

Industry TRENDS

MARCH 2019



THE INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION

Grow Like a Pro at ISA International Sign Expo 2019

There are thousands of ways that attending ISA International Sign Expo will build your business. They are found in the aisles of the massive tradeshow floor and in the connections with other attendees. Several past attendees tell you how they've done it.

Make the Right Connection

As a project manager, Betty Austin often is tasked with finding installers in far-flung cities. That just got a little easier thanks to relationships forged at her first ISA International Sign Expo.

"It wasn't just at events like the National/Custom Networking Reception, which was amazing on its own. But it seemed like everywhere I looked, I met someone. Now, I can now call and say, 'I need an installer in X city' and get recommendations. I've already been able to solve small issues quickly, thanks to people I met at ISA Sign Expo."

She also has been able to help out a client with a project that her company, Signage Solutions, previously might have turned away. That's because of a relationship that provided an outsourcing resource.

Those concrete differences are important. But overall, attending ISA Sign Expo reignited her enthusiasm for the sign, graphics and visual communications industry. "I was able to feed off the people in the industry. I came away refreshed and ready to bring it back to the office and share the motivation."

Connections were not the only benefit. She found technology that makes it easier for installers and sales personnel to measure buildings without climbing on a ladder. Discovering new methods—and making those new contacts—has helped her grow in her career and in project management.

"I was able to introduce new ways of doing things to my fellow employees," she said. "Attending ISA Sign Expo has deepened my love of the industry."

She recommends newcomers "keep eyes wide open. Don't just focus on what you think you need," she said. "Really take a moment

and absorb each booth. You never know if you might come across something that you may need. Step out of your comfort zone. You'll find that it really pays off."

Pro Tip: Carve out room in the schedule for the many networking opportunities. The Last Hour Happy Hour is always a great place to connect and unwind on the tradeshow floor. And ISA is marking its 75th anniversary with a party for the ages. The event is open to all attendees. Of course, connections can be made outside of those events, too. Consider yourself "working the room" the second you get to the airport. Chances are good that someone on the plane is headed to ISA Sign Expo, too. Meet people in the hotel lobby, in line for coffee or walking to the convention center. Those sorts of connections, coupled with the more formal networking opportunities, may provide the right name at the right time.

Get Up to Speed

For Chris Arthur, franchise account sign specialist for Signplicity, ISA International Sign Expo is a great way to help a new buyer learn more about the sign, graphics and visual communications industry. At last year's event, he brought along a new franchisee who had significant experience in engineering and manufacturing but was from outside the industry.

"I used the show to get him acquainted to all the practices and products available. It helped him understand how to make excellent signs and grow his company. Without this show, it would have been very hard for him to get up to speed on the industry. The process would have taken many years."

New employees can benefit as well as company owners. Not only can a walk of the tradeshow floor help them to learn more about the industry and specific products, but targeted education also can be invaluable.

Pro Tip: Find education based on specific needs. With course tracks aimed at topics like design, marketing, digital signage and technology, it is easy to find ways to build up your employees (or yourself). Make sure to select one or both of the Game Changer sessions, too. They deliver some of the most inspiring sessions each ISA Sign Expo. And finally, take advantage of the Lounge & Learn area, where presenters talk more about the specifics of their products and innovations.

Get a Bigger Vision

Scott Thornton, president of Apogee Signs, has long taken groups of employees to ISA International Sign Expo. Scott has been many times over 30 years and recognizes that his familiarity may make him miss some new insights. Taking employees and first-timers brings a spark back to the office. Plus, it "shows them that you value them enough to invest in their understanding of their craft." He believes employees are "partners" to whom the company owes its day-to-day success.

Beyond the goodwill, however, employees attending ISA Sign Expo brings "so many intangibles," he said. "Staff picks up so much through merely being immersed in the broad spectrum of the industry rather than just their typical day-to-day work scope...Then you add the bonding atmosphere of a road trip with commonality of experiences beyond the work space. It's certainly a win-win."

He admits it is "not free to take a group, especially if you add the 'lost' revenue those employees could be making while you travelled alone," Scott said. "But in my eyes the return is way beyond the costs. As owners, we always wonder why the employee doesn't value the finished product, the customer, our trade, our business, etc. Maybe they think we don't value them? Maybe they feel they have little or no impact on the direction of their future? It is somewhat our own fault as owners if they feel this way. As owners we can engage them, and Expo attendance is a significant way."

Pro Tip: Invest in the Company Package, which allows anyone from your company to attend an unlimited number of education sessions as they would like on Wednesday and Thursday. Perhaps get together to plan out the courses you would recommend so that your staff can divide and conquer—and bring back the most ideas. Make sure to set up time after the event to decompress—where everyone shares what they learned in their sessions. Go ahead and get it on the calendar now so that it will happen.

It's clear that there are any number of ways that you can build your business by attending ISA International Sign Expo. But the first step is to register, then take some time to assess your needs and get a plan together. The right idea, product, inspiration or connection is out there, waiting to be discovered.



GETTING THERE

ISA International Sign Expo 2019 will be Wednesday, April 24 through Friday, April 26, with pre-conference workshops on Tuesday, April 23.

Register or learn more at www.signexpo.org.

