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# THE OTHER HIRE

It's one thing to be an expert in renting out equipment - but in a market with labour and skill shortages, it's also vital to know how to hire the right people.

Talk to almost anyone in the lifting equipment business across Europe - manufacturers distributors, rental companies and service providers - and they all highlight how hard it is to find and retain good people. Although career opportunities in the crane and aerial work platform market are excellent the sector has never been seen as sexy or even visible to the general public, and that can make it a hard sell to anyone, but especially young people looking to choose a career.

## WINNING OVER A NEW GENERATION

Appealing to the next generation is never easy, especially when the crane or access sector is generally something they are not even aware of, even though the equipment surrounds them - if they could only see it. There are, however, methods that can be adopted. For example, Skyjack and its parent company Linamar are backers of the Skills Ontario competition. This annual event in Toronto sees school age students compete in a range of skills-focused events such as servicing heavy equipment and repairing cars.

"Supporting and celebrating youths interested in trades of all kinds is important for both highlighting our industry as an exciting option and for showing students the different paths they can take in their careers," says Skyjack's Malcolm Early. "We utilise information and statistics from trade associations and other sources, to help with our recruitment strategies. Furthermore, we also



Crane operation at My Future My Choice

make sure that our values are clear to potential employees on our social media and careers pages."

## NEVER TOO EARLY FOR NIFTYLIFT

One company that has been actively promoting the access industry to Primary and Secondary School students in the UK is Milton Keynes based Niftylift with its Nifty 4 Schools programme.

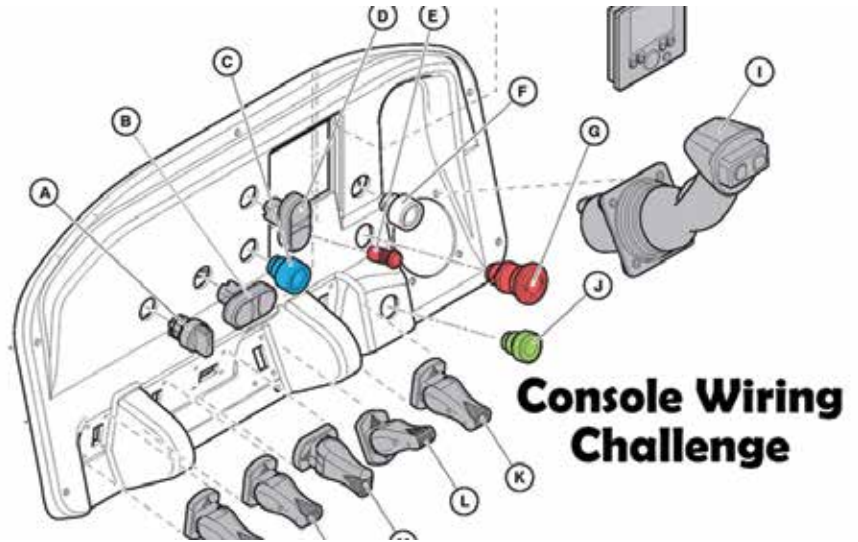
One of the many activities included is the RC Nifty Challenge Day - a team based-competition to build and code a Niftylift inspired, remote controlled



1:10 working scale model based on its HR12N boom lift for those in Year 8 and Year 9 - roughly 12 to 14 year olds.

The company also runs a 'Design a Niftylift poster' competition and offers a free to download repository of interactive educational presentations and videos covering STEAM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Maths - subjects for primary and secondary schools.

These include: 'Make a Rotating Cage', 'Make an Articulating Boom' and 'Make a Telescopic boom'. For younger children - catch them early - the company has made a fault finding video called 'Who Burnt the Toast, that schools can use to help develop fault finding skills and logical thought. It also has interactive video presentations such the 5S Challenge which highlights the Toyota principles for quality manufacturing, and a downloadable 'Console Wiring Challenge' and interactive quizzes for those who like the idea of designing or building things.



### Console Wiring Challenge

### MY FUTURE MY CHOICE

The Vertikal Press, owner of Cranes & Access, has also played a small role in the UK and Germany. In the UK Vertikal Days has played host to the organisation My Future My Choice for the past 10 years or so. Each year, it teams up with local schools with a group of young students attending the show on one day and a group of more senior students the next. While at the event they join in with workshops where teams are taught the basics of lifting and hydraulics and then form teams to design and build a piece of lifting equipment. They also have a chance to operate a real crane and finally are given a guided tour of the show with the chance to interact with stand personnel.

So far it has covered schools in Haydock, Silverstone, Peterborough, Derby/Donington and this year Newark. Liebherr has sponsored the event over the years and provided the crane with a trainer. Hopefully that has at least created a few clusters of young people who are aware of the industry and its opportunities if nothing else.



**ASSOCIATIONS AIMING TO HELP**

Recruitment and retention in the rental sector are such big issues that last year the European Rental Association - ERA - made it one of the pillars of its three year strategy. Its ensuing report made 10 recommendations to rental companies, bookended by broadening recruitment and embracing new technologies. The latter is important, along with wanting to work for companies which share its values.

