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2015 has been a strong year for many of the companies in the sign and graphics industry. It doesn’t mean that it’s been free of challenges — but the foundation for continued growth and success has been laid as we progress in the new year.

As the sign and graphics industry’s largest association, the International Sign Association (ISA) devoted its year to helping companies make the most of its opportunities. We’ve done this by improving some existing programs and growing others. We’ve also created new initiatives designed to help companies overcome their most pressing challenges.

This 2015 Progress Report highlights how ISA brought you value in 2015 through:

- Plugging into the latest products, ideas and contacts for your business at ISA International Sign Expo 2015
- Flipping the switch on new educational programs to find, keep and train qualified workers
- Shining a light on industry insights through research and white paper initiatives
- Changing the current of restrictive sign code regulations by building relationships with planners and local officials, and responding to a Supreme Court ruling affecting communities around the country

Success comes from the involvement of members like you and our partnership with ISA Affiliated Associations. None of it would be possible without you, and we are grateful!

Here’s to a strong, successful 2016.

Robert Mattatall  
2016 ISA Chairman of the Board  
President, Mattatall Signs, Ltd.

Lori Anderson  
President & CEO,  
International Sign Association
At the sign and graphics industry’s largest event, ISA International Sign Expo, sign and graphics professionals found sparks on the diverse trade show floor showcasing the latest advancements in the industry, learned valuable insights from thought leaders and made crucial connections in a variety of events.
ISA Sign Expo 2015

THE LARGEST SHOW FLOOR IN HISTORY!

213,000 square feet of NETWORKING ON THE SOLD OUT TRADE SHOW FLOOR
The equivalent of 4.5 football fields!

77 EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS WITH 41 TRADE SHOW FLOOR SESSIONS

19,000 INDUSTRY CONTACTS UNDER ONE ROOF

57% of attendees WERE COMPANY OWNERS, PRESIDENTS OR EXECUTIVE LEVEL EMPLOYEES

600 COMPANIES EXHIBITING THE LATEST TECHNOLOGIES

97% of attendees WOULD RECOMMEND ISA SIGN EXPO TO A COLLEAGUE

74% of attendees CAME TO SEE THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY

75% of attendees MADE A PURCHASE FROM AN EXHIBITOR within six months of the show

88% of exhibitors SAID ISA SIGN EXPO IS IMPORTANT TO THE SUCCESS OF THEIR BUSINESS

97 COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

Source: ISA Sign Expo 2015 Post-Show Attendee/Exhibitor Surveys; ISA Sign Expo 2015 Registration Data & Demographics

ADVANCING BUSINESS
“It was another great ISA International Sign Expo. We left the show with many new business leads and sold several pieces of equipment while on site in Las Vegas. We’re already looking forward to next year!”
MARTY FANGMAN, CET COLOR

LASTING CONNECTIONS
“The ISA Networking Reception for Custom and National Sign Companies at ISA Sign Expo is the most important hour of my year.”
LANCE COSSEY, SCOTT SERVICES
ISA Sign Expo Builds

BUSINESS

When Mandy Wisner of Southern Signs, Inc., purchased a new printer during ISA’s Sign Expo, it was like adding a new employee. “We just sit back and watch it work,” she said. It allowed Southern Signs to expand into political printing, adding another important stream of revenue by printing directly to substrates.

Southern Signs has pursued new products via trade shows in the past and considers them a great opportunity to expand business. When she and her husband purchased Southern Signs, Inc., from family members in 1999, she had little knowledge of the industry. “We saw all the equipment for vinyl cutting and printing. We ended up purchasing a printer and a plotter and started from scratch.”

ISA Sign Expo offered Mandy the opportunity to help decide among the many printer options to diversify her business. “It’s really cool to come and see things actually working and see what’s going to work for your business. I needed something kind of specific, and I was able to find that. It’s been wonderful.”

“I’ve always liked to come and see what’s going on in the industry, see new products, meet new people who speak your language. You get this many people together who know the lingo — you can’t get that anywhere else.”

MANDY WISNER, SOUTHERN SIGNS, INC.

Made Important Connections

Networking events, some targeted based on specific interests — such as print or digital signage — helped generate long-lasting and productive relationships among sign and graphics industry professionals. In 2015, hundreds more attendees and exhibitors in a sold-out trade show floor joined the pool of potential business connections.

Learned the Latest Skills

Education sessions and the new game changer sessions, designed to change the way you approach your business, left participants with clear strategies to build their skills and improve business operations. Presentations included some of the industry’s top experts and demonstrations of the latest innovations.

