

# A Year Like ***NO OTHER***

**2020**  
Progress Report



INTERNATIONAL SIGN ASSOCIATION






WELCOME

WE ARE

OPEN

PLEASE COME IN



## 2020 was truly a year like no other.

During this challenging health and economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been times of great uncertainty.

One of the biggest questions we faced as an industry has been: "Are we open for business?" At one point, our future was unclear.

ISA stepped up to guide the industry with the resources, connections and information needed to help you open your doors and keep them open. We delivered digestible, timely and invaluable information on the rapidly changing situation, including health protocol recommendations to keep employees safe and federal financing options to keep employees paid.

We cheered in excitement and relief as the industry moved from "locked down" to "essential," proudly witnessing the industry's vital acts to help other small businesses, healthcare workers and communities show that they, too, were open for business.

While 2020 may be behind us, many challenges linger. ISA continues to lead the industry with information needed to make the best possible decisions for to keep your business growing.



**KEN VANHORN**  
Mimaki USA, Inc.  
*2020 Chairman  
of the Board*



**LORI ANDERSON**  
President & CEO



# CRITICAL RESOURCES

## AN ESSENTIAL DESIGNATION AS “CRITICALINFRASTRUCTURE”

ISA urged the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to consider the sign and graphics industry as “critical infrastructure.” CISA is a U.S. federal government department which provided guidelines to the 40+ states that enacted "shutdowns" on what businesses qualified to stay open and operational. This designation proved immensely valuable during this pandemic—and will live on for any future challenge we may face.

As state and local governments began to shut down businesses, it was essential that sign, graphics and visual communications companies continued working. ISA advised sign, graphics and visual communications companies that they could stay open and operational, to an extent, as long as they had stringent safety and health procedures in the workplace and provided services to "essential business" customers. Projects that were vital to essential businesses—like hospitals—needed to continue. And other businesses—like restaurants and retailers— needed ways to communicate the dramatic changes they were undergoing.

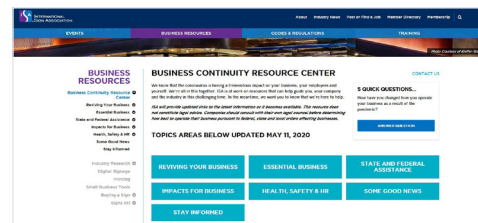
In the first few weeks of the stay-at-home orders, sign, graphics and visual communications companies asked ISA to help them prove that they were delivering essential services. For several weeks, ISA was in regular contact with CISA, advocating that they include the sign and graphics industry as “critical infrastructure” because we enable so many “essential businesses” to operate. Rather than fight this issue one location at a time, ISA convinced CISA that our industry’s work contributed to the nation’s “critical infrastructure.”

The fallout from the pandemic will likely continue for some time. ISA will continue to fight to make sure that the sign and graphics industry is represented no matter what comes next.

## WHAT YOU NEED, WHEN YOU NEED IT

In the first few days and weeks of the pandemic, the information was flowing fast and furious—and all of it vital. ISA designed and distributed communications to serve as a one-stop resource for what companies needed to know to survive.

- **Business Continuity Resource Center (BCRC)** provided a repository of invaluable, industry-specific information to keep your business running, including receiving loans, keeping employees healthy and working, and keeping your business open as “critical infrastructure.”
- **Expert-led webinars on crucial topics** such as COVID-19 government loans, HR issues, health and safety and more drew over 1,000 participants.
- **Daily Industry Digest e-newsletter** provided actionable and regular updates on the top issues impacting the sign, graphics and visual communications industry to almost 60,000 industry professionals.
- **THE LINK virtual events**, such as *THE LINK...INSTALL* and *The Wrap Experience™*, helped attendees from around the world make connections that were vital to their business.



“I've been receiving your Daily Industry Digest emails for the past year and I have to say, of all the emails and information we've received about business in COVID times and especially regarding the PPP loans, yours has been the best. It's clear, timely and just what we've needed.”

