easy to understand.

At the end of the course you will find a final last exam. This exam has a time limit of 1.5 hours and has fifty questions which are selected at random and you only get one shot at it, you cannot access your notes for this exam so you must revise the course before you attempt to take the final exam.

As I write I can almost hear it “I haven’t got the time to take this course.”

The course is supposed to take around 30 to 40 hours depending on the student, and you have two months to complete the course. I am sure that during a two month period everybody will all have more than enough spare time to pass this course.

The course has a very reasonable price tag too at only £60.00, less than the cost of a tin of ink!!

This course is not just for the printers on your shop floor. It is useful to new trainees or apprentices, people with years of experience can benefit from it too learning about areas of the business they don’t normally get involved with, helping them to understand the wider diversity of skills and techniques that is screen printing.

This course is definitely one for management to take on, both middle and upper management can benefit from this course and really should consider its viability, as many directors of printing companies do not get their working experience directly from working on presses, or making stencils. Many of them have come from either accounts, sales, or simply been employed as a manager because they have a degree in business management. My point is this, the directors of a company make the decisions on what type of equipment to buy, how much money to spend on it, how we are going to incorporate it into the day to day running of the business, and whether or not it will be suitable for the job it is intended for.

How can you possibly make these decisions without knowing how the process works or what it can achieve?

The money that can be saved through investing in proper training can far outstrip the cost of this training course.

When I think back over the past twenty-six years of my career it pains me to think of how much money, materials, inks, how many opportunities, and indeed how many jobs have been wasted and lost. Effective training, and this e-learning is certainly that, can resolve most of these issues.

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