Showcased the Newest Products

Exhibitors showcased some of the industry’s most advanced products in print, digital signage, LEDs, vehicle wrapping and more for attendees like Randy George, Allied Electric Sign & Awning. Randy used his time on the trade show floor wisely: “We’re an expanding operation, and we wanted to upgrade our fleet. We’ve been talking to companies over the phone, looking at product descriptions online. We came here to talk to people in person and get a feel for the products up close.”
LOOKING AHEAD

Once again sold out, ISA Sign Expo 2016 took over the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL, April 20–23. The trade show floor featured the latest in new technologies and products in over 219,000 square feet for 600 exhibitors. The industry’s leading thinkers addressed key business challenges and opportunities at more than 77 educational events. Increased networking opportunities, including the ISA Rocks: THE Industry Party, brought together the whole industry for business and fun.

HANDS-ON DEMOS

“We really enjoyed being able to get our hands on the equipment, seeing live demos and getting to question the vendor about the products in person.”

TIFFANNI SANSTRA, MIDTOWN SIGNS LLC

EDUCATING THE WORKFORCE

“No other expo can compete with ISA Sign Expo. The scope of all the exhibitors and the wealth of knowledge that you learn in the classes are overwhelming.”

JOSHUA BARNETT, INK’D OUT LLC
Empowering your current and future employees to help build your business

As your business grows, finding new workers — and replacing retiring workers — is an issue that must be solved for the industry to thrive. This past year, ISA confronted these issues head on, guiding the industry with new training programs and career resources.
Trained the Workforce
Online learning provided employers an opportunity to educate an entire staff or just a select few while saving time and money. On-demand courses in the ISA Sign Academy (www.Signs.org/Online) offer the best training and education available in the industry and are designed to supplement your company training program. Plus, webinars on topics that affect the industry, such as critical labor laws or the Reed v. Town of Gilbert Supreme Court ruling, offer cutting-edge expert advice for business leaders.

Recognized Key Skills
Hundreds of high school and technical school students took advantage of a new program to demonstrate their knowledge and talent to potential employers. The “ISA Digital Badge” assesses 15 different skills, ranging from welding and construction to advertising and design. These badges provide a new way to validate the competency of the future employees you are looking to hire. Keep an eye out for these digital badges to appear on resumés, and find more information at www.Signs.org/GetBadge.

Found New Workers
Job openings, jobseeker resumés and unique programs such as Hiring our Heroes debuted through ISA’s new Career Center (www.Signs.org/Careers). Expanding partnerships with the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) and SkillsUSA continued to introduce teachers, career counselors and administrators to the sign and graphics industry and the career potential at a sign and graphics company. These educators are the bridge to students and a vital part of our strategy.

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BUILDING THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

The numbers don’t lie: Baby boomers are retiring while the sign and graphics industry is growing. A lack of skilled workers could stunt growth. Sign Manufacturing Day, in its third year in 2015, brought high school, community college and technical school students together to explore the possibilities of a career in the sign and graphics industry.

Sign Manufacturing Day: By the Numbers

- 2,200 students toured ISA member companies
- 34 companies
- 43 locations
- 81% said Sign Manufacturing Day made them consider a career in manufacturing

Source: ISA Survey of Sign Manufacturing Day Attendees 2015

LOOKING AHEAD

Workforce development programs for the sign and graphics industry will focus on:

- Expanding ISA’s career center and job board as the “go to” resource for job seekers and employers
- Developing future employees’ skills through educational programs like Sign Manufacturing Day and encouraging their success with tools such as the digital badge
- Launching an assessment program for sign and graphics companies to evaluate training needs of employees

For more information on engaging, empowering and elevating a future workforce, visit www.Signs.org/CareerCenter.

PARTICIPATE IN SIGN MANUFACTURING DAY 2016 ON OCTOBER 7!
Contact workforce@signs.org for details.
A CAREER ADVANTAGE

Sign and graphics industry employees love what they do — thriving on the constant challenge and creativity, helping their community and seeing their handiwork on display throughout their towns. And a survey of 60 salaried and hourly positions from ISA in 2015 showed that the industry offers more than just good feelings, but also solid jobs with competitive pay.

AVERAGE SIGN AND GRAPHICS HOURLY WAGES IN 2015

WAGES HIGHER THAN OTHER FIELDS...

$20.06  
Overall manufacturing

$21.43  
Average U.S. worker

$21.63  
SIGN AND GRAPHICS EMPLOYEES

...WITH EMPLOYEES REPORTING LARGER RAISES

2.9%  
Overall manufacturing

3.0%  
Average U.S. worker

5.4%  
SIGN AND GRAPHICS EMPLOYEES

BUILDING STRONGER EMPLOYEES

“The ISA Elite program is a great way to network with the up-and-comers. Just meeting with them for an hour opened my eyes to all that’s out there.”

