**The Wisdom of Having Smarter Techs**

**[Callout:** A well-trained team of techs means fewer equipment breakdowns and faster repairs**]**

Making your techs smarter is smart business. A well-trained team of techs means fewer equipment breakdowns and faster repairs when they occur. While techs pick up a lot of new knowledge and skills just through experience, it’s sometimes necessary to turn to experts for training. That is especially true when utilities, manufacturers and process operators add new equipment.

There are many innovative ways to deliver training these days; but when it comes to the practical knowledge needed to operate, maintain and repair equipment, traditional face-to-face training remains the most popular.

“For people working with power equipment, the preference is to be trained at their site,” said Art Schultz, an ABB field service supervisor and training coordinator for the Power products group. “When our trainers are on site, they get a better feel for the customer’s operations and can provide the customer with more tailored information. Plus the convenience of on-site training makes the most of the customer’s training budget.”

The decision of whether to train at the customer site or an ABB training center typically depends on the travel costs related to the training, and that hinges on the number of techs involved.

“The break-even point is around six,” calculated Matt Dawson, ABB’s US Sales & Marketing Manager for ABB University. “For less than six participants, it’s usually more economical to bring them to our site. For more than six, it’s usually cheaper to have us go to the customer site.”

Schultz sometimes eliminates travel costs via online training through video conferences or webinars. As a bonus, online training makes it possible to include top expert instructors from wherever they are in the country. But Schultz and Dawson agree that online learning is limited solely to the classroom content.

“I have suggested online training to some of my customers, and they weren’t interested,” Dawson admitted. “They felt their techs really needed the hands-on practice and personal interaction with the trainer. They were also concerned about the ability of learners to be attentive to long stretches of sitting in front of a TV or computer.”

One way Dawson has seen online learning used successfully is pre-training prior to live instruction on newly purchased equipment.

“Before their techs came to our training facility, we did a series of four, one-hour overview sessions via video conference,” Dawson explained. “When they came to the actual, live training, they were more up to speed and able to ask better questions. They got much more out of the live training.”

You’ve no doubt seen many breathless advertisements warning about “limited-time offers.” With Microsoft discontinuing support for XP, organizations are faced with a true, limited-time offer. Dawson warned that ABB is offering only six more sessions of their courses that run on an XP-based operating system. They won’t be offered after 2014. Customers working with legacy systems should be sure to get this training while they can.

Anyone who has tried to do a home repair has probably been in the situation of taking on a project, getting halfway through it and realizing that they don’t have the skills or knowledge to finish the job.

“That’s embarrassing and wastes time, but it’s usually not a big deal,” Schultz said. “But I’ve had customers in that situation with a HV circuit breaker. They took it apart and were struggling to get it back together, and that IS a big deal. Customers can save themselves a lot of headaches by being sure they have the training they need before trying to operate new equipment or taking on a complex repair.”

For more information please contact:

ABB Inc.

Anne Roberts-Kraska

29801 Euclid Avenue

Wickliffe, OH 44092

Phone: 403-225-5511

www.abb.com

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