It is clear that change is coming to our industry, to manufacturing and to business in general.

One doesn’t have to dig too deeply to find innovations occurring in the sign, graphics and visual communications industry. New products are launched just about every day, ones that improve efficiencies or create new business opportunities. And that doesn’t include other technological innovations that impact the broader business world.

In some ways, every company is a technology company these days—and must stay on top of these changes just to keep up.

That’s one reason that ISA recently attended the digitalNow conference in Austin. That conference brought together high-level thinkers and innovative technology producers. It wasn’t hard to envision how some of these coming innovations will change our industry.

Fourth Industrial Revolution

Everyone remembers from history class about the first one: steam power mechanized production. The second boosted production through electricity. The third used information technology to automate production. Now on the cusp of the fourth industrial revolution, the focus is on fusion.

As the World Economic Forum put it, this fusion is “blurring the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres.”

This blurring of lines will directly impact the sign, graphics and visual communications industry, especially as digital and physical worlds morph. It likely won’t be too long before a sign company salesperson is using Extended Reality to show what that sign will look like on that actual building. It’s a long way from drawing a mockup and showing it in two dimensions on paper, but is a natural evolution from a computer rendering.

By 2020, there will be 21 billion connected sensors, according to Gartner research. This could potentially save billions in maintenance...
of learning is lost within the first year. (Hey, maybe that’s where that knowledge about the first Industrial Revolution went!) On the positive side, however, research also shows that it is never too late to learn something new. So don’t give up on those long-time employees who don’t seem willing or able to keep up with the changes coming.

A deeper understanding of the brain won’t just change the way we train employees. We’re also getting better insight into what motivates potential customers to act. This understanding may change the way designs are created and deployed.

**A Quickening Pace of Change**

If you think the pace of change is quickening, it’s not your imagination. Each generation of technology builds upon the last, so the rates of progress speed up. Each iteration of a printer gets faster and more accurate. Lighting continues to become more durable and efficient. The computers we use to program routers and design sign are outdated within 18 months.

Here’s one thought that may be hard to swallow, but still is true: This is the slowest pace of change you will enjoy for the rest of your life.

One speaker at the digitalNow conference said something that could broadly apply to the sign, graphics and visual communications industry—or, for that matter, any industry.

“We will not recognize our profession in the next 10 years…. And, honestly, I said 10 years so it wouldn’t scare you so much. It will probably be unrecognizable in five.”

As things speed up, it can be tempting to hunker down and focus on the task at hand. Those who do will be left behind. Change is coming. You—and your business—had better be ready. | ©

As ISA celebrates its 75th anniversary, it would be easy to focus on looking back. But ISA is looking forward every bit as much. Technological advances continue to transform the industry, and to help sign, graphics and visual communications companies stay ahead of coming changes, ISA will launch a series of Strategic Insight papers. When ISA began, the industry was neon. These days, it is that and so much more. By the time we conclude our 2019 celebration, who knows what innovations it will bring?

The white papers will be available at signs.org/research.