Industry TRENDS

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Having Challenges Finding Workers? Learn from the Sign Industry Pros

It's fairly obvious that you'd seek out expert advice when looking to solve any other problem. So why not enlist help in finding and keeping workers? It is one of the most pervasive problems facing sign, graphics and visual communications companies today.

In fact, time and time again, company leaders peg this as the biggest workforce issue they have. In ISA's 2018 *Pulse* survey, 70 percent of company leaders said they were having trouble finding workers. That is about the same number who said they intended to hire.

Clearly, the jobs are there, but the workers are not always there to fill them. Training and retraining are imperative—but difficult for sign companies to develop on their own.

ISA's online training platform helps solve this issue, bringing dozens of courses in a variety of areas. Those who demonstrate proficiency in individual areas earn an ISA Digital Badge. Those who complete 70 percent of the subject area badges are identified as a Sign Industry Professional.

Some of the first recipients of the Sign Industry Professional designation and hiring managers showcase how to use the training to solve the issue of finding and keeping workers.

Tip 1: Don't Be Afraid to Look Outside the Industry.

Finding workers with previous sign, graphics and visual communications industry experience isn't easy. But many skills translate.

David Civitarese, project manager for Poyant, and Stephanie Wilkins, project manager for Image National Signs, were among the first to receive the Sign Industry Professional designation. Both came to the industry from other fields.
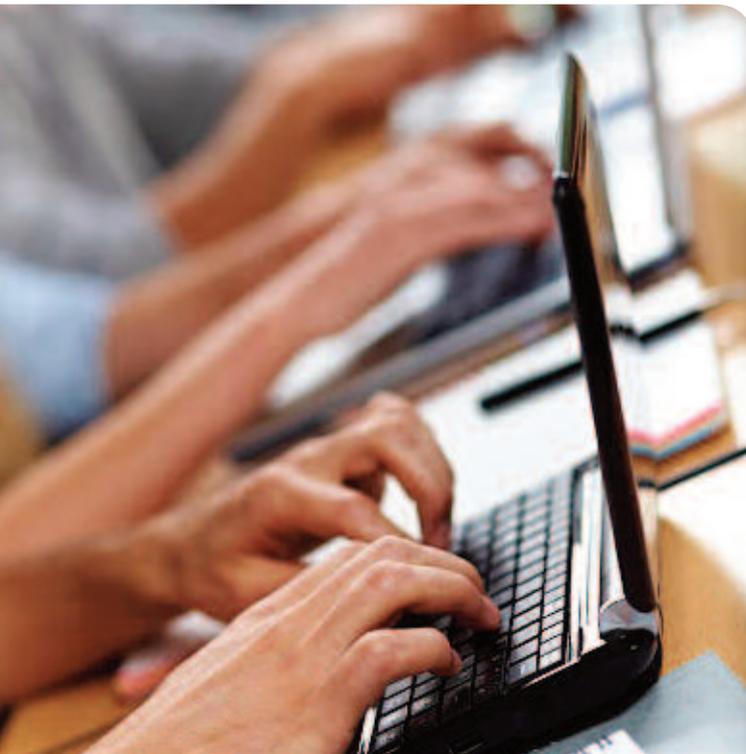
ISA's Online TRAINING

ISA's Digital Badge program and Sign Industry Professional designation provide on-demand training for new and existing employees. Company packages are available, with flat rates to educate all employees. Managers can see their employees' progress in the courses. Some courses are approved for continuing education units (CEUs) by the International Codes Council. **Learn more at signs.org/online.**

ISA INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION

"I found the ISA 'Knowledge Direct' website highly informative and easy to navigate," Civitarese said. "While I have a background in program management, my experience has been in health and human services. However, the ISA training modules have complemented my in-house training and helped my transition immensely."

Wilkins came to the sign, graphics and visual communications industry from construction. "This has been great for bringing myself up to speed to handle anything that comes my way," she said.

Evan Wollak, EVP program management at Icon, also has used the ISA training to help onboard new employees, particularly those new to the industry.

"We have people coming to Icon who are from adjacent industries, and some who are brand new," Wollak said. "The sign material that ISA offers is particularly useful for those who haven't worked in our industry. It gives them a perspective on things they haven't seen before. They may be familiar with a construction site, but have never paid attention to a sign being installed before."

Anything to expand the pool of potential hires is vital these days, he said. "The labor market is tight. People have options and there is competition to find qualified candidates, so it's hard all the way around."

Image National also has focused on bringing in those from outside the industry. "We realized we needed training as we hire people on," said Jim Reese, Image National's senior manager of product development. "We use it to help them get a good understanding of what the sign industry is, and who we represent. This gives people new to the industry a lot of knowledge that would take several years to gain. They're able to get it in a much shorter time period."

Tip 2: Continue to Invest in Existing Employees.

Keeping an existing worker engaged prevents the need to hire a replacement. A study by the Society for Human Resources Management says it costs a company six to nine months' salary to replace a salaried worker. Another, by the Center for American Progress, says it costs 16 percent of an annual salary for those jobs earning under $30,000, and 20 percent for mid-range jobs.

Investing in current employees has been proven to lead to better retention. The payoff extends beyond that practical application, Reese discovered.

"We have found that ISA's Digital Badge program works well for our seasoned employees, too. Everyone gets busy and gets in their silos. We found that this offers information about what other departments do so that they can develop empathy and learn how to communicate better."

ISA International Sign Expo 2019

Take advantage of in-person training designed to solve the most pressing issues and opportunities in the sign, graphics and visual communications industry. Pre-conference workshops are April 23, with education and tradeshow April 24-26 at Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas. Learn more at **www.signexpo.org/education.**

FIND **NEW** WORKERS

ISA Sign Manufacturing Day, typically held the first Friday in October, is a great way to meet high school, community and technical school students— many of whom are preparing to enter the workforce. Past participants suggest getting an early start, before the current school year is out. To learn more, contact workforce@signs.org.

Tip 3: See Who is Willing to Learn New Things and Ready for a Change.

Dave Jantz, another recent Sign Industry Professional designee, has been in the industry for 13 years. Earning the Sign Industry Professional designation allowed him to learn more about what other departments at his company do. It also has helped him see where his career might take him next.

"I got an idea of what I would be facing should I be moved into a different position. I used to be apprehensive about trying something new. These classes gave me an understanding that you do not have to be scared."

Ongoing learning does not have to be scary, either—especially when seasoned pros are there to offer advice.