

## Videotaped training programs capture world-wide markets

In some Third World 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 peasant lore to Space Age technology is remarkable enough. Even more so is the fact that they learn their tasks from demonstrations on videotapes made on a quiet residential street in the west end of Toronto.

Two television sets were playing on a typical working day in the modest brick building that houses Leighton & Kidd Ltd. Consulting Engineers. On the one upstairs, in the conference room, an instructor was conducting a course on oxy-acetylene welding for beginners.

Three floors down, an electrical engineer on screen was lecturing about power transmission. She discussed voltage in the terminology of advanced mathematical equations.

The difference in the content of those two TV presentations is a measure of the range of Leighton & Kidd's expertise in devising training techniques and in reaching foreign markets.

On factory floors throughout the emerging industrial world, the journeyman teacher is increasingly apt to be a demonstrator in 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's assessment of that achievement is simple and proud. "We've pretty well cornered the market," he says.

John Leighton and Keith Kidd, who formed their present business partnership in 1971, came from strikingly similar backgrounds. Both had graduated as



President John Leighton (centre) points to diagram of Mississauga's electrical distribution system as training consultant Mitch Anderson (right) takes notes.

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?"

His concern was vividly borne out by a visit to a power plant in India in the early '70s — about 10 years after he had first gone there, as a consultant in the initial stages of operation. "It was a disgrace," he recalls.

### 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 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 U.S. The firm's next major venture was in the familiar field of electric utility operation. The breakthrough order came from New Mexico.

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.

It was company policy, from the outset, to engage the services of specialists whenever they were needed. But at the same time staff members were always encouraged to try their hand at different tasks. Now, artists double as camera operators, engineers as scriptwriters. Leighton rates the sales manager, Dave Crawford, a "first-class director".

### 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 firefighting 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.

But the company had not abandoned its