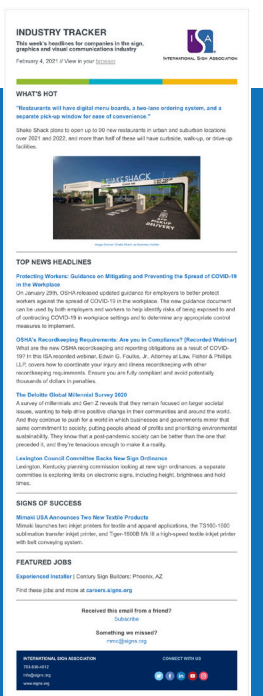
—Steve Upton, President, CHROMiX Inc.

Member communications back to ISA—including responses to daily surveys in the Daily Industry Digest and emails to ISA’s advocacy team—were crucial in helping ISA determine the information and resources your business needed to move forward.

## Ongoing Resources

The **Industry Tracker** is a weekly hub of the hottest information in the sign, graphics and visual communications industry. The Industry Tracker, which publishes each Thursday, is available free at **Signs.org/Tracker**.

**Webinars** are ongoing and continue to dive deeply into the complex challenges that face our industry. Learn more at **Signs.org/Webinars**.



# VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES



## THE LINK to Insights and Virtual Connection

With ISA International Sign Expo 2020 first postponed and then canceled due to the ongoing pandemic, it was more important than ever for ISA to help sign, graphics and visual communications companies continue to do business. COVID-19 made it challenging to connect with others and find new products to grow your business.

**To bridge the gap immediately, ISA launched *THE LINK*, a series of virtual events that brought together segments of the industry for networking, education and exploration of new products.**

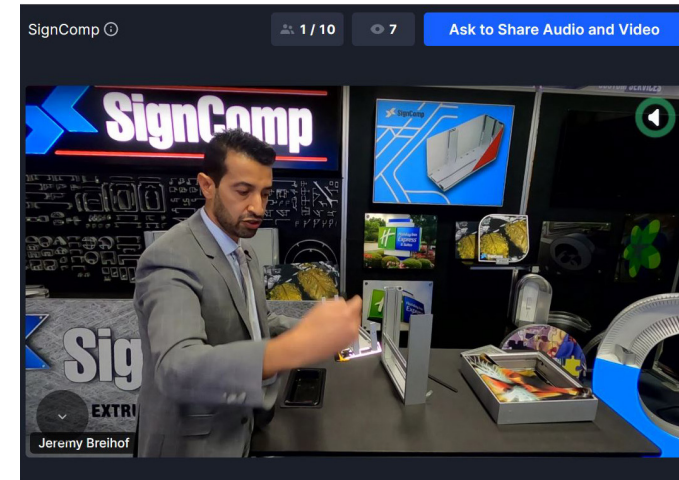
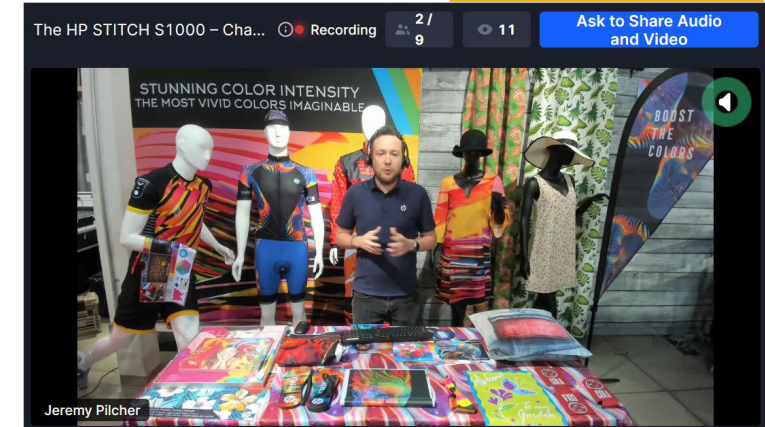
These events, such as The Wrap Experience™ - Virtual and *THE LINK...INSTALL*, offered experiences that truly delivered something different from other virtual events. ISA's virtual experiences were set apart from others by uniquely engaging and educational virtual content along with effective opportunities to connect face-to-face.



