

Canadian Company in Region

Leighton & Kidd Limited: Video Taped Training Programs Enter ASEAN Region

In some developing countries, workers who have never been to school can time maintenance jobs in sophisticated power plants by the phases of the moon. Their adaptation of ancient lore to Space Age technology is remarkable enough. Even more so is the fact that they learn their tasks from demonstrations on videotapes made in the modest brick building in Toronto housing Leighton & Kidd Ltd. Consulting Engineers.

On factory floors throughout the emerging industrial world, the journeyman teacher is increasingly apt to be a demonstrator of a Leighton & Kidd videotape. So is the visiting expert in the control rooms of high-tech plants in older industrial societies. The firm's markets literally circle the globe — from Hawaii to New Zealand. Its video training programs are used in 24 countries and in six languages.

Winning performance

There are two outstanding reasons for Leighton & Kidd's winning performance in the export of services. One is that currently more than 80 per cent of the firm's earnings come from export sales — a performance, in the matter-of-fact assessment of the president, John Leighton, "that probably no other company in Canada can match".

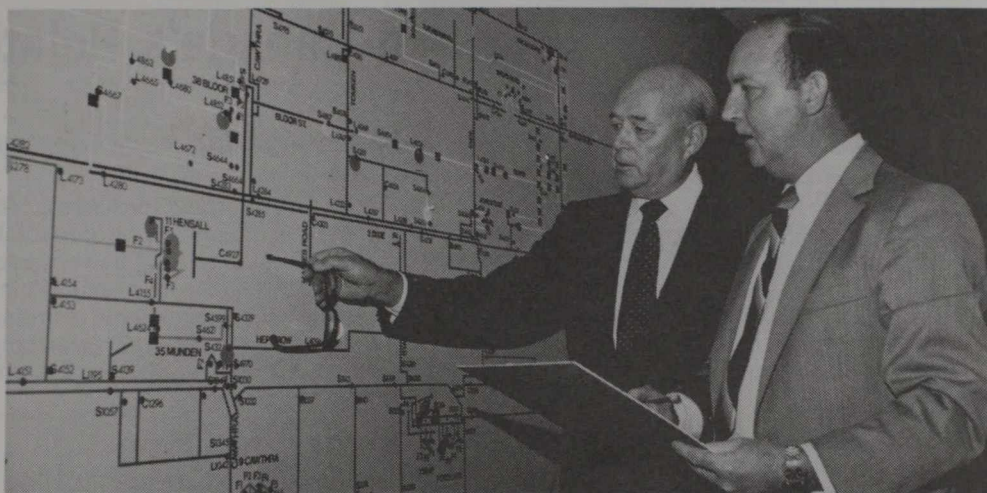
The other is that the company is a world leader in a select field, and it accomplished that by taking risks in a largely untried business.

John Leighton and Keith Kidd, who formed their present business partnership in 1971, came from strikingly similar backgrounds. Both had graduated as engineers in 1942, served in World War II, worked for big Hydro utilities and gone into business as independent consultants. Both had given high-level advice to governments and regulatory agencies. Both had worked on major power projects in developing countries — and left them with a growing sense of unease.

"I was disturbed," says Mr. Leighton, "about what was left behind after the Canadians and Americans had packed up and gone home. We'd built a plant, but had we built the skills to run it properly?"

Unexpected order

The two partners worried at the problem, but the solution eluded them — until an unexpected order came in one day in 1975. An American firm was considering producing a training film for thermal plant operators. They needed an expert to write the script, and they'd heard that Ted Major, a Royal Navy



A.J.G. Leighton (centre) and D. Crawford (right) discuss the layout of the hydro-electric distribution system of the City of Mississauga, Ontario.

veteran and recently joined partner in Leighton & Kidd in Toronto, was just the man.

"Ted wrote the script and produced the program, and that got us going," says Mr. Leighton. They then did a survey, searching for potential users of training videotapes, and saw a gold mine in pulp and paper. That industry was being wracked by technological change, high staff turnover, low morale, absenteeism and slumping productivity. Training and retraining was becoming an acute problem.

Without any specific order, Leighton & Kidd gambled on a "generic" production. They bought a camera and "darted around local video production houses looking for studio space and time". The speculation paid off in 1976, when the giant MacMillan Bloedel company bought the program for training mill personnel in Canada and the US.

In a few years, the company's staff grew from eight to 22. Graphic artists and film editors were hired. A fully-equipped television production studio was installed.

Branching out

Similarly, the branching out in projects and products in the last few years has been spectacular. There are Leighton & Kidd tapes — on everything from furniture manufacturing to fire-fighting machine maintenance to medical crisis intervention.

Total sales revenue rose from just under \$1.4 million in 1981 to more than \$2 million last year. A high proportion of the training programs are now custom-made for specific clients.

The firm is just beginning to tap some markets with huge potential. Leighton

& Kidd took part in the Far East trade mission of Premier William Davis and Industry and Trade Minister Frank Miller last fall. Now thousands of students in Singapore's polytechnical institutes are viewing videotapes made in Toronto.

The company is in the midst of negotiating the final details of a deal to supply a top-to-bottom training package for a brand new pulp and paper mill under construction in the Far East, and another for an oil refinery in the Middle East.

Leighton and Kidd's agent in Singapore is Transforma Pte. Ltd. and with the help of Transforma's energetic President, Andrew Sng, the firm has succeeded in making substantial sales of material to both the public and private sector. Its clients include Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic, Public Utilities Board and others.

In Thailand an order has been received from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand covering the purchase of the "Electric Power System Operation" training program. EGAT was the seventy-second major utility or power pool which purchased this program as the basis for operator training.

Representing Leighton and Kidd in the Philippines is the skills training group of Engineering Equipment Limited which is managed by Training Group Manager, Philip Torres.

Engineering Equipment has its executive offices at 110 E. Rodriguez Jr. Avenue, Ortigas Industrial Estate, Quezon City, Metro Manila 3305.

(Article adapted from Ontario Business News).