RYAN TRAPP, POBLOCKI SIGN CO.

INSPIRING A NEW GENERATION

“It’s encouraging to see the next generation interested in what we do.”

WENDY GIBSON, RAMSAY SIGNS


55.8%  
OF SIGN AND GRAPHICS COMPANIES SAID THEY WOULD HIRE IN THE LAST HALF OF 2015

Sign and graphics companies can now assess how competitive they are in wages and benefits in 60 salaried and hourly positions in the industry. Get the report here: www.Signs.org/Salary
Investments in research to gain insights and knowledge

Arguments are more persuasive when backed by facts, not opinions. And education is more effective when backed by insight, not feeling. ISA developed a number of research projects in 2015 designed to provide a competitive advantage for sign and graphics businesses, as well as to build bridges with important partners.
LOOKING AHEAD

Research for sign and graphics companies will provide the industry with actionable information and data to drive their business expansion forward. ISA is dedicated to helping our members and advancing the industry overall by putting substantial resources toward research content development.

INSIGHT INTO THE SIGN AND GRAPHICS INDUSTRY

Infographics Series
Produced throughout the course of the year, infographics on a variety of sign and graphics industry topics supported our members’ efforts to tell the industry’s story. Topics ranged from career opportunities for future and current employees to the size and economic impact of the sign and graphics industry. In addition to the infographics throughout the year, there were five special infographics that were distributed during the month of November as a part of a campaign of “thanks” — a token of appreciation to our members.

Digital Textile Printing Opportunities for Sign Companies
Produced in partnership with InfoTrends, this white paper maps out new business opportunities in digital textile printing for sign companies. It analyzes growth opportunities in textile printing and discusses the investments needed to succeed in this growing business.

The Benefits of New, Innovative Curing Technologies
UV-curable and latex-based inks present growth for companies seeking new revenue sources and improved efficiencies. This white paper, produced in partnership with InfoTrends, identifies the benefits of innovative curing technologies.

Quarterly Economic Reports
Users of this research got an edge on the economic conditions impacting the sign supply and manufacturing sectors. The research, compiled by IHS and Vandiver Associates, provided data from each quarter, with above average growth in four key sectors of the sign and graphics industry forecast for 2016.

ISA MEMBERS CAN ACCESS THESE RESOURCES FOR FREE
Log in and download at www.Signs.org/Research
ISA supports the work of the Signage Foundation, which works to create safe, livable, thriving communities through signage education and research. All of this research is being used to help convey the value of signs to planners and local officials.

**Best Practices in Regulating Temporary Signage**
The guide, developed by prominent planner Wendy Moeller, offers tips on creating codes that balance the importance of this type of signage to businesses and community groups while maintaining aesthetics.

**Illuminated vs. Non-Illuminated Signage — Economic Impact of Illumination**
This research, conducted by Villanova University, shows the importance of lighting to signage. Businesses say they rely on lighted signage branding, advertising and communication and find marketing value in illumination when the stores are closed.

**Signs and the Downtown Experience**
This research, developed by Craig Berger, found a greater reception for sign size, diversity and messaging in urban areas and an acceptance of digital signs that conveyed clear, legible information, important content and were architecturally integrated.

Support sign research with a donation. Visit [givetosfi.org](http://givetosfi.org).

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**COMMUNITY INSIGHTS**

“I am finding SFI’s research extremely helpful. I gained knowledge both for my role within Downtown Ottawa’s Business Improvement Association and to share with our local businesses.”

**JASNA JENNINGS, OTTAWA BIA (BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION)**

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**EFFECTIVE FACTS**

“I used the SFI Urban Wayfinding Manual to guide Downtown Evanston through a full redesign and development of a new wayfinding system. I would love to see research or data on sign code issues to help me work with government officials.”

**ERIC SANTIAGO, DOWNTOWN EVANSTON**
Research Partners
In 2015, ISA continued to partner with industry leaders on key resources such as white papers and reports researching valuable industry topics. To access the full list of these reports from 2015 and earlier, visit www.Signs.org/Research.

Growth through Data Analytics
ISA is putting substantial resources toward content development designed to help our members and advance the industry overall. Our understanding of that data/research sits at the heart of your business expansion, and we are dedicated to providing more and more relevant content to support that end goal.

Do you have ideas on research that would help your business? Contact ISA membership@signs.org today.

PERSUASIVE SUPPORT
“Being able to go argue a sign code with all that documentation and to show that colleges have researched these issues and how other communities have put these into practice was invaluable. We had facts, and people listen when you can put a stack of papers in front of them.”