Operating under the umbrella *THE LINK*, these virtual events delivered such a positive experience for attendees and exhibitors alike, that they have extended into 2021 and beyond.

The National and Custom/Install Networking Reception at ISA Sign Expo is one of the most important networking events for many of our members each year, connecting custom sign companies and installers to national companies who need them to handle local projects.

Without the ability to meet in-person in 2020, *THE LINK...INSTALL* used virtual technology to help our members make these important connections, while adding valuable one-on-one networking. The first sold-out event, held late in 2020, proved that it was not only possible, but also in some ways better than the in-person event.





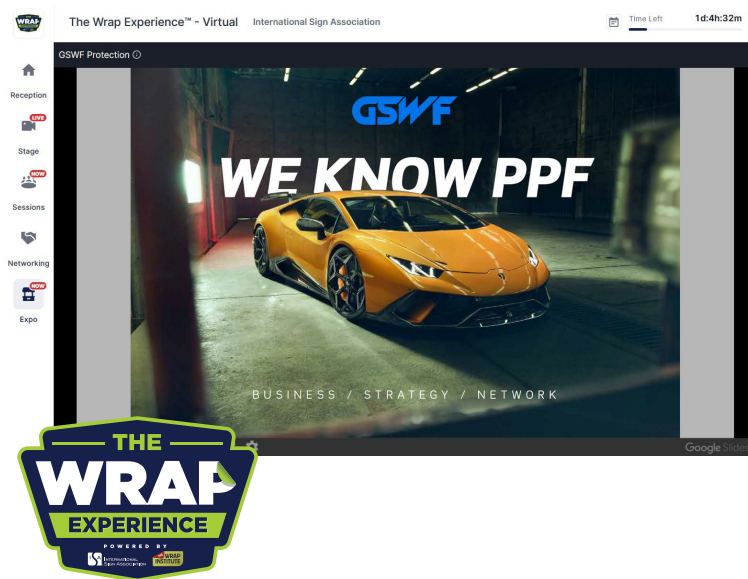
# VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES

The Wrap Experience™ - Virtual, in conjunction with The Wrap Institute and noted instructor/installer Justin Pate, helped wrap professionals explore new business opportunities. The fast-paced, exciting and engaging event hosted attendees from across the globe in a digital setting, with networking, education, demonstrations and exhibitors. The digital event educated hundreds of companies on the power of wrap and highlighted the business opportunities it brings while making the event a truly global experience.

Another ISA event, XDP (Experiential Design Program), which brings architects, designers, municipal planners and others together to learn about the sign, graphics and visual communications industry, also provided powerful connections between our industry and those who significantly influence it.

While in-person events are returning there are inherent benefits to virtual experiences that *THE LINK* offers, without the challenges and costs of travel. Virtual events also offer more opportunities to engage more of your employees, no matter where they are located in the world.

**It is clear that *THE LINK* isn't going anywhere and will provide a powerful year-round extension of ISA events. To learn more or sign up to be notified of upcoming events, visit [Signs.org/THELINK](https://Signs.org/THELINK).**



## ISA INTERNATIONAL SIGN EXPO™ 2021: ALL VIRTUAL

ISA International Sign Expo™ 2021 was held April 7-9 as an all-virtual event with 7,500 industry professionals in attendance from the convenience of their home or office.

Attendees found solutions-centered sessions held by leading industry experts, visited a dedicated exhibit hall to explore the hottest products and connected during happy hours and speed networking sessions.

Breakout sessions allowed various market segments and niche groups to connect in smaller settings. Attendees also heard from thought leaders and futurists about where the industry is headed.

Find the recorded sessions at [SignExpo.org/Session-Recordings](https://SignExpo.org/Session-Recordings).

