



## Plant layout key element in integrating technologies

BY HAL ETTINGER

Today's printing plant is the antithesis of what it was before the technological changes made in the last 10 to 15 years. The impact of computer and equipment technology has dramatically changed the industry. These changes are constantly discussed when suppliers or printers get together and talk shop. It goes without saying that the printing industry will continue to change as a result of the continued advance of technology. We've learned we must be part of the process or perish. Change spells out the epitaph for some printers.

What is rarely discussed at coffee breaks, production and sales meetings or industry conventions, is the integrated production environment the graphic arts professional faces as a result of these changes. I admit, this topic is not as exciting as things like data compression, direct plate imaging, scanners, automatic palletizing, and 3,000 feet-per-minute presses. But the reality is that the printer must face another set of issues altogether.

One of these is understanding the dynamics of the working environment--the printing plant. Because this environment houses the technology, it becomes as important as the technology itself.

Let me give you an example. A piece of equipment was purchased--a finishing line, for example-- that should allow the company more flexibility, speed, and control to service your existing market better, and bring in more business. This equipment arrives, is installed and commissioned, and you go on about your work.

But in reality, the company is not in the position to compete in the additional markets you had originally hoped to attract, let alone service existing production demands. Not as many hours were spent on considering the working environment in which this equipment would be placed, as were spent selecting the equipment itself. Was the working environment in which you placed this new equipment determined to be suitable for its anticipated productivity? Was it even discussed?

For possible answers, we need to take a closer look at what I have called the working environment, and what it means to the graphic arts professional.

Employee services, those non-production areas of the plant that employees interact with as part of their work day, is arguably the most important element of a printer's working environment. It is crucial to provide an environment that is conducive to an employee's productivity.

When entering a plant, I can tell how an office or plant floor worker feels about his job. Their body language, the look in their eyes and their mannerisms reflects how



they feel about their work. Are there areas in the plant where production or coordination meetings can take place without having to raise your voice to be heard over noisy equipment, or having to use a skid or paper roll as a table to support the materials you are discussing?

Employee services should include an area where the employee can take a break away from the heat and noise to collect his thoughts. Locker and toilet facilities that a person can walk into without getting the creeps are needed also. Again, let's remember an employee's attitude, and the impact it has on productivity. Does the lunchroom provide essentials so that the employee doesn't feel like they are camping out? Is it an environment conducive to relaxing from the rigors of production? Is an exercise room that encourages fitness provided? If your working environment provides the employee services mentioned, their contribution will be greater than otherwise. In light of the cost of new technology, the employee service upgrades that might have to be made to your existing operations are a relatively cheap and worthwhile investment.

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