

**Screen Reclaiming**

**We try to reclaim as many screens as possible but find we have to tear out more than we should due to ghosting and other junk left behind. We haven't found a chemical system that does the job as advertised. Can you give some advice on how we can possibly improve beyond what we are presently doing without recommending another chemical brand?**

**Answer:** I can try but not seeing or knowing precisely how your company physically manages reclaiming means that I have to offer advice blindly and on assumptions. I have never heard of a cleaning/reclaim chemical system that does not work. Granted, some work better than others depending on emulsion/inks used but they all work well to a degree or else they would not be in business.

From my experience, the problem is not so much chemicals but people and training — or the lack thereof. Let's make one thing clear — we consultants are not people-bashers. I believe it is my professional obligation to deal with actualities rather than simply passing blame, no matter how objectionable the response may be.

I used to make a statement, partly in a form of a question, which went something like this: "What is the easiest and cheapest task in the whole process, which can have a direct impact on quality and productivity, yet, if done poorly, becomes the most expensive in the building?" If no one responded, which was often the case, I followed up with a clue: "It is also the dirtiest job in the process." Of course, the answer can only be screen cleaning and reclaiming!

An operation can implement whatever it wants for cleaning/reclaiming but if a screen is pulled off a press because of ghost images, chances are the company has already lost its shirt on that job. If a screen has to be cut out and re-stretched due to ghosting after two or three reclaims, the company has definitely thrown hard-earned dollars down the drain. The answer to the problem is none other than to follow procedures as stated by the supplier. It cannot get any easier than that. In my estimation, reclaiming requires three important attributes: application protocol, reaction time and sense of accomplishment. For application, use a color-coded, solvent-resistant brush for each treatment employed. Suppliers stock them just for this very purpose. Brushes do a fantastic job if used correctly. Scrubbing up and down, across, diagonally and in circles, both back and front, is not hard to do, yet it will ensure the bristles have done the job properly.

All chemicals react differently among themselves, according to emulsions/stencils and inks used. Some will soften up and break down particles more readily than others. Because chemicals cannot predict the degree of stubbornness of an ink, emulsion coating, thickness, or the amount of days-old dry ink left on the screen, the reaction must be allowed to do its job unhindered if it is to handle the worse-case scenario as routine.

Reaction time is just as critical as application, but this is where many operations fail. They do not follow instructions for each product — or at least embrace the reaction time required.

Oftentimes, it is assumed that all products and treatments have similar reaction time regardless of brand, but this is far from reality. On many occasions, irrespective of the reaction time stated, department personnel merrily proceed to blast away any treatment with 1,600-psi pressure and then claim the product was inferior because it didn't do the job in less than 60 seconds. This is the best example of throwing money straight down the drain.

Most personnel in this department will faithfully swear they wait, say, two minutes for such-and-such product's reaction to take place. When put to the test, their two minutes is mostly less than 45 seconds because standing there waiting and doing nothing feels like two minutes! By placing a large analog cooking timer on the wall, the reaction time can easily be set immediately following an application—with color-coded reaction times clearly displayed nearby. Only then can one be assured the cleaning/reclaiming protocol is truly ensuring screens are not only thoroughly cleaned but also acting as a preventive procedure against ghosts and other stains from developing for prolonged screen life. Correct reaction times for each chemical/treatment application should also be programmed into automatic cleaning and reclaiming systems by default, to allow effective treatment for even the worst screens.

A sense of accomplishment by individuals plays a special part of job satisfaction, because the task of cleaning/reclaiming is considered the pits of the business — unsavory, but necessary. Let these personnel know the value of their contribution to the overall quality betterment of the company and that their workmanship and team spirit is an intricate part of production and ultimately to customer satisfaction. Their appreciation shows through the operation with greater productivity and yield when recognized for this fact. When one company's screen cleaner became employee of the month, you bet screen making cost rapidly dropped to its lowest ever, and complaints from production fell almost to zero. The amusing thing is, cost associated to convey such recognition is so small that it must provide the industry with just about the highest return on investment.

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