

Industry AUGUST 2020 TRENDS



THE INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION

3 Important Lessons We've Learned

The COVID-19 pandemic certainly threw a wrench into any plans for 2020. Companies were forced to shut down, or perhaps lay off parts of their staff. End user markets were challenged, too.

While it may be easy to think about what was *lost* during the pandemic shutdowns, it also is worth looking at what was gained. And in terms of the sign, graphics and visual communications industry, the COVID-19 impact brought quite an education.

Here are a few key lessons:

1

As an industry, we are essential.

Sign, graphics and visual communications companies were able to keep working after the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency deemed those in the industry to be critical infrastructure, a vital designation that will pay off for years to come.

In the short term, it meant companies were able to immediately return to work. "We called back all our workers the day we saw the ISA email about the 'critical infrastructure,'" said Tabitha Bowen of All-Rite Sign in Illinois.

This designation was important for a couple of reasons: many states and municipalities adopted the CISA list outright, and in future national emergencies, our industry may automatically be able to continue working since we're on the list.

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2 We are in this together.

When the pandemic hit and closures started happening, sign, graphics and visual communications companies struggled to stay afloat—and to absorb the often-confusing deluge of information that was coming at them from all sides. ISA created the ISA Business Continuity Resource Center (signs.org/bcrc), which aggregated all of the material—all intended to keep sign and graphics companies operating—in one place.

Companies were able to learn about federal aid programs and requirements from regulatory agencies like OSHA, IRS and the CDC, and get expert advice on the myriad of human resources and health and safety issues.

The information had use beyond ISA members, of course, and manufacturers and suppliers stepped up to share it more broadly. Deborah Weber of Avery Dennison had her sales reps sending out the link “and sharing with as many sign shops as possible. During this difficult time, everyone is struggling with finding ways to help or make a difference.”

3 End user markets present opportunities.

For as challenging as the season was to keep sign, graphics and visual communications companies afloat, some of our key end user groups are grappling even more. Their very survival may be at risk. Restaurants may not reopen. Hotels and lodging may be challenged for years. Retailers are undergoing dramatic changes.

Yet there are opportunities within each of those industries—if sign companies know where to look. That idea has launched a new ISA initiative: Sector Secrets. Throughout the summer, ISA has been offering a series of webinars designed to dive deeply into the economic issues facing our end users in restaurants and grocery, hotel and lodging, and retail among others.

This insight—part of ongoing BCRC—will help companies better serve their end users and understand where opportunities exist to grow their own businesses.

Perhaps nobody wanted to learn these lessons—at least not in this way. But realizing the lessons learned may pay off as the industry and economy begin to recover and for the long run.



- Sign companies sought help for challenges with receiving essential business designations while others asked ISA for ongoing sign code help.
- Webinars, attended by hundreds of planners, helped them understand the importance of temporary sign regulations and sign permitting, both through the lens of the pandemic.
- Between March 1 and June 20, more than 2,500 sign, graphics and visual communications professionals gained critical insight in topics like through 22 webinars.
- Sign, graphics and visual communications companies swung into action, converting production into much-needed personal protective equipment, temporary signage and other vital products.