

Industry **NOVEMBER 2020** TRENDS



THE INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION

Taking Advantage of Opportunity

When the world slowed down in early March, it presented quite an opportunity for companies to invest in their employees—and gain a strategic advantage for the future.

Harold Pedley, president and owner of Sign Engineering LLC in Puerto Rico, is accustomed to getting things done in-house, including training for his 102 employees.

When COVID-19 struck, Puerto Rico was one of the first and strictest governments in the US to impose lockdown orders. They wanted to keep their employees “productive,” so they purchased a company package of ISA’s online learning.

“We started off thinking we were only going to do it for a few middle management level employees,” Pedley said. “Then we ended up with about 23 employees in the program from field supervisors to our human resources manager and VP of operations.”

They are hoping to expand it to even more employees in the future. They developed a “core curriculum” of approximately 20 of the 80 courses covering a broad variety of topics that each Sign Engineering employee is required to complete. After they complete the core, they then begin to specialize in their area of expertise. After completing their specialty, they are then free to take as many courses as they would like in whatever fields they choose.

“The core curriculum helps each department better understand how the company should be operating as a whole,” Pedley said. “It’s also creates a better dynamic between employees since they better understand each other’s job.”





To help with social distancing, the staff is rotating days in the office. As things return to normal, the plan is to have regular weekly roundtable discussions about each course so they can share what they're learning. Already, though, he has found dramatic improvement in developing a more common language of communication and an increased understanding of the overall process of the company.

"The ISA program gives us the ability to provide a more formal education that as a small company we are not easily able to create on our own. It also gives the ability to better cross train/expose employees into other areas of the company that they are not normally directly exposed to. People perform their jobs better when they understand the other roles in the company that they interreact with. Exposing operations people with account management and vice versa is huge. It is much easier to relate with people when you've walked in their shoes a little bit."

Learning Curve

While Sign Engineering is benefiting from getting all its employees on the same page, Mark Medonich is better able to consult with clients as a result of the ISA training. Medonich had spent years in the restaurant business before joining Allen Industries at the end of April as an account manager. The pandemic made it difficult to travel to North Carolina for company training, he said.

The knowledge he gained pursuing the Sign Industry Professional designation had an immediate impact on his career, helping to guide his customers strategically.

"I know that price isn't a great selling point since there always will be somebody who will come in and sell it cheaper with a lower quality product. I needed to understand what provides value."

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Harold Pedley

The training provided that and so much more, he said. After he completed his first course, he noticed that he had earned an ISA Digital Badge. He found then that he could compile enough badges to earn a subject-matter Digital Badge. He started in sales and moved on to installation. Eventually, he had completed enough subject-matter Digital Badges to earn the Sign Industry Professional designation.

"With the training I was receiving, it gave me a nice overview of the industry compared to the restaurant building industry. I found the classes enjoyable."

It also provided a "nice easy crossover" for someone new to the industry, he said.

"Any person who wants to understand all aspects of the sign business or those who are new, or want to learn different areas of it, it's very easy to take. The badge system makes it easy to measure your personal growth and focus on all areas of the sign business. Understanding different areas of the sign business, I've become a more valuable employee to the company."

FROM ONE BADGE SHOWS BROAD PROFICIENCY

ISA's online learning program is akin to building blocks. Employees can choose one of 80 courses, all of which focus on an area of importance to the sign, graphics and visual communications industry.

Successful completion of that course lands a digital badge for the employee. When the employee amasses enough badges in a specific area, he or she receives a subject-area specific badge, demonstrating broad proficiency in that subject.

Those who amass 70 percent of all the subject area badges earn the Sign Industry Professional badge, which shows comprehensive learning and an understanding of the broad range of skills needed in today's sign, graphics and visual communications industry.

Learn more at
<https://www.signs.org/online-learning/digital-badge>

Companies can choose to purchase a "company package," a one-year license that allows a set number of employees access to all of the courses with the online training for a flat fee. Learn more at
<https://www.signs.org/online-learning/company-subscription-package>.