

Building the Tower of Babel

How to meet the challenge of training ethnically diverse personnel **By John Craig**



John Craig is the founder and managing director of Halo Training, which he established about 18 months ago to supply a solution for the training and on demand reference material to support and enhance operations and maintenance activities within the food industry

Last month we published an opinion piece from Eve Clark, a director of Hull-based translators and interpreting company Language Finders. She explained why the food processing industry can be a dangerous environment for immigrant workers who aren't fluent in English, and provided a few examples. As more immigrants from Eastern Europe arrive in the UK, the problem is becoming increasingly pressing. This month, we invite John Craig of Halo Training to discuss some of the solutions available to manufacturers with respect to training ethnically diverse personnel.

Recognition of a problem is the first step in discovering the solution. The challenges of training ethnically diverse staff with little grasp of the English language is slowly being recognised by the food industry.

The most obvious solution is to examine the traditional methods of training new starters and see how these can be adapted to meet the new challenges of multilingual staff. This approach would involve the translation of existing training materials into the appropriate language, then employing native language speakers to deliver the training material. The costs and logistics of such a plan will be high and involve an ongoing additional expenditure as training is repeated for each new staff entry. With high staff turnover in the industry this ongoing cost will be significant particularly if several languages are involved.

These challenges require managers in the industry to start 'thinking outside the box' and demand innovative solutions. In fact, a revolutionary approach is available to meet the health & safety and operational training needs of new staff with limited English skills.

Starting with the premise that "a picture is worth a thousand words" one can extend the saying to "a video is worth a million words". It's worth considering the advantages of video over audio. When you see an operation being performed there is no question of language or interpretation. Visual images are global and have no language barriers. The operation, if correctly captured, is exact in its nature and clearly understood by the audience.

The recently introduced On Demand Training concept from Halo Training starts from the above premise. Starting with video material as the fundamental building block the solution can be extended by the use of animation to

illustrate those operations and procedures not easily captured on video. Now introduce limited audio, or voiceover, to reinforce key elements of the training and you are starting to see the emergence of a powerful solution to the problem.

Finally, add the ability for the new employee to study the training at their own pace and be able to revisit any part of the training at any time, then you have the ultimate training package.

The basic concept of On Demand Training is that an employee may navigate through the training material from start to finish or alternatively use the package as an instantly available electronic reference manual.

Training should start with health & safety issues plus standard factory procedures. It can then incorporate the most efficient ways to use equipment including subjects such as product changeovers. Not only will your new staff work in safety but they will also operate efficiently. This is often overlooked when employing non-English speaking staff: the operators might be able use the plant and equipment but it is difficult to ensure they are operating at maximum efficiency owing to the communication problem.

Another benefit of this approach to staff training is the ability to incorporate assessment modules which prove individuals have received suitable training and reached the desired standard of understanding.

Short voiceovers are used to emphasise particularly important points and the question will arise – "do you require a new version of On Demand Training for each language?" Basically the answer is 'no' since the audio files are separate from the video and animation and can be loaded separately for each language required.

The training can be delivered in a classroom environment using a dedicated computer and projector, or individually using a desktop, or laptop computer. The material can be loaded onto individual computers or supplied and maintained from the company intranet.

And what of the costs? The cost of developing the initial training material is little more than that for conventional training courses but there are major savings since the training of ongoing staff does not require the services of a trainer or an interpreter. Other cost-savings can be made through more efficient line operation. *enter217*

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