

Documenting Screen Life/History

We are a close-tolerance printing operation and switched over to retensionable frames about three years ago. Not knowing otherwise are there any benefits in keeping track on each screen mesh?

Answer: The overwhelming answer to your question is a resounding YES! There are great benefits to keeping a record of each screen. The purpose is more suitable and beneficial for retensionable screens than static or stretch and glue frames. Although record keeping can be used for static frames, not being retensionable means only their present condition during each stage of its life can be documented.

For retensionable frames, create a simple history chart with frame number, size, fabric information and initial tensioning particulars marked on the top part of the form. At the bottom, reasons for fabric replacement and other custom details are entered. The center contains rows and columns for data entry. Relevant data would include date, tension before printing, quantity printed, tension after printing, “check box if retensioned,” new tension level after reclaiming, and perhaps the screen maker’s initials. Some operations require additional information, such as job numbers, printing press, operator initials, off contact, stencil/emulsion type and “check box if squeegee was sharpened.”

Once details have been logged over the course of time, screen making and production management will have a dynamic tool that improves quality and productivity, captures lost time (fewer screens re-made) and reduces overall cost in terms of materials and labor. In addition to making people more accountable for their actions, it will show where strengths and weaknesses are in the operation (pre-press, production or cleaning/reclaiming).

As an example, one graphic overlay specialist hit the roof because the operation was tearing many screens during printing. Understandably, this caused great chaos during production and a significant amount of downtime. Their initial response was to back off the high tension levels they adopted, thinking this was the cause. Upon closer examination, they later established that every screen ripped was either made or retensioned by the second shift. In other words, it was not a tension problem but a people-problem with one shift.

-- The Print Guru, Mike Young, August 2004