

# INDUSTRY TRENDS

The International Sign Association

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## Sign and Graphics Industry, ISA Growing and Improving

There is no doubt that the sign and graphics industry has been in a period of change—and ISA right along with it.

The same technology curve that has allowed our businesses to be more efficient has drawn others into the market—creating new competitive pressures. And yet, it seems that these pressures are in turn pushing us to be stronger.

That is evident in the 2016 ISA State of the Industry. Each year, we ask how CEOs how their sign and graphics companies are performing. In 2016, it is clear that many in our industry are very positive about the past six months and excited about the growth they anticipate in the coming year. It's a trend that we've seen since we began asking these questions in 2013.

In 2013, for instance, only 17 percent of sign and graphics company CEOs said their companies had grown greater than 20 percent in the previous six months; this year, that was 28 percent. In 2013, only two in three sign and graphics companies said they had grown at all in the past six months. In 2016, that figure was up to 81 percent.

The same holds true for anticipated growth, with 65 percent of sign and graphics company CEOs saying they expected double digit growth in the coming year. In 2013, that was only half.

I would say that ISA is in much the same vein: we're growing and continuing to make positive improvements. Just as in business, we don't always have to constantly invent new things. ISA has begun a pretty deep treasure

trove of new projects in recent years. ISA has focused on gaining traction and making tweaks as needed. Now, we're in a place where I can see those things taking hold.

I want to point out a couple of recent initiatives that I think are working well—and that the overall industry seems to find successful.

**Finding and keeping employees.** This has been a critical issue to companies throughout the industry. Sign Manufacturing Day, which my company has participated in since 2013, is one response. By bringing in high school, community and technical students, we have an opportunity to let them know about the great careers available in the sign and graphics industry.

## KEEP THE GROWTH GOING

*More work remains in workforce development and codes/regulations. ISA has a number of resources to help:*

- The ISA Career Center ([www.signs.org/careers](http://www.signs.org/careers)). Find and post jobs and access resources to help recruit new workers. Once on board, use the ISA Sign Academy ([www.signs.org/online](http://www.signs.org/online)) to help train them for their first job or as they grow into new areas.
- ISA's advocacy team ([signhelp@signs.org](mailto:signhelp@signs.org)) is available to assist ISA and Affiliated Association members and communities with sign code and regulatory issues. A web portal includes resources to help local planners and government officials know more about crafting reasonable sign codes ([www.signs.org/local](http://www.signs.org/local)).

### STATS • FACTS

67% of sign and graphics company CEOs said they planned to add staff in 2016, according to the ISA State of the Industry report.

# Industry Trends

This is just one step in a multi-pronged approach to help companies address this issue. ISA's Career Center ([www.signs.org/careers](http://www.signs.org/careers)) includes a career portal, online training and other resources.

It's clear that we're making progress, but there is still much work to be done. In 54 percent of companies said finding qualified workers was the most pressing workforce issue. But that is down 10 percentage points just since 2014. Granted, this is a long-term issue and will require a long-term effort to see it fully beaten down.

**Codes and regulations.** In 2013, only 9 percent of those surveyed felt the environment for codes and regulations was improving; in 2016, 31 percent felt that way. That's a tremendous turnaround in just a few years. This type of advocacy also has taken signif-

icant effort to move the needle. Thousands of local planners have been trained by ISA and Affiliated Associations since 2013. They learn more about the importance of signs to businesses—and how to craft regulations that protect the rights of businesses. ISA's Advocacy Team continues to assist communities on sign code issues. To date, more than 200 communities have adopted ISA's recommended brightness guidelines for electronic message centers. Thousands have learned more about crafting codes that are compliant with the recent Supreme Court ruling. It's clear these efforts are paying off, as reflected in the State of the Industry survey.

Yet neither of these are quick fixes. But programs that ISA developed a few years ago have continued to grow and improve. In my tenure as ISA Chairman of the Board, I've

been focused on seeing what traction we could get and making tweaks as we go along.

Our challenge now is to continue the momentum. ISA's Board of Directors has met that challenge head-on, through a strategic planning process to steer ISA and the sign and graphics industry into the next decade.



**By Robert Mattatall** • • •  
Chairman  
ISA Board of Directors |

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