



ISA PREVIEW

Internet of Places

Gear up for 2015's ISA International Sign Expo, where you can discover a world beyond printed signage as educational sessions highlight customer-experience design and the digitization of everyday life.

BY EILEEN FRITSCH

To keep up with trends and technologies that will irrevocably alter the sign business, attend ISA International Sign Expo 2015 at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas. The expo runs Thursday through Saturday, April 9-11. Educational programs begin Wednesday, April 8, with Dynamic Digital Signage Day and continue Thursday and Friday, April 9 and 10.

At the show, you'll find innovations for profitably operating your sign or graphics business today. The educational sessions will prepare you to serve the sign business clients of tomorrow.

Bridging Graphics and the Digital Realm

At Sign Expo last year, members of the Society of Experiential Graphic Design (SEGD) described how brand owners, healthcare centers, and museums are combining printed graphics with digital displays and other technologies for immersive brand storytelling. The designers explained that a consumer's interaction with a brand may start on a website or mobile app, but it continues every time people visit the brand's stores or participate in its events.

Today, sign companies that can deliver both printed and digital signage enjoy a competitive edge. But if you allow your existing customers to look elsewhere for digital signage expertise, those digital sign firms could easily add digital graphics production to their mix of services.

Due to technologies that continue to disrupt all segments of society, the sign industry as it exists today will be much different in 15 years. Mobile devices have already changed how people work, play, shop, gather information, and communicate. Static signs and graphics won't disappear, but many clients will expect printed signs to be interactive and measureable, with QR codes, NFC chips, or augmented-reality markers.

With smartphones, consumers will use printed signs as gateways to the digital realm, where they can access information, order products, or engage in game-like experiences.

Clive Roux, CEO of the SEGDA, explains, "We are in the early stages of the Internet of Places – the digitization of our environment. This is something far bigger than signs. Everyday places are about to get a whole lot more technologically complex." Customer-experience designers will be expected to understand digital displays, sensors, cameras and tracking technologies, interfaces, content management systems, communications systems, and data handling capabilities.

Currently, advocates of omni-channel marketing are experimenting with different ways to integrate digital and printed communications and track the results. They need service providers who can help them execute the technical and fabrication complexities of their ideas.

Think Like a Designer

The "C-Level" track at the ISA International Sign Expo features a session on "Building a More Design-Centric Sign Company."

Instead of selling signage as a commodity, re-imagine signage as an integral part of consumers' interaction with a brand. Yes, you must still manage the logistics of delivering 5000 signs across the US for the lowest possible price. But as you automate your digital printing workflow to handle production and logistical details, you can retrain your staff to become "creative technologists."

According to the "Creative Team of the Future" study by AIGA and The Creative Group staffing firm, creative technologists are one of the hot jobs of the future. In an interview on The Creative Group blog, a design studio creative director explains, "In advertising, we're doing work that's more similar to the art world in that we try out new concepts and ideas ... Creative technologists are good at prototyping early, making something very simple, allowing someone to test it, and modifying the changes. They're comfortable in an environment of change."

Employees trained in design can help clients answer questions such as: "How can we create a compelling experience that will draw people back time and again? How can we prevent people from getting lost (and frustrated) when visiting office complexes or healthcare facilities? How can we blend digital signage, graphics, and wall murals to make brick-and-mortar stores conducive to new functions such as customer education and entertainment?"

Selling Dynamic Digital Signage

During Dynamic Digital Signage Education Day, presenters will clarify profit opportunities for sign shops and cover topics such as generating recurring revenue, selling dynamic digital signage in "sign language," and combining static and dynamic signage in retail and P-O-P projects. The digital signage market is expected to achieve \$17.1 billion in worldwide sales by 2017. About a third of those sales will be in the US.

"There is a groundswell of interest across the sign industry in dynamic digital signage, how it works, what applications it can fit," says ISA COO Brandon Hensley. According to ISA and Roland DGA research, 53 percent of sign companies' existing customers are already asking about digital signage products.

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According to Julie Gederos, a Roland DGA marketing development manager, digital signage doesn't have to disrupt a sign shop's traditional business: "If managed and promoted professionally, adding digital signage to a print shop's offerings can have a complementary effect and actually increase print business. In addition to creating new revenue streams, you can enhance customer relationships by introducing existing clients to digital signage."

Bring Your Walking Shoes

Along with workshops on design, sign production, fabrication, installation, project management, regulatory issues, and sales, Sign Expo will feature "game-changer" sessions. David Kepron, author of Retail (r)Evolution, will discuss "The Brand Performance Place: Where Minds, Merchandise, and Media Connect." He envisions a future where shopping and the digital experience converge. Ken Schmidt, former communications director for Harley-Davidson Motor Company, will discuss how businesses can avoid margin-killing commoditization.

According to Hensley, ISA International Sign Expo exhibits will cover the breadth of the sign and visual communications industry: "We had 3D printers on the exhibit hall floor last year, and I anticipate that we'll see more cutting-edge print technologies this year. The Dynamic Digital Park is more than 30 percent larger than last year, and we will have more than 175 exhibitors with wide-format printers and print products. Last year, we got our first glimpse of 4K screens, which were truly phenomenal. In all, we will have the largest exhibit hall in ISA International Sign Expo history, with more than 212,000 square feet of the latest products." For details, visit signs.org. **BP**

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