

INDUSTRY TRENDS

The International Sign Association

APRIL 2017 EDITION

Print Poised for Continued Growth

If forecasters had been right, printed products would have gone the way of the horse and buggy by now. But print is enjoying a bit of a revival—and sign, graphics and visual communications companies are wise to pay attention to the opportunities it presents.

“People don’t realize how connected print is to every part of life,” said Denise Gustavson, Special Projects Editor, Printing & Packaging, Publishing for NAPCO Media. ISA International Sign Expo 2017 will discuss the many opportunities that exist in today’s print market. “While many people don’t read print newspapers anymore, from the moment you get up until you go to sleep, a hundred times a day, you’re touching something that has been printed. From the toothpaste tube to the bag that you get from McDonald’s, people tend to forget that is print. There are some things that can never be replaced. You cannot replace packaging with a digital equivalent.”

Today’s printers have more opportunities to expand and remain relevant, thanks to new technologies. And broader trends affecting end users provide opportunities for print to excel.

Personalization and Customization

Forbes magazine identified personalization as one of the top marketing trends for 2017 and business-to-consumer organizations must find unique ways of making it happen. Technology has certainly made it possible for print to play a role here, Gustavson said. “That is something that we’ve seen in commercial print, but it’s finally hitting the wide format space. We’re no longer looking at runs of 50,000 or 100,000 posters. Customization offers a huge opportunity. That’s what brands are looking for and it’s what they’re willing to pay for.”

She notes that while a large national retailer may use one printer, it likely won’t have a one-size-fits-all approach to its print project. “They are doing location-based advertising, so that a store window will look different in New York than it does in Florida. They’re very targeted because they know what draws better in each of those markets.”

She also has seen wallpaper get the custom treatment. When a major corporation holds its board meeting, it’s not unusual for the hotel boardroom to be wallpapered with the company’s logo and then changed out for the next occupant. It’s an extravagant expense, but one that some companies are willing to pay for.

The ISA whitepaper *Wide Format Print Trends, Opportunities & Challenges* identified construction as the top area of opportunity for wide format printers. “Digital printing on



STATS • FACTS

Total print volumes for wide format production graphics in North America are expected to rise from about 460 million square meters (over 4.9 billion square feet)

Industry Trends

glass, wall/floor coverings, wood, ceramic tiles, and laminates is making inroads in the construction industry. Items like posters, banners, flags, billboards, and signs can be used for a variety of indoor and outdoor applications to create brand impact, attract new customers, promote services/offerings, or sell homes.”

Improving Customer Experience

Retail and customer-service organizations are tasked with improving the customer experience at every turn. In its earliest incarnation, it seemed that digital and technology would provide the solution. Think digital sign displays and phone apps. But as customer experience has matured, so has the understanding that print can play an important role.

Mark Bollmeier, national sales manager for Federal Heath, based in Racine, Wisc., says customer experience has “many issues, but that means there are many opportunities,” he said. “One of the challenges that any retailer

has is maintaining a consistent look and feel of the brand across many media: the exterior signs, pylons, graphics on the window and doors. Maintaining that brand image across the different media—all of which can come from different suppliers—is a challenge.”

But it is important, he believes. “They want their customer to recognize the brand and create loyalty to the brand.”

Directional signs can help customers easily navigate the stores. Printed signs remain the best and most consistent ways to do so, outstripping digital—which has yet to be widely adopted—and store personnel—who can be inconsistent.

One-Stop Solution

Print may not make sense for every sign, graphics and visual communications company. But as the opportunities increase, professionals would be wise to pay attention.

Bollmeier sees more retailers trying to streamline the number of vendors they work with, seeking out those that can provide multiple elements. That helps with consistency, but also saves on the costs of creating and managing a number of vendors, bids and orders. “The more suppliers you deal with, the more it costs. And staffs are so lean these days.”

Even printers must evolve into total solutions providers, according to the *Wide Format Print Trends, Opportunities & Challenges* white paper, written by InfoTrends: “More and more businesses are seeking out printers that can serve as total solutions providers. The potential for growth exists across a wide variety of industries and verticals within the wide format market. Sign and graphics shops that can identify and leverage these areas of untapped potential will be well positioned for future growth.”

It’s clear that the obituary of print may have been written too early. But thanks to today’s technology, it’s easy to edit. | 

5 Resources TO LEARN MORE

ISA has developed a number of research papers aimed at shedding light on opportunities in the print market. All can be found at www.signs.org/research:

- 1 *Wide Format Print Trends, Opportunities & Challenges*, written by InfoTrends, explores the size of the wide format market.
- 2 *Digital Print Trends*, published by the Sign Research Foundation, offers insight into new printing approaches and uses.
- 3 *Wide Format Cutting Devices: An Overview for Sign Companies* explains new finishing methods.
- 4 *Digital Print Substrates: An Overview for Sign and Graphics Companies* investigates the increased adoption, new technologies and an expanding range of applications like soft signage, rigid panel printing, textiles and backlit displays.
- 5 *Digital Textile Printing Opportunities for Sign Companies* maps out new business opportunities in digital textile printing and offers insight into training and equipment needed to get into this rapidly expanding field.



ISA International Sign Expo 2017 will include a number of events targeted to helping companies seize the opportunities in today’s print market. Special incentives are offered. Email mmc@signs.org to learn more or visit signexpo.org to register.