

## Industry Outlook: Re-Envisioning The MRO Model

Written by Andy Teich, President, Commercial Systems Division, FLIR  
Friday, 19 August 2011 14:11

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Despite high unemployment numbers, our industrial base is dealing with a substantial shortage of skilled technicians. In particular, the skills gap has made it difficult to fill an increasing number of MRO roles, including non-destructive testing.

Many factors are at play, not the least of which is a rolling exodus of well-trained baby boomers heading for retirement. Expect skilled technician shortages in the millions, just in the U.S. Several strategies can address this dilemma.

First: training, training, training. It needs to be a key strategy for companies—*one that's protected and defended, even in adverse times.*

Training improves productivity, quality and job satisfaction. Continuing education keeps skill levels matched to advancing technology and cuts turnover and downtime. Job training and apprenticeship tax credits for companies offering training will go a long way in sustaining this priority.

Fresh thinking about MRO training will drive real progress on this front. Companies can increase access to training by de-emphasizing four-year degree requirements and increasing the role of tiered training certifications and two-year programs.

Look beyond formal schools and consider training centers with MRO-specific programs, as well as business and trade organizations—*places where a "learn by doing" approach is thriving.* Innovative online education coupled with field training can help workers build skills at their own pace at considerable savings to the company. By providing an achievable path for substantially improving skills, employers can enable MRO workers to take more control and ownership of their professional futures and increase job satisfaction.

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The other key strategy involves a wholesale review of existing MRO roles and functions. Here's the tough question: "Are your roles outdated?" As specialized MRO roles have become harder to fill, there's also been tremendous progress in making powerful, sophisticated technologies (once reserved for in-house or third-party specialists) more accessible, not only through lower costs but through increased ease-of-use.

Roles must evolve with technology. Now's the time to evaluate moving aspects of diagnostic work from a specialist model (i.e. "We only have two people trained to diagnose that equipment") to an empowered, distributed and interconnected model. How? Tools like today's infrared (IR) cameras employ state-of-the-art, productivity-enhancing technology that's many times more powerful than that of a decade ago, and it's available at a fraction of the cost. The goal is to empower more technicians with the right tools and training to perform front-line diagnostic work so that limited specialist resources can focus on escalated, critical issues.

FLIR infrared cameras are at the forefront of this effort to transform MRO. For example, by enabling Wi-Fi connectivity between our E-series cameras and mobile devices like iPads, personnel can instantly send IR images of problems to decision-makers. Bluetooth connectivity with test equipment accurately captures and pairs electrical readings of failing equipment with IR images for a big-picture diagnostics approach. IR cameras are more intuitive and easier to use than ever, and with many productivity-oriented capabilities, they represent an exciting shift in how we think about tools we use.

Interconnected tools are helping companies implement today's emerging interconnected MRO team. Organizations like the "Infrared Training Center," with alternatives to four-year degrees, will quickly and painlessly expand the number of qualified MRO professionals in high-growth areas such as thermography. With solid training geared to this new model, companies will be better equipped today to tackle tomorrow's scarcity of skilled resources. **MT**

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