

Composing-Room Costs

Numerous angles of Linotype sales approach are stressed in this discussion of a newspaper plant executive's operating responsibilities under the challenge of modern conditions—verbatim reprint of a speech at ANPA Mechanical Conference

EDITORIAL NOTE—In the following observations by Harry Eybers, Production Manager of the *Washington* (D.C.) *Post*, carefully prepared for his critical audience of several hundred newspaper mechanical executives, we find reflected the experience of many years of highly successful plant operation. Today, Eybers directs one of the largest production jobs in America in one of the most modern plants. He started his newspaper career on the *Sioux City* (Ia.) *Tribune*, served as Mechanical Superintendent of a chain of newspapers in Montana and in 1944 was appointed Production Manager of the *Salt Lake City* (Utah) *Tribune and Telegram*. He left Salt Lake City several years ago to assume the post of Production Manager of the *Washington* (D.C.) *Post*. He has also served for three years as a member of the ANPA Mechanical Committee.

COMPOSING-ROOM cost should be a familiar subject with you. With composing-room costs now at an all-time high, I am sure many of you have been in serious discussions on this subject back home during the last year. This cost is now second only to newsprint in the total cost of producing a newspaper. The most alarming factor is that in many offices in the country it is increasing far *above* the increases granted in scales. Operating a composing room has now become big business and many composing-room foremen are now handling pay-rolls as high as \$50,000.00 per week.

With the total cost of producing a newspaper now running out of sight, the profit slice of the advertising revenue for many newspapers is getting pretty thin. On many newspapers Ways and Means Committees are being organized to see what can be done about it.

The Impact of Column-Width Changes

I AM SURE you are all well acquainted with what has already been done throughout the country to reduce costs through reduction of newsprint widths. I am sure

you will all agree we would like it much better if we could have retained the 12-pica column width and low shrinkage. Even the favored few have had to move in this direction or are planning to do so in the near future.

Before the last increase in newsprint cost, I was interested in the reduction of the column width, with the hope that we might be able to get away from high shrinkage. At that time I made a survey of about 50 of the leading newspapers in different sections of the country. I received answers from many of the larger newspapers stating that they were not interested in reducing the column width and were not at that time using high-shrinkage mats. Now, just two years later, many of these newspapers have already gone about the limit on both column-width reduction and high shrinkage.

I have been in this business nearly 30 years and have done everything but sleep in composing rooms. I have operated in four different parts of the country and so far I have had pretty good luck. I thought maybe if I outlined some of my experiences, how I have tried to operate, and some of my opinions on composing-room operations, it might be of help to some who are in trouble. I hope I won't bore you.

Page-Cost Comparisons Unfair

WHENEVER composing-room costs start getting out of line, as is the case now on many newspapers, top management usually starts making page-cost comparisons with other newspapers. I do not believe this gives them the information they are looking for or helps much in any way. I do not think there are two papers in the country that operate exactly alike, so how can a fair comparison be made?

I don't think it is fair to compare the page cost of non-competitive papers with that of papers in top competitive cities and, last but not least, I don't think there are any two papers in the country that figure their page costs the same. There is only one thing they all do seem

able to get together on, and that is, in obtaining their page cost they divide the number of pages run in their city edition into the composing-room payroll.

Management has more to do with controlling page cost than anyone else because most differences in page-cost comparisons can be traced back to office policy and deadlines. A newspaper in a non-competitive city is in a position to demand good advertising deadlines and make them stick. The same condition prevails with news copy. In a city where the newspaper does not have to worry about competition, these deadlines can be set up so that composing rooms have time to get the work out in a proper and orderly fashion and not have to man for a peak load. Manning for a peak load is very costly and makes it virtually impossible to get the production you should be getting. Manning for a peak load means a short-take system, which you all know is a time-killer. It makes the copy situation, both news and advertising, a case of either feast or famine.

There are quite a few newspapers that make many of their pages good on the first edition and have few make-overs on later editions. It is pretty hard to compare costs with that kind of an operation against a newspaper that tears the paper to pieces nearly every edition.

Organization Relationships Are Vital

I AM NOW working at the fourth job since I started in the newspaper business and each time my first approach has always been to get top management's confidence. Next, I tried to sell myself to the people working with me because I feel a production manager, mechanical superintendent, or foreman, is only as good as his employees make him. I have always been a great believer in good employee relationships. I believe you should make your employees feel like they are human beings and an important part of your organization instead of pieces of machinery.

