

Industry JANUARY 2020 TRENDS



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THE INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION

ISA Plays a Critical Role in the Industry

A Message from the ISA Chairman

I realize that there are two types of people who devote their lives to the sign, graphics and visual communications industry: those who grew up in it, whose families laid the roots of our modern industry; and those who fell into an industry that they knew little about.

I am in that latter category. I did my share of sign making as a kid (primarily to the chagrin of my parents, neighbors, and communities) but my semi-pro story starts in college when a friend was selling advertisements for the school newspaper but didn't know how to create the ads after closing the sale. I stepped in to help and eventually found my way to a career in graphics, designing for clients in several industries.

I moved over to the manufacturing side after getting a call from Encad about an opening. Again, I knew very little about digital printing, but it proved yet another important step in my career.

Time passed, and I found myself in an industry that I loved. Working most of my career on the equipment manufacturer side, I started to see how that aligned with my passion of identifying pain points, solving problems, and filling gaps. I'm a solid believer in the "Name, Frame, Claim" principle meaning, when we take the time to dig in and name a problem, then put in the effort to frame a solution, we're destined to claim a win.

That's why I'm excited to take on the role of ISA chairman, especially now. If you think about the sign, graphics and visual communications industry as a wheel, there are all sorts of interesting features, complex designs and structural variations. But when you get down to it, the one fairly constant and essential element of every wheel is the hub. Without a hub, there is no wheel. ISA is the hub that connects the complex elements that make up our industry.

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ISA, I wouldn't know who the sign producers are, who the brand owners are, or how to develop a product or solution that would help them. And they might not know that I have solutions for them. We can all keep evolving and growing thanks in no small part to the networking that occurs through ISA, which provides suppliers the opportunity to hear from sign producers, and the Expo providing the ideal platform to introduce emerging technologies.

One of those emerging technologies is additive manufacturing, which will bring design and production efficiencies to signs that traditionally have been created by either hand sculpting or CNC.

Other coming changes I see are the increased role of textiles in signage, transformation of ADA signage (through digital print and additive manufacturing) and thermoforming technologies. ISA is leading the way, not only by offering networking opportunities but also by helping designers understand what's possible now—and how emerging technologies are catalyzing imagination.

I believe all these types of technologies will change the way the sign, graphics and visual communications industry looks in the next five years.

ISA has kept the industry up to date on these changes, too. A series of Strategic Insights white papers (www.signs.org/insights) released last year explored topics like 3D printing, nanomaterials, extended reality and 5G. ISA International Sign Expo remains the best place to further research these technologies—and to hear from companies that can help be on the leading edge of innovation.

Workforce is another gap, but ISA has stepped in with training, job boards and the ISA digital badge, allowing our employees to demonstrate proficiency in areas of importance to the industry. One of those programs reminds me of who I was when I came into the industry. Young people don't always know that we're there. At Mimaki, for us to be viable and evolve, we must attract new talent. I would assume that many of you are in the same situation. It is daunting to attract people into an industry they know very little about.

Interestingly enough, adopting the latest technology can help us appeal to those new workers. When Mimaki participated in ISA Sign Manufacturing Day in 2019—bringing students to tour our facilities and learn more about the industry—some 90 students took part. Although they thought digital printing was cool, once they saw what we were doing with 3D, they were enthralled. It was something they could see themselves doing every day.

Consider this another spoke in the way ISA solves the biggest issues facing our industry—and helps us tell the stories of who we are, what we do and how we're innovating.

While I come to the industry through print, I do realize that the work that we do every day—whether in neon, architectural, digital display as well as print—helps build strong economies. People don't always want to go into manufacturing. But without a strong manufacturing sector, we don't have a strong economy. More so than just about any other type of manufacturing, sign, graphics and visual communications is a vast career field, one which offers any number of specialties.

I could talk more about how ISA works on advocacy issues, ensuring that our best sign, graphics and visual communications solutions can be produced. I could mention more about training and networking. I could discuss ISA's work with the National Association of Manufacturers to solve another important issue for companies: health insurance. All of those are detailed on the signs.org website, if you need more information.

The best place to see all of this in action is at ISA International Sign Expo 2020. It's April 2-4 with a pre-conference day on April 1 in Orlando, Fla. You can learn more or register at www.signexpo.org. It will be an exciting time to see the latest technology that will be fundamental for growing your business, either by saving costs or implementing efficiencies.

Whether your family's roots run deep in the industry or you've simply found your way here, ISA International Sign Expo 2020 will be a celebration of the great work produced in the industry, an exploration of the new opportunities ahead, and a connection to others who share your same joys and challenges around the world. I hope to see you there!



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