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## Developing a Computerized Simulation Training Package

by

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The first section of this article contains a brief description of the training package. Then, the process used in developing the package is reviewed.

The reader of this journal might be most interested in the process used, as it may be a model for development of other industry-specific training programs.

### The Training Package

The NACS (National Association of Convenience Stores) Computerized Management Simulation includes software which runs on a microcomputer, a users manual and ten training modules complete with visual aids and handout materials. The simulation and supporting materials are primarily intended for convenience store company first- and second-line supervisors.

The objectives of the training program are to teach:

- general business management principles
- specific convenience store management principles

- operations and merchandising strategies
- decision-making skills
- team work
- characteristics of the industry

In a training situation participants are divided into teams. Each team has a chance to operate its own "convenience store." The teams make decisions regarding merchandising, operations and personnel for their stores. These decisions are then fed into a microcomputer. The computer simulates a market situation as though all teams are in competition with each other. Each team then receives feedback (financial statements) on how its decisions affected the sales and financial health of its store.

While the decisions are being run on the computer, an instructor teaches some aspect of convenience store management based on selected teaching modules, such as labor scheduling, inventory control, gross margin blending, understanding financial statements, or a related operations topic.

The participant evaluation ratings of the seminars have been very high. A major reason the seminars have been so well received is because the training package was developed and tested with considerable input from convenience store industry personnel.

### **Using Industry Input**

In the spring of 1983, the NACS Board of Directors approved the development of a training program based on a computerized management simulation. NACS was able to obtain funding for the project development from McLane Company--a major grocery wholesale supplier to the convenience store industry.

A task force of eight industry executives was formed in 1983 to provide input and guidance for developing the program. The industry executives included CEOs and other top management people with experience in finance, marketing, personnel and training.

In developing a computerized management simulation there is need for considerable information on the market economics of the industry. The task force members and others in their companies completed a lengthy questionnaire regarding convenience store operations. They provided information on the likely sales response of price increases and decreases for various product categories, the impact of advertising and promotion on sales, the optimum levels of training for new employees, appropriate mix of full-time/part-time employees and other operating characteristics.

Using information obtained from the task force and from other industry sources, a computerized simulation was developed to run on microcomputers. Simultaneously, training materials were being developed to support the simulation program.

In the winter of 1984 the task force met again to review the simulation and

training materials and to provide feedback on changes and enhancements.

In the spring of 1984, a two-day seminar using the simulation package was presented to a group of supervisory people at one of the task force companies. And then a half-day version of the package was presented to the management people with one of the industry's major suppliers. After these seminars, the simulation and training materials were again changed and enhanced.

NACS then sponsored two national seminars based on the simulation program. After these two-day programs, additional changes were made in the simulation and training package. In the summer of 1984, one of the task force companies used the complete package in-company at two of its management meetings. After using the training packages, the company provided additional feedback which was used to further refine the teaching materials.

In the fall of 1984, NACS offered the Computerized Operations Simulation Training Package for sale to member companies.

Throughout this process of developing the package the task force was kept informed through frequent "progress reports." The individual task force members also provided excellent information and case examples to be used as part of the training package materials.

In addition to task force members, several other industry leaders provided informal advice, suggestions and input to the development process.

### **Summary**

This approach to using industry personnel to help develop and test a training package proved to be very successful. The package could have been developed with much less time and cost without industry input, but it would have lacked the quality and credibility

gained through industry counsel. There is no question that the additional investment of time and dollars has yielded and excellent return in program accept-

ability. This approach to developing industry-specific training packages, with variations, could be a useful model for other program development efforts.