Check the Equipment in Use

THE NEXT step is to check equipment in use. In my moves, I have run into composing rooms with keyboard equipment badly out of date and worn out. I have found ad machines improperly set up without the type faces needed or full range of sizes. This meant type was being set by hand that should have come off the machine. I found offices without mixers, yet these newspapers carried heavy grocery and liquor lineage copy that is so adaptable to mixers. In other words, mixed composition was set and assembled in five, six, and seven operations instead of two slugs as it should be set in mixed composition. I found ad machines not equipped with automatic quadders, yet quadders have proved to be a success for many years; have proved to be a big time-saver

and, of course, a big money-saver. I found many shops still cutting machine slugs on hand saws instead of having machines equipped with saws. These saws proved their worth many years ago.

When I inquired why mixers, quadders and saws had not been purchased with the machines I got several answers. One was that the office would not spend the money. I felt then that somebody had not gained the confidence of top management. Either that, or they were not sold on the equipment or did not have the ability to sell top management. I have always found that if you can show management how much time can be saved with new and up-to-date equipment they can see that it is good business because nowadays time costs a lot of money.

The Importance of a Replacement Program

I HAVE ALSO found offices operating without a replacement program on their keyboard machines. They were running machines from 30 to 40 years, machines that cost them money every time they turned over, machines that cost them thousands each year on parts and machinists' time. But nobody had bothered to show the office how much money these machines were costing, nor how much money was being lost in down-time on account of machine trouble.

Operating old, worn-out machines is very costly in many ways. It means not only continually buying new parts but it takes more machinists to take care of machines in this condition. Old machines are hard on mats and manufacturers haven't started giving them away as yet. Old machines are slow and do not have the improvements to speed up production so there is a definite loss there. In shops with old machines of this type, the operator's proofs are usually dirty and a large percentage of errors can be charged to faulty machines. Okay proofs are something you very seldom find in shops of this kind. Dirty proofs are very costly because they take more time in the proof room, more time on the machine to make corrections, more time on the floor to read and insert corrections—and, I repeat again, time means money.

It does not take long for an operator to run up 5% down-time because of machine trouble. An average size daily could very easily have 50 machines operating during a double shift. Five percent of 50 operators' production adds up to quite a figure and runs into a lot of money. Old and troublesome machines also have a bad effect on the morale of the operators. If an operator has to fight a machine to get any production you are just not going to get much type and soon the operator will get the attitude that if the office does not care whether he sets type, why should he.

With all the reasons I have listed above it should not be very hard to justify to management that they

would be making money on a machine replacement program, a program whereby you would not be operating a machine more than 15 years at the very most. I know there are very few of you in the audience who drive your automobile for 10 years.

Plant Layout a Big Factor

PLANT LAYOUT is also a big factor in composing-room cost. If possible, equipment should be laid out so that copy travels only one way until it reaches the stereo molding machine. If it has to back-track, it means extra steps and that costs time and money. Equipment should be laid out so every operation can be made with a minimum of steps. If it takes two men a minute to walk ten feet to perform an operation, one man can make the trip twice if the distance is cut to five feet.

News machines should be set up within the shortest distance to the hook and dump. Remember, you pay your operators to sit in front of a machine and set type, not to walk all over the office.

Extra magazine changes should be eliminated or held to an absolute minimum. In some of the shops I have inherited during the last 30 years, there have been as many as 40 and 50 extra magazines on the ad machines. This is absolutely ridiculous and costly. How can operators be expected to set type if they have to make as many as 25 or 30 magazine changes or more per day? Each time I ran into a situation of this kind, I either eliminated all magazine changes or cut them down to an absolute minimum. To do this I purchased machine models capable of carrying most of these magazines on the machine at all times.

News proof presses should be located right next to your dump and the proof room right next to the proof presses. In this way, type, proofs, and copy can be passed from one to the other without another mechanical operation. In offices I have been connected with, I have found proof rooms in just about every kind of location. I have even found some proof rooms moved out of the composing room because of noise, with little thought given that it is possible to build a soundproof room right in the composing room. In some shops, I found all kinds of gadgets, such as overhead carriers and tube systems, to carry proofs and copy to the proof room. This is swell and works swell, but it still takes someone to open tubes, put the copy and proofs in, and send them along the way. The same thing must then be done at the other end. This takes time and costs money.

Another important reason why I think the proof room should be right in the center of the operation is that it is one of the most important functions of the composing room for the foreman to keep track of. This is especially important in non-departmental shops where men are shifted in and out of the proof room according to the flow of work.

Make-up tables should be placed so that the news dump and proof room are on one end and stereotype molding machines on the other. In this way, the flow of work will move in one direction. Head machines should be located as near the copy desk as possible. Ring machines, if one is used, should be located next to make-up if possible. Machines used for setting outlines should be next to outline assembly bank.

The entire room should be laid out so the foreman or man in charge can see the entire operation from the center of the room. I feel it is pretty hard to hold foremen responsible for an operation if he has to walk all over the place to see what is going on or if a lot of his operation is hidden from view.

