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All instructors should make their training as realistic as possible so that it transfers to real life effectively when the situation demands an armed response.

In law enforcement communities around the world, we know that *realistic* training is key to giving students the experience necessary to prevail in stressful situations.

Realistic training is provided in many different ways, including conducting force on force scenarios using different training equipment like marking cartridges and RedMan protective gear.

This training is good and helpful, but what can we do when we conduct *live fire* training? We use a variety of different types of realistic targets.

A Wide Range of Targets

The following is some of our ideas on the use of a *variety of targets* in creating a *building block approach* to realistic training during live fire exercises.

Traditional paper targets: The first targets which most people use are paper targets, ranging from bull's-eye to B-21 silhouettes. A major drawback with these targets is that some instructors use them exclusively and they don't advance students to the next series or types of targets.

New realistic paper targets: As an example, here at Team One Network, we have designed a paper target which can be used in many ways.

- The target (which is used as the lead image above) features the use of a **color picture** of a subject with a gun, rather than a silhouette, drawing or cartoon. On this realistic target, the subject is wearing different colored clothing and those colors will affect the eye under different lighting conditions. The use of a color photograph – rather than a silhouette, drawing or cartoon – greatly improves the realism of the target.

- In addition, the use of a photo of a subject allows the instructor to place **overlays** of different threats or weapons on the target with very realistic results.

- The **background of this target** consists of different shades of gray, eliminating the silhouette effect.

- Along the outer edge of the target, there are **different shapes** in different colors which can be used to make decisions and to engage multiple targets. Having all of these different areas provides the opportunity for many different drills and saves time and targets by utilizing more of the target.

- Ghosted in the target is a **marked incapacitation zone** which is located in the upper chest, throat and face area. We have purposely *narrowed* this area – making it much smaller than usual – so that the students will concentrate on making their shots count. Note that most firearms instructors quote Mel Gibson's character in the movie, *The Patriot*. He said, "Aim small, miss small; aim big miss big," which means that, if you aim at a *man* and miss, you could miss him entirely, but if you aim at a *button* (or a small target) and miss small, you'll still hit him. (Gibson learned that advice from the technical advisor on the movie and he liked it so much that he included it in the script.)

Paper cutout targets: Paper cutouts add a little more realism and depth to the target. By placing the paper target on a ridged background – like a piece of cardboard, foam or wood – and then cutting the background off allows the instructor to place the targets in different positions. The cutout also allows the target to blend in with the background of the shoot house instead of having the easily detected paper rectangle which surrounds the bull's-eye or silhouette.

Targets on large cardboard tubes: We have had very good success with placing paper targets on cardboard tubes. This simple device gives the target some dimension and narrows it because the image gets wrapped around the tube. Students may be required to change their location to identify the threat. The cardboard tube can also be enhanced by cutting the background of the target as mentioned earlier.

Props

Adding 3-D props to any of the target options above will provide different views and angles which will develop better decision-making by the students. (*Note: When using 3-D props, always be sure to use props which will not create an unsafe situation because of deflection.*) Here are some examples of plastic or rubber props which we use: guns, knives, crowbars, pipes, broken and nonbroken bottles, flashlights and boxes. Target manufacturers also have a wide variety of props available.

Total 3-D targets: We have discussed 3-D props, but the next step is **total 3-D**, using 3-D targets which are available in plastic or foam. These targets also come in different weights – from a plastic shell which is lightweight and easily moved to a full-sized, solid plastic mannequin. Three-dimensional targets are also available in male and female shapes and in animal versions. These targets can be placed at different angles so the shooter is not always looking at the target straight on. Three-dimensional targets can have a wide variety of different looks by adding different apparel to them such as hats, shirts, glasses, hoods and wigs. These total 3-D targets vastly improve the decision-making and realism in live fire, shoot house training.

Reactive

Reactive targets: To enforce accuracy and add stress, reactive targets – those providing quick feedback – do the trick. There are many ways to get the effect of reactive targets.

- When conducting range training, **metal targets** are an excellent choice for getting instantaneous feedback. Metal targets are available so that they can fall over, fall down or just make noise.

- Utilizing **targets which break** is another option. Some of the ways which we have used breakable targets include:

1. Not only engaging **clay targets** in the traditional way for shotgun shooting, but adding additional throwers to create stress and multiple target situations.

2. **Gluing or taping** clay targets to cardboard targets down-range (double-sided tape works best).

3. We have also used helium filled **balloons** in different colors tied to a string which creates movement. Having *multiple* balloons creates a decision-making scenario with some colors indicating innocent targets. Also, balloons can be used *inside* cardboard boxes or *inside* plastic 3-D shells, and they can have props and apparel placed on them. The target will react/fall when the balloon is broken. This does not allow the shooter to actually see the balloon, but he (or she) has to engage the target until it falls.

4. One of the recent additions to our list of reactive target options is a **3-D plastic shell** which has an out of service ballistic

vest taped to the chest and a trauma plate installed in the head. Apparel such as shirts, pants, glasses and a hat are added, and then this target is placed on a wooden two-by-four which is attached to a Pepper Popper base. When the target is struck with a bullet in the ballistic panels, the energy of the bullet knocks over the target. This target can also be used for active countermeasures and struck with a knee or elbow when deadly force is not required.

Moving

Moving, robotic and shoot back targets: These recently developed targets are more expensive and a little complicated, but they do the job when trying to make the live fire training more realistic. Moving targets can be set up to move toward, away or parallel to the shooter. They can be controlled to move at different speeds between shoot and no shoot targets and cover. This creates different angles, distance and engagement opportunities. Robotic targets have several features or use options – controlled movement, multiple targets and multiple split second features – to assist in making decisions. The robotic platform can be used with most of the aforementioned targets. Instructors may want an assistant instructor to control the target. Shoot back targets are equipped with a device which shoots a projectile back at the trainee shooter. These projectiles are generally made of plastic, foam rubber, or balls filled with paint or water. These targets induce stress to the trainee being hit with the projectiles; this teaches proper use of cover and demonstrates real reaction time issues of accurately engaging threats. If you have the budget and the logistic capability, robotic and shoot back targets should be in your training arsenal.

Summary

In this article, we have given you some ideas on how to improve your live fire training by incorporating a variety of target options which provide a pathway to improve the skills of your students. By presenting these unique target options, we are providing different experiences to officers participating in the live fire training. Our ultimate objective, of course, is to save the lives of our officers and innocent civilians. For us, that is the first and *only* purpose for realistic, useful training. 

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