

Improving After-Sales Service for Mitsubishi Offset Printing Presses Responding to Customers' Needs



RYOICHI NISHIHATA SATORU KUBOTA

SHIRO KOHARA YOSHIAKI KATOU

YUZOU NAKASAKO CHIE KUWATA

It has been several years since predictions of the “paperless” society were first made. The widespread use of the Internet and cell phones was supposed to eliminate the need for most printed material. Despite the increasing reliance on electronic media, however, there is still a steady demand for print media such as newspapers and magazines. The Paper and Printing Machinery Division of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd. (MHI) provides customers with printing equipment, and our Service Center helps customers to produce high-quality printed material. This article describes our approaches to customer service.

1. Introduction

MHI produces three types of offset printing press: mass-production sheet-fed offset printing presses, commercial web offset printing presses, and newspaper offset printing presses. It is important for our service business to be able to provide satisfactory maintenance service and take quick action when troubles occur to ensure that our products perform as expected after delivery to our customers. The broad range of after-sales service requests by our customers can be divided into two categories: the provision of service parts, and the provision of technical services mainly for modification and maintenance inspections.

2. Current approaches

Our customers cover the complete spectrum, from large newspaper companies with many presses to small printing companies that operate only one offset printing press. While we do provide maintenance service for our most recent offset printing presses, we also support the presses that we delivered more than 20 years ago. Our objective is to provide quick service to every customer regardless of size, location, or type of press. To do so, we have organized a system with over 30 selling agents around the world, links with sales and servicing companies in Japan, and five distributors (Mitsubishi Lithographic Press Co., Ltd [MLP]) in the rest of the world.

2.1 Technical services

The provision of technical service is segmented into two fields. The first is the service of machines and equipment at a customer’s site. The second is the training and education of our customers’ operators as well as the technical service staff of our distributors and agents.

(1) Machine and equipment services

If one of our machines and equipment should happen to fail, we provide technical services such as disassembly, replacement, and repair as necessary. Our after-sales service also includes maintenance and inspection services that may be required when operational issues occur during the use of our machines and equipment. We meet a wide range of customer needs.

(2) Training and education

Even more important than hardware service is ensuring that our customers use the machines and equipment we have provided to them in an efficient and safe manner. MHI has two domestic training centers and several more overseas to provide training and educational seminars to the service engineers of our distributors and agents, as well as to our customers’ press operators.

For example, we have nine different training courses every year, ranging from a beginner's course for those who have limited knowledge of offset printing to the advanced quality control course for those who wish to improve their skill with sheet-fed offset printing presses. There are 40 different training workshops held at the training center. We also train the service engineers who are responsible for servicing our offset printing presses all over the world so that we can maintain a high level of onsite service.

2.2 Parts supply

Any downtime resulting from trouble with our offset printing presses will have a direct impact on our customers' profitability and could reduce our market credibility. It is in the interest of both our customers and MHI to reduce downtime to avoid production delays. Quick response by our service engineers and a system that can provide service parts without delay are thus extremely important.

(1) Service parts management

Each of the three types of offset printing press has different internal components, and thus, each model requires different service parts. We must stock service parts for the lifetime of our machines and equipment so that we are able to meet service requests not only for our most recent models but also for older models that have been in service for a long time.

To do this, we use a system that allows us to maintain optimum stock volumes by predicting future parts requirements based on past experience. Furthermore, we always keep a certain number of critical parts in stock. Even if the probability of requiring a certain part is very low, if that part is critical and the customer does require it, not having it in stock would have a major negative impact on the customer's operations.

(2) Information on parts in stock

To reduce the time required for parts procurement when supplying parts to our customers, all our distributors and agents share information on their stock levels so that the type and quantity of parts in stock anywhere in the world can be easily determined (**Figure 1**).

(3) Parts supply system

We minimize the time required to supply parts to our customers by having stock not only in our Service Center but also at our distributors and agents. Our parts supply system operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week to meet the unique requirements of our customers. Newspaper companies that use our presses often operate at night, for example.

