

## Sign Manufacturing Day: Tackling One of the Industry's Biggest Challenges



*Top left: Vantage LED brought in students who were specializing in science, technology, engineering and math classes as part of Sign Manufacturing Day. Bottom left: In 2016, more than 2,500 students visited sign, graphics and visual communications companies, including Ramsay Signs. Main: Sen. Chris Murphy toured Lauretano Sign Group during Sign Manufacturing Day in 2016.*

It wasn't that long ago that, whenever Ivan Perez had a job opening, he had 300-400 applications to wade through. Then, the economy improved and the challenges finding workers intensified.

"Now, it's not necessarily the pool that it used to be," said Ivan, Vantage LED's director of resource development.

That's a story that is no doubt familiar in many sign, graphics and visual communications companies. It is an issue that has been growing as baby boomers retire. When the federal unemployment rate dropped below 5 percent, it only intensified.

Yaron Lew, Lauretano Sign Group's Chief Operating Officer, also has seen hiring to be "a very big challenge in some areas. Painters, welders, fabricators and installers are very hard to find. It's a little bit easier in shipping/receiving, channel letters production, CNC operations and in the office. Designers and estimators are very hard to find, while sales and project management is somewhat easier."

Both Lauretano and Vantage LED have tackled the problem head on by participating in Sign Manufacturing Day. The annual event, sponsored by ISA in conjunction with the National Association of Manufacturers, brings in students to learn more about careers in the sign, graphics and visual communications industry.

### STATS • FACTS

2 million manufacturing jobs are expected to go unfilled by 2025, according to Deloitte. 350,000 manufacturing jobs

# TIPS For Success!

## A Successful Hire

Lauretano has been a participant since the beginning and has already hired one welder who first connected with the company during Sign Manufacturing Day.

Yaron realizes that one successful hire marks the beginning of a relationship that can continue to pay off as the happy employee introduces friends and former classmates to the career opportunities at Lauretano. It also serves as a bridge to the school and its instructors.

“We told him to bring in friends and spread the word that we are hiring. We hope that he will,” Yaron said. Even on those rare occasions when there aren’t positions open, continuing to raise the visibility of Lauretano is important. “You may not need somebody right now, but you will in the future,” Yaron said. “The more we are known and recognized, the easier it will be.”

## Engaged Employees

Vantage LED participated for the first time in 2016 and found the event created a perfect opportunity to work with the local community of Ontario, Calif. “The city said, ‘We have a lot of skilled labor looking for these types of jobs.’ We thought it was a good opportunity to show that we’re a full-blown manufacturer that also does software development, sales and technical support. Bringing people in to see what we do can help them see the career opportunities here.”

The city got on board, sending out information about Sign Manufacturing Day to a variety of area schools. “We had busloads brought in,” Ivan said. “Schools want to encourage their kids to strive for something.”

Vantage LED runs an alternate work schedule and Friday is typically a day off. But the company paid overtime to support the event. Sales reps and managers served as tour guides, taking small groups to stations to show them what each specialized job requires. “They could get a little taste of what we do and the opportunities that are out there.”

While some companies have used Sign Manufacturing Day specifically to reach trade schools, Vantage also started working on a pipeline for engineers, bringing in middle school students who specialized in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

The day has created important connections with trade schools, too. “Now, whenever I need somebody, I can reach out to see if they have a student or alumni looking for work.”

Plans are underway for this year’s event, with Vantage hoping to start on the marketing earlier. “We’d like to double or triple the attendance,” Ivan said.

Participating in the event also provides a great opportunity to showcase the strength of manufacturing. “Everybody has this perception that those jobs have gone overseas or are lost to automation. But there are still plenty of companies that need skilled labor, people who have a passion and drive to create things and make things work. These types of events show this to the world and especially to the younger community. These are things that still exist.” | 

Yaron Lew of Lauretano Sign Group offers the following advice for companies considering whether to participate in Manufacturing Day and how to gain the most benefits:

- Showcase a broad range of products and introduce as many aspects of the trade as possible. “Some of the attendees might be interested in graphic design while others will be more interested in the manufacturing opportunities. The more products you show them and the more skills you showcase, the more likely you are to strike a nerve with someone. You have to look at your facility through the eyes of a young student just graduating high school or technical school. What will interest the younger generation? We work in this industry every day, so we’re not thinking about it this way.”
- Reach out to a broad range of schools. “Think beyond the technical schools to include design schools and high schools. Try to have as many groups come through and extend the day as long as you need to, to accommodate them.”
- Always invite the press and political leaders at the local, state and federal levels. “We always make sure that we have high-level politicians come in and speak to our employees and the guests. That lends a lot of credibility to the day, both with those attending and with shop employees. We also make sure that we invite the press and get an article in the newspaper or a news story on TV after the day. My advice is to tell the politicians that you’re running an event that supports and promotes manufacturing in America. This will always make them flock to your shop.”

Sign Manufacturing Day will be October 6, 2017. To learn more about participating, contact [workforce@signs.org](mailto:workforce@signs.org)

## STATS • FACTS

went unfilled in June, according to the Manufacturing Institute.