

On the Cusp of Innovation: Is Your Company Ready?

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.

STATS • FACTS

By 2020, there will be 21 billion connected sensors, according to Gartner research. This could potentially save billions in maintenance

This is just the beginning. At digitalNow, presenters showcased screens that were directed not by touch, but by voice or eye movements. Imagine how this might affect digital signs. Don't think this is so far off. Thanks to Apple's Siri and Amazon's Echo, we're already accustomed to voice-activated tasks. Some 50 million people—about one in seven Americans—own a voice-activated device like Amazon Echo. Consider that the first Echo came on the market just three years ago, and it is easy to see just how quickly this change is occurring.

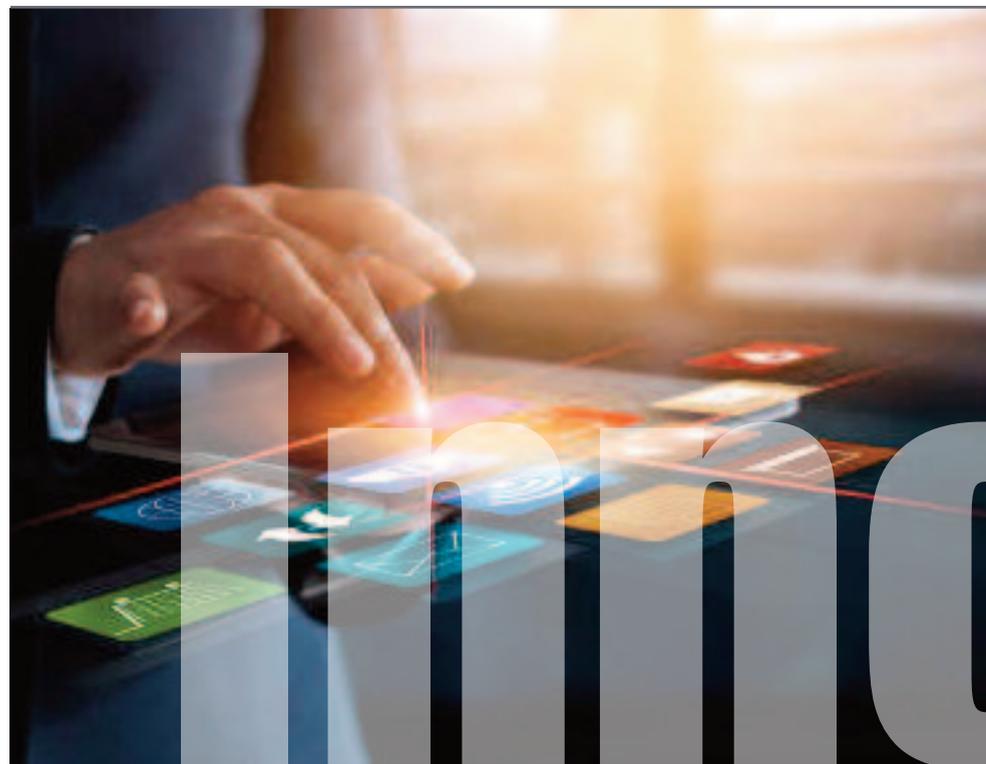
Driverless cars will open up the vehicle's windshield to be so much more than just a way to see oncoming traffic. Signage and information might be embedded on the windshield itself. Again, we're already a few steps ahead in that direction. Already, vehicles come with small screens that project the speed limit, for instance. How much of a leap

will it be before those same screens include information about the closest gas station or lodging?

Deeper Understanding of How the Brain Works

As scientists begin to understand more about our brains and how they work, the door opens on a few fronts. One is a better way of training employees in ways that maximize learning. This topic was the focus of ISA's Leadership Congress earlier this year. The Leadership Congress brings together the ISA board of directors and three steering committees to delve into a topic affecting the industry. The need to train the next generation of workers was at the forefront of discussions.

This session left a couple of remarkable impressions: workforce training has to change, because the way it has been done is ineffective. Research shows that 90 percent



STAY IN THE KNOW?

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.

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. | 