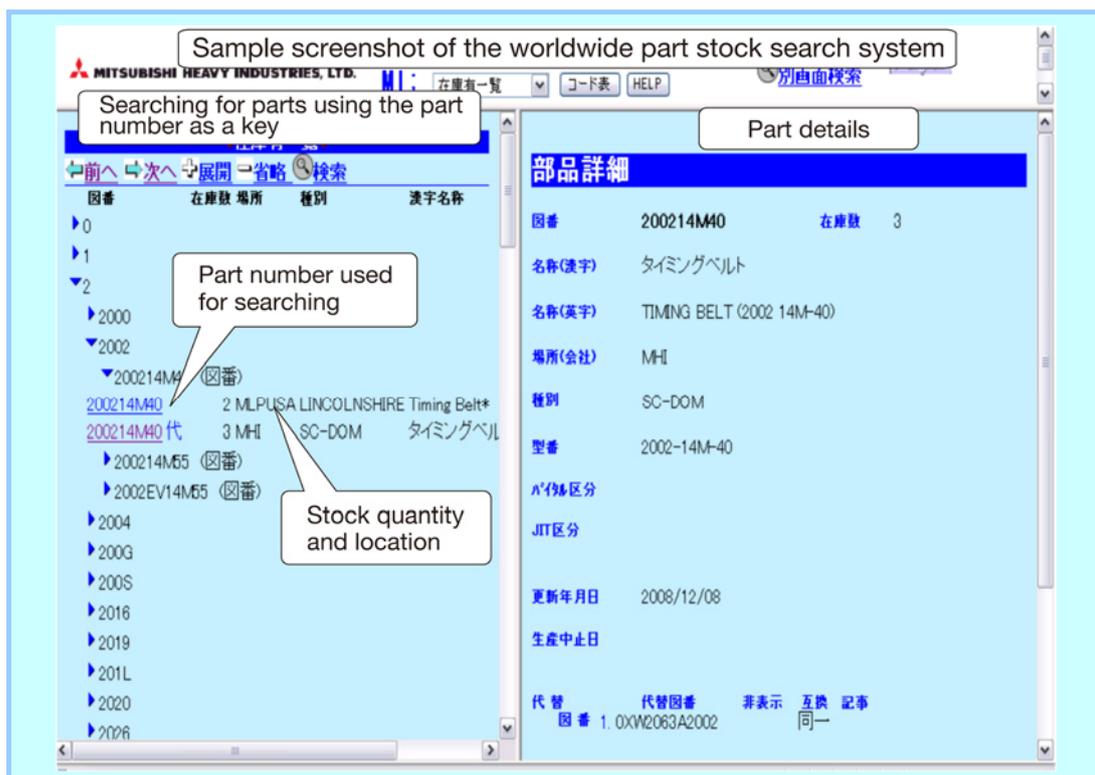


Figure 1 Sample screenshot of the worldwide part stock search system

3. Recent approaches to improving service quality

We have already mentioned that fast action is required when providing our customers with after-sales service. We believe there are four important factors to be considered in improving service quality even further. First, we must react quickly to customer requests to understand what the problem is. Second, we must quickly provide the information to those who can solve the problem. Third, we must share and learn from experience to be able to build on our success for similar situations in the future. Fourth, we must keep a record of the service (parts changing, modification, etc.) performed on each piece of MHI machines and equipment at the customers' premises.

3.1 Management of customer equipment failure information

We have created the Customer Press Information Management System database (**Figure 2**) to manage the information received from service engineers, who are our points of contact with customers. This system operates by sending an email to each representative of our Service Center as soon as the service engineers enter the failure information about domestic customers' machines and equipment. We record the information in the system so that the failure information can be shared immediately.

Before this system was developed, customer information was shared by paper, fax, or 'phone. This often caused problems such as delayed action when important information was not instantaneously available or a key decision maker was not present. Since the new system became operational, the numbers of delays and missed contacts have been greatly reduced since customer information is shared more quickly and more widely. It is now much easier for the people in charge to assess a situation and act quickly to solve customer problems based on successful past resolutions of similar problems that are stored in the database.

3.2 Press carte system

The Press Carte System has been developed to store customer hardware historical information, including installations, modifications, and maintenance of each piece of machines and equipment (**Figure 3**). Because this system is linked with the Customer Press Information Management System, we are quickly able to determine the history of each installation, when any parts were changed, or the past failure of any machine and equipment. This system has been improved to be able to provide better and more detailed service to each customer.



Figure 2 Main page of the Customer Press Information Management System (partially revised)

The number of failure cases by model is available. Details can be seen by clicking on icons.



Figure 3 Main page of the Press Carte System

Access is controlled by ID and password.

3.3 Upgrades and rebuilds

Provision of the services mentioned so far is an important part of our Service Center operations. However, we go a step further and assist customers with refurbishing and upgrading older equipment to maintain or even improve their operational efficiency. This is very important, as economic conditions may make it difficult for customers to purchase new equipment. Our program of retrofitting and upgrading existing machines and equipment has been well received by our customers.

4. The future

Although testing of our Customer Press Information Management System has already started overseas, the major users of this system are the distributors in Japan. We will improve our service quality even further by deploying the system around the world to meet the needs of our overseas customers.

There are many companies that own second-hand MHI presses that we do not know about. We plan closer collaboration with overseas agents and distributors to provide better service to these potential customers. We would like to let these companies benefit from our upgrade and refurbishment programs that include environmental and energy-saving improvements.

5. Conclusion

The MHI Paper & Printing Machinery Division has taken a consistent and unified approach to the provision of new machines and equipment and the servicing of existing machines and equipment. We aim to be the world leader in this business. We are sensitive to the opinions and demands of our customers.

Authors



Ryoichi Nishihata
Manager,
Paper & Printing Machinery
Division



Shiro Kohara
Manager,
Paper & Printing Machinery
Division



Yuzou Nakasako
Manager,
Paper & Printing Machinery
Division



Satoru Kubota
Manager,
Paper & Printing Machinery
Division



Yoshiaki Katou
Paper & Printing Machinery
Division



Chie Kuwata
Manager,
Control Systems Laboratory,
Hiroshima Research &
Development Center,
Technical Headquarters