**And get ready to meet in-person in 2022 in Atlanta, GA. Sign up to be notified when registration becomes available at [SignExpo.org](https://SignExpo.org).**

## THE LINK... Events for 2021

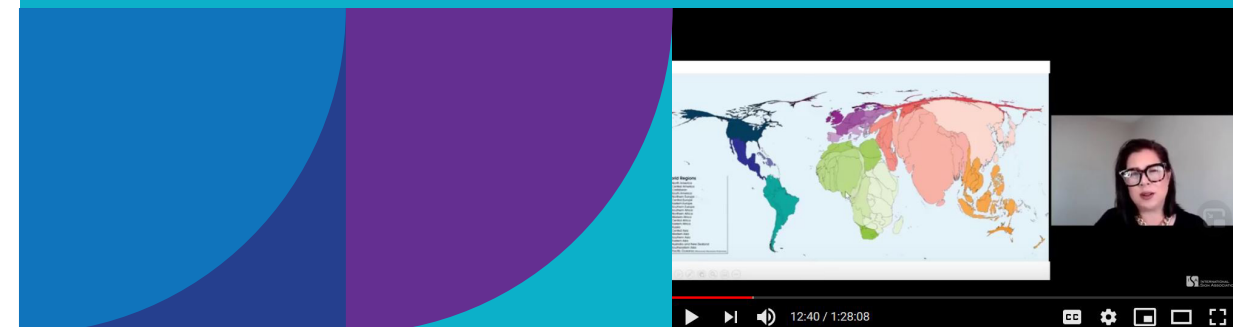


› **THE LINK...INSTALL** connects national and local sign companies in one-on-one networking opportunities. Additional events scheduled for 2021 will be in August and November.

› **The Wrap Experience™** provides networking, education, demonstrations and a product expo for those in the wrap industry. Two more events occur in 2021.

› **THE LINK... Niche Buying** Events help sign companies focus on specific solutions, products or technologies they need right now.

**Learn more about these events, or sign up to be notified at [Signs.org/THELINK](https://Signs.org/THELINK).**



# TRAINING ACHIEVED

## TRAINING CONTINUED VIRTUALLY WITH ISA ONLINE LEARNING COURSES

Some companies kept their employees growing in their skills during slower periods of work. Other companies selected ISA's online learning courses to help onboard new employees.



ISA's Digital Badge program helped incentivize and acknowledge employees for gaining new knowledge and skills during the pandemic.

For example, Sign Engineering LLC in Puerto Rico found ISA's program so successful that it developed a core curriculum for its leaders, requiring them to take 20 of the 75 offered courses. Courses were chosen for the broad expertise that they offered, something that Sign Engineering found would benefit their overall operations. After an employee completed the required course, they could pursue topics in their field before exploring other courses outside their area of expertise.

ISA's courses start at \$25, and the company package allows a set number of employees to pursue as many classes as they like for one flat fee. Employees can pursue digital badges that demonstrate their expertise in an area of importance to the typical sign, graphics and visual communications company.

**Learn more about the digital badge program and online learning at [Signs.org/Online](https://Signs.org/Online).**

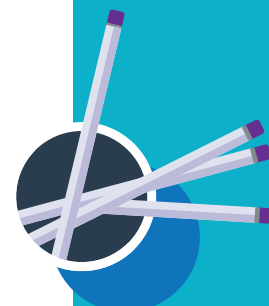
## SIGN INDUSTRY QUARTERLY ECONOMIC REPORT FORECAST MARKET CHANGES

With immense economic uncertainty in 2020, the Sign Industry Quarterly Economic Report was an invaluable and comprehensive research tool. The report provides a forecast on future trends and upcoming market shifts by key segments in the sign industry. Prepared quarterly, the report is an important resource for the entire industry. Download the latest report at **[Signs.org/QuarterlyReport](https://Signs.org/QuarterlyReport)**.

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The core curriculum of ISA's Online Learning helps each department better understand how the company should be operating as a whole. It also creates a better dynamic between employees, since they better understand each other's job.