MIKE BURNETT, SIGNMEDIA
Effectively managing codes and regulations

A sign and graphics company needs permits to build and install the sign they just created for a client. A sign helps a business be successful, which leads to a vibrant community. ISA and its Affiliated Associations continued to build relationships with planners and other local officials throughout the United States and Canada, helping them understand how reasonable sign codes can positively impact their communities. These efforts help sign companies protect and grow their business.
Built Relationships with Planners

Nearly one third of planners have started to use ISA as a resource within the past three years, according to a new ISA survey. ISA continues to work with planners across the U.S. and Canada for positive change.

Planning for Sign Code Success™ Events

These day-long training sessions, held in conjunction with the Signage Foundation and Affiliated Associations, were attended by 134 planners representing 79 communities. The regulators of approximately 4.3 million people were inspired by this education in Hot Springs, AK; Atlanta, GA; Philadelphia, PA; Austin, TX; Vancouver, B.C., Canada; and Los Angeles, CA.

American Planning Association Events

Planners attending local/state/regional meetings of the American Planning Association (APA) learned about sign code issues from sign industry speakers. In 2015, more than 400 planners attended in-person presentations at state meetings in Arizona, Ohio, Georgia, Maine, Idaho and Michigan, and regional chapters that serve Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Impacting Your Bottom Line

Research developed by ISA with its Affiliated Associations showed for the first time the high costs that companies spend dealing with restrictive sign codes. The data was broken down further to highlight the impact on sign companies by geographic region.

On average, sign and graphics companies experience:

- **$25,600** spent annually per company on permits and variances
- **$107,099** lost in annual revenue per sign and graphics company due to restrictive sign codes

**MEANING OVER**

- **$600,000,000** in U.S. sales lost every year

Reed v. Town of Gilbert: Seized the Opportunity

When the Supreme Court issued its first sign code ruling in two decades, many communities had to make changes to become compliant. New and revised resources, webinars and events for planners help these communities understand more about the ruling and the importance of developing reasonable sign codes. As a result of these new programs:

- **1,300** planners educated on Reed in person or via webinars in 2015
- **4,612** planners and local officials received valuable materials on the Reed ruling

Is your community exploring sign code changes? Contact signhelp@signs.org for help from ISA and your Affiliate.
Carol Short is like many members of community planning boards. She had no formal training in planning issues. Yet she was tasked with evaluating ordinances — including sign codes — that came before her committee. When it came time to revise the entire sign code, her community was at a loss.

“Small cities like ours usually have no professional staff and not enough money to hire consultants for projects like revising a sign code,” she said. “We found we didn’t even agree on what the words meant that we were trying to make more clear. We did the best we could, but the document was far from professional or what it should have been. We asked a wide variety of people for their input (e.g., local signmaker and the code enforcement officer), most of whom did not answer or participate in the meetings.”

And yet, her Arkansas town had an existing sign code that “did not help create effective signage for an attractive town and was hard to understand.”

Carol attended a 2015 Planning for Sign Code Success™ event in Hot Springs, AK, hosted by ISA, the Signage Foundation and the Mid South Sign Association. It was eye-opening, to say the least. “It never occurred to me that there are sign industry recommendations that a sign code should follow. In spite of our best efforts, there are many things in the new code that are not well done. ISA has made some suggestions which I appreciate very much.”

Carol Short, Citizen Planner, American Planning Association Arkansas Chapter
Made a Difference at the State Level

ISA and its Affiliated Associations worked together to successfully influence state-level initiatives that would have adversely affected the sign industry. The Southern States Sign Association, the Mid South Sign Association and the California Sign Association all worked with ISA to guide proposed state initiatives that could have had major negative impacts on the sign industry in local communities.

Encouraged the Snowball Effect of Sign Code Advocacy

Since communities often look to neighboring towns or big cities within their state to provide resources when developing sign codes, positively influencing sign codes in one community can have a ripple effect. ISA worked to impact hundreds of communities, building successful relationships with local officials, testifying at public hearings and providing resources to help communities develop reasonable sign codes.

- In Chicago, ISA and the Illinois Sign Association progressed on streamlining a laborious codes process.
- In Dallas, ISA and the Texas Sign Association helped to defeat a proposal that would have required a manufacturer’s certification signaling that existing signs would comply with new brightness standards.
- In Utah, ISA and the Utah Sign Association educated local leaders about electronic message center technologies that inspired a switch from banning everything but monument signs to a much more business-friendly sign code.

When ISA works in a community miles away, we have the potential to positively influence your community, too!