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What's In Your Concept Tool Cart?; Adopting best practices from around the globe can help web printers be more profitable.

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Anyone working to improve, repair or maintain something knows the importance of having the right tools for the job. Some of us have used this knowledge to accumulate an impressive array of tools in our home garages with the help of an understanding spouse.

There are few things more frustrating than having a problem you know how to fix, but lack the tool required to complete the work. Some tools, like some processes, exist physically, such as having the proper plate wrench to lock up a cylinder.

Other tools exist only in concept but are equally, or arguably, more important to an organization. Examples of these are education and knowledge. Many times, printers tend to focus on ensuring the physical tools are present and in place (we certainly would not expect employees to operate equipment without a toolbox handy) but woefully neglect to provide employees with the latest in education or knowledge to better perform their work.

The concept of best practices exists in both the physical and the conceptual world. Companies develop physical processes-ways of doing things-that they perceive to be best for their business. If companies manage their internal knowledge effectively, these practices get passed throughout the organization; as employees join the company or move into new positions, the culture fosters easy dissemination of the best way to perform.

Conceptually, best practices also must continually evolve, and company culture should support a constant desire to further educate itself, challenge assumptions about how it does things, and strive to improve upon the past to ensure future success.

Fostering a learning culture

Creating and fostering a learning organizational culture is not an easy task. It is made even more difficult if you lack the

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proper tools to be successful. Recently, to facilitate printers developing greater skill sets within the arena of best practices, the Web Offset Champion Group (WOCG) launched a Best Practices ToolBox for web printers worldwide. Information on its seven best-practice guides can be found at <http://wocg.projet-client.com> .

Topics range from web-break prevention and diagnosis, productivity maintenance, color control issues, paper handling and multiple other issues of importance to printers. This toolbox is intended to provide a common platform for employees in a print organization working to improve business processes. It also serves as a consistent reference point within an organization for helping to educate employees on common best practices.

Being the best requires constant effort to improve. The best practices of years past seem archaic and do not position a firm for success today. Process thinking must evolve and ways of doing things must continue to change. And change cannot take place without the proper tools in place to facilitate it.

Formed by international suppliers in 1998, WOCG works with printers and industry associations to identify best practices. PIA/GATF is the exclusive distributor in North America.

To order your ToolBox (\$100 for members; \$150 for non-members), go online to the Bookstore at gain.net or to graphicartsonline.com/plugins .

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