

Industry JANUARY 2019 TRENDS



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THE INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION

ISA, Industry GROWTH

A Message from the ISA Chairman

My entry into the sign, graphics and visual communications industry is probably a little different than most. I worked in another industry that was aggressively consolidating and re-consolidating. Over a six-year period, the company I worked for was sold three times. My wife and I were employed in the same organization and therefore job security in my family took on a new meaning.

My wife Linda was the one to find that security when she landed in the sign, graphics and visual communications industry. She loved computers and had a commercial art background. This industry combined both. She built the business and, eight years later, I joined her, at Sign-Age in Clearwater, Fla.

That's not to say that I was hands-off until then. Together, we went to ISA International Sign Expo. Even as an outsider, it provided connections that would prove invaluable. I saw how my corporate skills would translate to help her build the business.

I also saw the potential in the industry, thanks to ISA. Being at ISA Sign Expo allowed us to explore what was happening in the market today and see what was coming.

We always came back from the event with an idea that would grow revenue or save costs. We also came back energized, knowing that we were not alone. As an industry, we all experience the same problems and opportunities. Just having that sense of community kept us connected.

As relative newcomers to the industry, it helped to talk to people whose grandparents had started businesses. Their companies might have started with hand-painted signs, and now they're wrapping buildings or putting up electronic signs. The transition is exciting.

ISA has done more than watch this happen. As an association, it has helped propel it and support these changes. This year, ISA



marks its 75th anniversary, which will provide a chance to look back at our history while celebrating our growth. Much of the celebration will occur at ISA International Sign Expo—the one chance where the entire industry comes together. We’re planning some exciting events that you’ll hear about in the coming weeks.

But this anniversary is about so much more than a party. It is about noting how far we’ve come as an industry—and how ISA has been and continues to be behind much of that growth.

In my year as ISA board chairman, we will continue to tackle the challenges that impact your businesses the most. We will continue to create a welcoming environment, which showcases the possibilities of a career in our industry. We’ll do that, whether reaching a mid-career executive like I was, or a recent technical school graduate like we do through ISA Sign Manufacturing Day each fall.

The industry grows when companies grow, and companies grow when people do. ISA will continue to refine its workforce training and development programs. ISA recently launched its digital badge program, which provides targeted learning opportunities and allows sign, graphics and visual communications professionals a chance to demonstrate their knowledge. As a company owner, I also can tell you that it signals people who are committed to growing in their careers. Those are the people I want working in my business.

In my two decades in the sign, graphics and visual communications industry, I have seen what happens when we connect with each other. Not only did these people help draw me into the industry in the first place; they continue to be a valuable resource today. Just recently, our supplier of photopolymer products discontinued a product we relied on. Because of connections made through ISA, I was able to pick up the phone and within 10 minutes locate an excellent source nearby.

Another time, we were getting ready to provide installation work for a company in Canada. We didn’t know them. I picked up the phone and called an ISA member in Canada who was able to give a great reference on somebody who I had no relationship with. That created the confidence of who I’m working with.

Another time recently, I had a need for channel letters and reached out to a member of the ISA Elite—a program which brings together next-generation leaders in the industry. The Elite member’s company couldn’t do the project, but provided references for another. It was a connection that I never would have made, just shooting in the dark.

I could tell so many stories like this of how connections made have helped my company grow. The industry has given so much—including an opportunity for my wife and I to work together in our business while providing security that I did not have before.

I know that you will find the same in the industry—and participating in ISA meetings and coming to ISA Sign Expo will help your company grow. It will help you grow personally as well.

A lot of times, I will hear people say, “I don’t want to help my competitors.” That’s the difference in an abundance or a scarcity mentality. I believe there is more work than any company can handle. As we come together, we grow the industry’s profile among end users. And we all become stronger because of it.

I hope you’ll plan to join me at ISA International Sign Expo 2019 as we mark ISA’s 75th anniversary. It will be April 24-26 with a pre-conference day April 23. Note that this is slightly different than our typical schedule as the tradeshow floor is open Wednesday-Friday. We’ll be in Las Vegas at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center. Learn more at www.signexpo.org.

You will leave with solid ideas that you can implement over the coming year. I know I will.



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