

# 40 AWESOME THINGS ABOUT BEING A SIGN PRO

ALL THE REASONS THAT YOUR OCCUPATION IS SUCH A SPECIAL ONE.

*By Signs of the Times Staff*

Sign people are different from many other professions. One major way is that most folks from outside the industry have absolutely no idea what sign professionals do — unlike, say, having an appreciation of what teachers, chefs or nurses may do. And so, we asked our readers, what is your absolutely most favorite, the most unknown or most underrated things about being a sign professional? “Best career on Earth,” said Seth Vargas.



As a design professional, you have a *huge* impact on the visual environment of the cities and towns where you live.



There are not many industries where you come up with an idea and six months later, it's out there for *thousands* of people to see.

Knowing your work on a sign played a role in a business owner's success.

When the 5 p.m. news comes on and there's a story about a successful local business, and while the camera focuses on the reporter and the owner, in the background, all you can see is — ta-da! — *your sign*.

You can sign-browse pretty much *everywhere* — malls, airports, arenas, cosmopolitan European cities or large-scale amusement parks.

The chance to embrace new technologies and products to stay ahead of the curve.

Taking a tired-looking business and completely reinvigorating it with an exciting new sign.

Watching a nervous customer purchase their first vehicle wrap, wondering whether it will be worth

the expense. Flash-forward seven years later, as they come to you to get their 14th vehicle wrapped, and your heart feels warm because you know you've played a role in the success of their business.

As a career, signage is a perfect mix of the artistic and the technical. You get to use your hands to paint and carve. *And* you get to use the fastest computers and latest software.

The near-instant gratification of the sign business. Where else — maybe website design — can you, in a few hours, transform a blank facade into a beacon?

Part designer, part colorist, part engineer, part electrician, sculptor, welder, installer, salesman and janitor. Name another profession that requires such diverse skills.

When installing a sign on top of a building, in the middle of a city, you are Spiderman. **You are the real-live Spiderman.**



**You get to be a jack-of-all-trades** — artist, designer, a salesman, installer, not to mention an improviser and collector.



...❖ Telling your friends you did the signs at a local hospital. And when they ask *which* sign, you answer, “All of them. Every single one.”

➔ One day, you’re a painter, the next a woodworker, the next a welder, and the day after that, you’re working with sheet metal. It’s *always* something different.

➔ Showing clients and friends projects you’ve worked on — from custom-tile inlaid floors to entire mall storefronts — and watching their faces as they realize that the scope of what you do is a *lot* bigger than they thought.

...❖ Every day is a new challenge. The materials we use include stone, wood, glass, plastics, aluminum, stainless and carbon steels, concrete, and even some brass here and there. Plus, multiple ways to illuminate the final product. Finishes may be brushed, polished or painted. They may be fluoropolymers, power coatings, anodized or galvanized.

➔ The excitement of seeing a project go from a napkin scribble to a digital rendering to a physical, tangible product.

➔ On top of that, every job site is different. Some are low, some are high. Some inside, some outside. Some easy, some nearly impossible. One thing is for sure; it is never a boring routine.

...❖ Service people, who are truck drivers, mechanics, carpenters, electricians, welders, crane operators, excavators, engineers, concrete people — and work 100 feet in the air. When you think about it, they’re pretty much miracle workers.

➔ How the general public underestimates the amount of creative thinking sign professionals have to do. It’s not just about designing signs — though creativity is critical to great design. It’s about being creative when

choosing materials, solving problems, finding efficiencies.

➔ The signmaker rarely does the same thing twice. Materials and techniques may be similar, but every job is *unique*.

...❖ When the client tells you, “It looks even *better* in person!”

➔ Walking away from a beautiful, finished installation.

➔ You are an expert in a field where customers are completely in the dark. No matter how many hours of research they do on the Internet, the average client can’t just go and put a wrap on their food truck. (Or, if they do, the results are going to be hilariously terrible.)

...❖ Knowing which materials to use depending on the project. It takes research to keep up with new products and how they work. It’s something that only comes with time and experience, and most of my clients take for granted that I know what I know.

➔ Being inspired and humbled, but *mostly* inspired, by looking at outstanding sign designs on Pinterest.

➔ *Neon*. The very word evokes glamor and excitement. That’s what you do — you *create* glamor and excitement.

...❖ Clients who become friends and even family. Business really brings people together. You wouldn’t think it would, but it *does*.



## How the love of signs becomes part of your makeup. You can’t escape.

It’s impossible to even travel to a gorgeous Caribbean island without spending more time looking at the colorful signs than the beautiful beaches.



# BEING A SIGN PRO



→ The variety of problem-solving you get to do. So much of the job is planning to make the difficult simple. Reducing complexity is an art. Planning and thought are required in abundance.

◆ When your business is second-, third- or even fourth-generation and now it's yours to run. The wonderful pride of that. And, yes, the nagging pressure of upholding the legacy.

→ Getting to explain what the sign business actually entails to those who think signage just magically appears on buildings. They are always surprised (and impressed) by the number of moving parts — site visits, design, mock-ups, production drawings, fabrication, quality control, engineering, public-safety logistics (land/sidewalk closures, transportation/shipping and installation).

→ No two days are alike. As long as that door is open, you are one sale away from a great day.

◆ Working with family, appreciating the time you get to spend together.

→ The respect you get when you tell people you built your own business.

◆  
Being your own boss, if you can.

→  
People thinking all sign-business owners are rich and successful. They are wrong, but it feels good anyway.

Working from home, if you can.



→ Knowing every business person in town. Your clients make a big fuss over you at the grocery store and tell everyone you were the one who put the beautiful sign in front of their business.

→ **Bonus 41st awesome thing. You've got one of the longest-running trade publications in the world serving your market. Yep, Signs of the Times started all the way back in 1906. We think that's pretty awesome ... and we hope you agree.**



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