— Harold Pedley, President and Owner, Sign Engineering LLC



# NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

## CONSISTENT GUIDANCE ON FEDERAL AID

**The pandemic may have brought plenty of changes, but some issues existed before—and did not go away. ISA helped companies navigate state and federal issues as well as regulatory compliance throughout.**

When the economy began to shut down in early 2020, sign companies were able to catch up on work backlogs. But eventually, they caught up and new orders slowed. The federal government's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and other types of aid were designed to help businesses weather the storm. ISA stepped in with additional webinars to help companies small and large navigate the complex—and often changing—programs.

Nearly 5,500 sign companies received a PPP loan, according to federal data, and the vast amount of these loans are potentially forgivable. Almost 1,000 companies received more than \$150,000, which does not include companies receiving smaller loans..



**The ISA resources were a tremendous help. Unlike a number of companies that found themselves scrambling when the COVID-19 pandemic hit earlier this year, Sign-Age turned to ISA to help us navigate these uncharted waters. Staff was working feverishly to keep us current as things unfolded with the PPP.**

— Mike Quigley, Vice President, Sign-Age



## CRUCIAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES AND PLANNERS

**ISA and the Sign Research Foundation (SRF) stepped up their outreach to planners during the pandemic, helping planners understand the critical importance of all signs, as well as temporary signs critical for public safety.**

The Sign Research Foundation released two reports that were essential for helping planners and local officials navigate signage regulations, including:

- **Urban Wayfinding Planning & Implementation Manual (2020 Edition)**
- **Model Sign Code (2019 Edition)**

SRF also hosted four webinars on the Urban Wayfinding manual targeted to local planners, designers, sign companies to help them understand and utilize the report from each key perspective.

Planners continued to take advantage of ISA and SRF's resources, research and support to understand how vital a smooth permitting process is to communities.

2020 was business as usual for sign regulations, and the pandemic did not slow down or overly complicate the permitting process. Sign regulations continues to be an area of extreme frustration to our members, and it's an area in which ISA continues to work closely with the planning community to improve for the entire sign, graphics and visual communications industry.

## KEY ADVOCACY EFFORTS IN 2020

- › Defending the industry in federal court cases, including *Thomas v. Bright* and *Reagan et al v. City of Austin*, which could change the ways that signs are regulated and how the sign industry does business
- › Valuable digital content, one-on-one guidance and webinars helped 5,500 sign companies apply for and receive Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans in 2020 (Source: SBA)
- › "Critical infrastructure" designation helped more sign companies stay open thanks to ISA efforts communicating with CISA on behalf of the industry
- › Over 50 cities across the United States received guidance to improve their sign ordinances
- › Dozens of ISA member companies received 1-on-1 assistance on technical, regulatory and industry concerns
- › 11 webinars helped sign companies deal with government/regulatory issues
- › 8 webinars helped over 900 planners and local officials learn how signs should be effectively regulated so that businesses and communities benefit, how to treat temporary signs during a pandemic, being compliant with the *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* decision, and how to facilitate iconic and creative signs



# STRONGER TOGETHER

THE LARGEST COMMUNITY OF SIGN  
COMPANIES, SERVICE PROVIDERS AND  
END-USERS IN THE WORLD!

ISA members are driven to succeed and committed to making their business a vibrant, healthy and exciting part of our economy. ISA membership offers the information, tools and resources that will help you and your company succeed.

Renew your membership or join today at [Signs.org/ISAMembership](https://Signs.org/ISAMembership)



## ISA AFFILIATED ASSOCIATIONS

ISA Affiliated Associations continued to provide member connection on a state and regional level. As with ISA, many of their events in 2020 converted to virtual. During this unprecedented time, the Affiliated Associations were creative and ensured that they were responsive to meet member needs.



### KEVIN STOTMEISTER RECEIVED DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Recognizing his significant leadership contributions to the sign, graphics and visual communications industry, Kevin Stotmeister was named the recipient of the ISA's 2020 Kirk L. Brimley Distinguished Service Award. Stotmeister is the former president and CEO of Federal Heath, and his leadership has made a lasting impact on the strength of the industry.



NORTHEAST STATES SIGN ASSOCIATION

