

Industry JULY 2019 TRENDS



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5 Myths About Sign Manufacturing Day

ISA Sign Manufacturing Day is solving the very real challenge of finding and recruiting the next generation of workers. Marking its seventh year in 2019, the event brings high school and technical school students to tour ISA member company facilities.

Companies who participate say they have found workers—and built ongoing relationships with local schools.

Maybe you've considered participating—but aren't sure whether it's worth the effort? Some past participants share their stories, which show the impact a day can make.

It's one day; how big of an impact can it make?

Consider Carl Weger at Sleek Advertising Ltd. Six years ago, Sleek had six employees. Now, it is at 34—something Carl attributes largely to the relationship developed with the local polytechnic school through ISA's Sign Manufacturing Day.

"It's been facilitating our growth," he said. "Students get trained in all aspects, so I have some who come in focused on pre-production, such as customer service and graphic designers. Others go on to printer operations. It's a good mix."

And speaking of that "one day." While it is typically held the first Friday in October, it doesn't have to. Some participants have conflict with fall breaks or busy work seasons. Participating companies can access ISA Sign Manufacturing Day resources no matter what day—or days—they choose to hold the event.

It's a hassle for my employees.

That may come down to how the event is presented. David Goodson of Impact Signs, Awnings, Wraps, in Sedalia, Mo., and Tracey Crews-Hammond of Hilton Displays in Greenville, S.C., both say involving employees in planning the event and in presenting to students pays off.

“It’s brought a lot of pride to our workplace,” Goodson said. “They’re excited that somebody cares about what they do, and that they might want to pursue a similar career.”

Goodson notes that his employees and staff have learned more about the sign, graphics and visual communications industry by participating. “The material that ISA provides has helped us all learn more about our industry,” he said.

It disrupts normal operations.

Weger says it doesn’t have to; he doesn’t close down his shop for Sign Manufacturing Day. In fact, there are benefits to having students explore a shop while it’s operating, providing more insight into what happens there. “I do a walkaround tour and point to different aspects of the production environment. If you can take a customer through your shop, you should be able to take the students.”

Both Hilton Displays and Impact Signs, Awnings & Wraps say they take safety precautions. Impact issues safety glasses to students while Hilton asks the students to bring their own.

Schools aren’t receptive.

All three agreed that an initial email may go unanswered. But a phone call can pay off. So too might a connection from a former employee.

“I was new to the industry when we began to recruit heavily,” Crews-Hammond said. “I had an employee who came to me and gave me his former welding instructor’s name and information. That’s where it began: one phone call, one name.”

After the initial groundwork was laid, all three companies have seen the relationship develop. Sleek donated equipment so that the poly-technic students can train on the exact same equipment they would be hired to work on and Weger serves on the curriculum committee.



Learn More

ISA has developed a number of resources to help make the most of ISA Sign Manufacturing Day. See tips on how to create a great day, videos to showcase the industry and other tools at **www.signs.org/mfgday**.

GOT QUESTIONS?

Email **workforce@signs.org**.

Crews-Hammond said the local technical school instructors have recommended former students for jobs. “They know what we do here and the level of trust I have with their recommendations helps,” she said.

At Impact, “tours have become the norm,” Goodson said. “We probably offer one a month from the local trade schools. We’ve become a destination as word’s gotten out.”

Nobody hires off Sign Manufacturing Day.

Companies are hiring as a direct result of participating in Sign Manufacturing Day and connecting with local schools. Hilton, Impact, Sleek have not only hired students they met through this program once, but multiple times.

Impact has hired its fourth student recently while Hilton has added six. Other participants have reported that students ask about job-shadowing, internships and work-based learning.

One final thought:

It’s important to remember that Hilton (2017), Impact (2015) and Sleek (2013) all have several years behind them. They started small and have continued to grow.

Goodson advises take the time to “do it right. It’s better to start someplace.” He also advises a dry run before students show up. Consider where the bus will park and how the students will flow into the building.

And don’t despair small beginnings, Crews-Hammond said. “My motto was I wanted quality, to make the impact.” She also suggests making time for employees to interact with students. Employees who are engaged and excited about their careers can be the best advocates.