In the ad room, each two-man ad bench should have a saw. Mitering and slug-stripping machines should be centrally located so they can be reached by all ad men with a minimum of steps. Ad "take" stones should be located near proof presses and ad storage racks, and they in turn must be centrally located so an ad man, on completing his job, has to make only one trip in delivering the completed ad to the proof press and return to his bench with another job to set.

The size and shape of your room does not always permit moves of this kind but it is surprising what can be done when you start playing checkers with it. I think it pays to hold discussions with all your foremen and assistants and even the journeymen when relaying your composing-room equipment. After all, they are the ones who have to make it work and they should be made to feel that they are an important part of the operation. You will be surprised at the valuable suggestions you will get even from the apprentice boys.

There are a few other things I have run into that I did not approve of and after changing them the moves proved profitable. One was having ad type on nearly every machine or scattered throughout the entire room. This is confusing and creates a lot of walking, plus the fact that you often get advertising display copy on a machine where an operator might be a very competent straight-matter man but not so competent on ad display.

Shell Casts Save Money

SEVERAL shops were still using type-high casts instead of shell. I don't believe there are any composing-room men who would want to challenge me when I say that the use of shell casts over type-high makes for big savings in time in the composing room. And again, time means money. I have never run into anyone who was able to justify to me why they continue to use type-high casts. One answer I did get was that the stereotypers did not have enough to do to keep them busy, so, in other words, because the stereotypers weren't busy, composing-room costs were made to run much higher than they should.

Factors for Productivity

To sum it all up, we cannot lose sight of the fact that increased wages are responsible for the biggest part of this increased production cost but that does not excuse one shop getting more productivity per hour than another. There is a tendency to blame this all on the union; in fact, it has become a favorite alibi whenever the office starts complaining about rising costs. I admit there are some union men who do not produce as much as they should but the law of averages calls for a few like this. We have always had them and probably always will. I do not think it is fair to hold that against the body as a whole.

As I have mentioned before we have had some fine talks on foreman training but I don't think anyone has really come up with the answer to the problem we in the newspaper mechanical departments are faced with in even getting men interested in becoming foremen. We have been faced with this problem since the last war started and I don't see any relief until there are enough men to go around and everybody is back working on straight time. As long as journeymen are getting so much overtime that they take home as much or more money than the foreman it is pretty hard to get anyone interested in taking on additional responsibilities. The only way at present to protect yourself is to make the premium pay attractive enough to get men interested.

I think it is mandatory to have your foreman backed up three and four deep to give you the proper and constant supervision you need. Constant supervision is a necessary evil that seems to be one of the laws of nature. The premiums paid these assistant foremen are the best investment the office can make. It not only gives you this supervision but gives you competent replacements during vacation, sickness, retirement, or in case someone hi-jacks your top foreman away from you.

At present, because there is not enough foreman training going on in the country, the practice has been to hi-jack a foreman from another shop who someone else has already trained. That might get us by for a while but we will soon be at the end of the line and then where do we go from there? The only answer I can find is to pay the extra premiums. Hard as it might be to do, at times you are going to be paying a third-string foreman just about as much as you were paying your foreman a few years back. Convincing top management how bad this situation is, really is the toughest job. It is pretty hard to make them realize that the guy you are paying an extra buck a shift may, as the third-string foreman, be in charge of a large group of men where alert supervision, and the right judgment, might save the office several hundred dollars on just one shift.

Eight Essentials for Economy

IN MY OPINION, if we try the following points we would get the same productivity per hour regardless of locality:

- (1) Take advantage of all the modern equipment on the market.
- (2) Give the employees a clean, well-lighted room to work in.
- (3) Establish a good employee relationship program—make your employees feel like they are an important part of your organization instead of just pieces of machinery. This is something you cannot buy with money.
- (4) A good foreman training program—back all your foremen up at least three or four deep.
- (5) Proper layout of your equipment to cut out all extra steps.
- (6) Proper equipment to fit your needs.
- (7) A replacement program for your equipment so full production is possible at all times.
- (8) If you are forced to operate a costly composing room due to the editorial policy of the paper, be sure to be on record with top management as to what this is costing. You know it is possible to give management any kind of a newspaper they want but it means either someone has to pay for it or something is going to suffer. By costly operation, I mean late news copy deadlines, setting most of your paper in about half a shift, big rip-ups of pages between editions, big kills, big over-sets, strict adherence to classification of news, and poor quality of copy. To eliminate this type of costly operation would mean a daily newspaper could suffer circulation-wise because news-wise the paper would not be as fresh and perfect as desired. The same condition should prevail with advertising deadlines.

The unions should furnish us with enough competent help to get the work out but they cannot dictate your operating policy. They are not going to tell you what type of equipment you should buy. They are not going to properly lay out your room. They are not going to train your future foreman and they are not going to set up your employee relationship program. This is *our* job and only we are to blame if we do not have such an operation.