I get bombarded with maintenance product news and seldom get excited about the "innovations" in the maintenance marketplace. This changed the other day when Universal Technologies Interactive sent me news of an online "Skills Accelerator."

OK, I will admit that anything related to the Web and maintenance gets my immediate attention—and this looked very interesting indeed. In brief, the Web-based Skills Accelerator allows maintenance managers and supervisors to determine what their employees do not know about their jobs and then identify resources and tools to develop these skills within their work groups.

Although there are off-the-shelf industrial skills assessment programs out there, Universal Technologies Interactive grew out of a maintenance training company and a skills assessment technology company combining resources to create a specialized and detailed offering.

To use the Skills Accelerator the maintenance supervisor logs into the secure Web site, defines specific jobs, and assigns discipline and job tasks. This list can be edited and updated at any point in the future. Once the system is set up, job and tasks analysis (JTA) defined processes are used to identify specific job classifications such as mechanical, electrical, and operations. Common tasks are identified for various skill areas as well as specific skills required.

An employee starts the assessment process by logging into the Web site and answering questions. The assessment can be taken in stages or completed in one sitting. The evaluation is sent to the supervisor immediately; the employee does not have any direct access to the results.

The knowledge and skills assessments are designed to identify "employee readiness" to perform tasks in accordance with identified best practices, and develop strategies to overcome identified gaps. The key to developing an individual development program is to assess each individual's knowledge and skills for each element of each assigned task.

Gaps between knowledge and skills possessed vs those that are needed are part of the Skills

Accelerator. The system also identifies areas of opportunity for future employee development. This allows the supervisor to select from a wide variety of training resources that are aligned with the company's business priorities and budget. This method not only identifies individual skill gaps but can be used to spot skill deficiencies within certain employee groups as well.

Once the supervisor selects the appropriate curriculum, an employee's development plan is generated. With the implementation of the development plans, companies can help each employee to become world class.

Eventually the system will even rate the effectiveness of the various training resources, including live instructor led, distance learning, and computer-based products, as the use of the system grows. Training resource companies are invited to send an e-mail to support@utinteractive.com with a brief explanation of the maintenance training offered to be added to the resource index.

To generate a valid result, managers and supervisors must communicate the positive aspects of employee and career development and avoid using the system for the "blame game."

Individuals can log on for less than $75 and corporate pricing plans are also available for volume users.

There is even a patent pending on the Skills Accelerator. It sure is exciting to see an innovative leading-edge technology applied to improving maintenance skills which we all know make our industries more competitive in world markets. **MT**

Internet Tip: Update, Update

Be sure and visit the Microsoft Windows Update site to read about possible incompatibility issues of certain programs (like firewalls and automatic updaters) with new Windows XP Service Pack 2. There is a list of known issues and you will do well to address them before you select the update. This update is a good one. It includes a firewall to beef up XP security, although some new flaws have already been identified with SP2.

Blogging, anyone?

Blogs or Web logs are becoming very popular. They are simply daily or weekly writings of everyday people who have something to say. A Blog is really an ongoing conversation between the author and the readers.

There is one maintenance and reliability blog site at www. maintenancetalkcom and a Blog 101 explanation will give you a good overview of blogging and whether it is for you or not. If you want your own blog, you can easily set up one at Blogger.com