

Helping Small Business Owners Achieve the American Dream

When Ben Ziglin recently completed a sign for an old classmate's new restaurant, it almost moved the friend to tears.

"He was just very giddy to see the real thing come to life," said Ziglin, president of Ziglin Signs in Washington, Mo. "You can look at renderings and drawings, but when your name is on the building, it means a lot."

It's something that sign and graphics professionals experience every time they work on signs for a business. The installation is the culmination of a dream of starting a new business. Or it may be the symbol of an expansion or rebranding. Regardless, it equates "new" and for a small business owner and often marks a giant step forward.

Kip Greer, owner of Signarama in Durham, N.C., understands. As a lifelong entrepreneur himself—including owning a restaurant at one point—the sign and graphics business offers one advantage that many other industries do not: "You get the benefit of seeing people's reactions," he said. "And often those are reactions that you wouldn't think would exist. When you make a sign for somebody going into business, they're passionate. When they see the sign go up, they're excited. I get excited when that occurs."

Other longtime sign and graphics professionals may not even notice it anymore. But those in the industry have the opportunity to help others succeed while finding success themselves.

"I've worked for somebody else for two years out of my 40 years of working," Greer said. "I just prefer to work for myself more because I reap the full benefit of my efforts. To be able to set your own agenda and get your own things done is the most important thing."

Perhaps because so many sign company owners understand exactly where their customers are, long-term relationships are the result. Sign companies become trusted partners with small business owners who outsource much of their branding and visual communications.

"There are a tremendous amount of relationships made in this industry off a sign," Ziglin said. "For me, some of those relationships have lasted 10-plus years."



STATS • FACTS

According to IHL Group, retail stores will spend 3.9 percent more on in-store technology with digital signage getting the lion's share (at 29 percent).

It means that business owners have somewhere to turn when their businesses struggle, too. Ziglin recounts another project where all of the pieces were in place for success. A bar along the riverfront should have been competitive with the two other restaurants that surrounded it. But customers were walking right by.

“They came to us two months ago because business hasn’t been what they expected,” Ziglin said. “I said, ‘I’ve been doing this for 18 years, so don’t take this the wrong way. It’s important to have a sign on the front of your building that represents who you are.’”

The logos—and there were multiple—employed different fonts. The restaurant lacked a theme and a brand. After a couple of weeks of working with Ziglin, the restaurant owners had a new look: exposed neon incorporating driftwood from the river.



“They’re thrilled,” Ziglin said. “You’ve got to get people in the door. What you do with them after that is up to you. We know quality, effective signage is an expense, but we know that this will change their business. I’m excited to see the results of it.”

While that particular restaurant is still in the process of finding its way thanks to the new signage, there are other stories of how the sign and graphics industry transforms lives of its customers.

Rick Scrimger, president, Roland DGA Corp., likes to talk about the number 195,258. “That’s the number of products we’ve sold since the late 1980s.” Every one of those products represents a company that has been able to better serve its customers, thanks to the new equipment.

But Scrimger remembers one in particular. In his earliest days at Roland, he was talking to a man at a tradeshow. The man detailed how he had bought a cutter for his pre-teen son. The young entrepreneur had started making stickers and selling them to friends. Within a few years, he had added on banners and posters for high school needs. “The father told me, ‘Now his college education is paid for,’” Scrimger said. “One of those products went to this kid and it changed his life. We help people get into business. It’s a strong motivator for me.”

But there is one thing he’d like to know: “I wish I knew who the son was, and if he’s running a sign shop,” Scrimger said.

If he is, he—like many others—is no doubt helping people change their lives in the same way his has been changed. | 



ISA SIGN EXPO 2016

*The Inspiration
Your Company Needs*

Sign and graphics company customers turn to sign professionals to find a needed spark as they work to achieve their dreams of business ownership. In many cases, as small business owners themselves, sign professionals know exactly how they feel.

So where do sign and graphics companies turn for that needed spark? ISA International Sign Expo brings together thousands of sign and graphics professionals to generate ideas, learn about new products and address business challenges.

ISA International Sign Expo 2016 will be held April 20-23 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla.

In addition to the sold-out tradeshow floor and top-notch educational sessions, ISA Sign Expo 2016 will include two co-located events: Roland DGA’s Imagination tour and Signarama’s 2016 Convention.

Learn more or register at www.signexpo.org.