In the UK the CPA's 'Stars of the Future' awards encourages excellence in those taking apprenticeships, with categories from equipment operators to lifting technicians, tower crane installers, mechanics and hire desk controllers. Vertikal's Leigh Sparrow, one of the judges said: "Over the past three years I have been hugely impressed by the number of high calibre apprentices we get to see. Choosing the eight winners from a short list of around 75 is a nightmare, with so many of them deserving. We also see some amazing mentors that help share their experience and encourage young people passing on their passion for the industry - a truly humbling experience."

**DIGITAL PLATFORMS**

In addition, new digital platforms are emerging to help with recruitment challenges. One example has been created by Elliot Hawkins of Hawks Crane Hire in the UK, who set up UpRate, a matchmaking service aimed at the lifting industry. It allows those seeking work to post their details, qualifications and experience, and for employers to post their details and requirements. Nothing new there, but it also allows them to leave reviews of previous employees. Many of the crane jobs are immediate short term such as 'Compact crane operator wanted tomorrow morning - Essex' or A66 spider crane operator wanted one week's work starting next week.' But also, there are well paid permanent positions for business development managers.

Hawkins says: "I saw the issues we were experiencing, particularly with recruiting blue collar workers and that really drove the development of this platform. We've been running now for nine months and it is continuing to grow."

**TRAINING AND QUALIFICATION CAN BE A HOOK**

Like many rental companies Hawks runs a dedicated training division with a training centre in Dartford, Kent, offering formal qualifications for crawler crane operation, crane supervisors and slinger signallers. In most of Europe and North America gaining such formal qualifications is expensive, putting off potential candidates from acquiring them, especially as some courses can take a week or two or even longer, adding loss of earnings to the cost of the course. The challenge for rental companies is that if you offer to cover the costs of obtaining the qualification for new recruits, you cannot always be sure how well they will do, although manufacturers of crane and lift simulators suggest that they can be used to weed out those with little to no natural aptitude for crane or equipment operation. Many companies offer training and support the gaining of the relevant qualifications on the understanding that the recruits will remain with the business for



Hawks Crane Hire in the UK set up UpRate - a matchmaking service aimed at the lifting industry



Stars of the Future winners



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## RECRUITMENT

a minimum period or pay a portion of the training cost should they leave before the agreed time.

### CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

"Gen Z and even younger generations are much more mobile based," says Hawkins, "so offering them a quick solution to finding a job using their phones can only be a good thing. It also makes it easy for young people to understand the earnings potential that our sector offers, and how quickly they can be making good money."

### SIMULATOR CITY

To outsiders, lifting equipment can look quite traditional, but in fact it is right at the leading edge of simulator training tools.

CM Labs was one of the first simulator manufacturers to get involved in the powered access market while also offering a range of crane simulators. CM's Alan Limoges says: "There is a lot of excitement with younger generations when a simulator is in the room. Some of our clients are bringing our portable Edge Plus simulators to career fairs or taking them on the road, they attract a lot of attention and make for a great conversation starter."

"When young people who are deciding on a career path see it, it piques their interest given that screens and joystick controls are something they have always known and are familiar with. They take very naturally to simulation and virtual training. It's amazing too, since they get the chance to feel what it's like to operate heavy equipment in a perfectly safe environment. I've seen it happen where high school students will try the simulator and say, 'Wow, I never thought I'd

enjoy this so much'. It gives them the opportunity to see the line of work in a new light and to envision themselves working as an operator."

However, several simulator manufacturers that focus on their use for screening candidates for training courses also state that while the younger generation take to the controls like a 'duck to water' older candidates start slower, clearly not initially adapting to the machines like the younger candidates. However they begin to match and even overtake the youngsters over an hour or two, particularly if they already have previous experience of operating equipment.

The National Construction Training Centre in Mount Lucas, Ireland has, like most of us, found that awareness of the industry is the biggest challenge to recruiting younger people. In an attempt to correct this it has moved to more simulator training and says it has begun to see enrolment grow as a result.

Manager John Kelly said: "There is a new pool

out there that doesn't come from a construction or agricultural background. If you ask a 17 or 18 year old to jump on a real machine and drive it, they'd be terrified. But with a simulator, they know they can't do any damage or make a show of themselves. Simulators are creating a new pathway to construction."

Of course, for many businesses recruiting requires engagement with the local community. "We have to educate students, teachers and parents about the types of careers available in the sector," said Limoges. The Missouri Public Utility Alliance, which runs CM Labs machines, has held a free 'bootcamp' for high school graduates. The curriculum included safety training, practical skills training, and the chance to network with potential employers. For the practical training portion, participants were given hands-on and simulated exercises. "It was inspiring to see the next generation getting involved in the construction industry," he said. ■

CM Labs Simulation Installation at Mount Lucas, Ireland



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