

# Next-Gen NeoCon®

**Tech start-up Designer Pages and MMPI partner to merge the physical and digital show experience for NeoCon® 2010 attendees**

Are you on LinkedIn? Facebook? What about Twitter? If you're an A&D professional, your answer is likely no. Although designers are the pioneers of style innovation, the industry as a whole is ironically far behind on the social media front. However, tech start-up Designer Pages (DP) is aiming to get the industry up to speed through a partnership with the Merchandise Mart (MMPI) to seamlessly integrate online sharing opportunities at NeoCon®.

The collaboration started when DP exhibited at NeoCon® 2008 and piqued MMPI interest with its socially powered product search platform. The two companies explored the benefits of a partnership, as both had a similar goal to help manufacturers reach buyers. "They're doing it with showrooms, and we're doing it via pixels on the screen," explains Jacob L. Slevin, co-founder and CEO of DP. "The partnership is to really think about how we can merge the physical and digital search experience, starting with trade shows but then taking that to showrooms, design centers, as far as we can."

NeoCon® 2009 saw the partnership's first leg. DP sponsored a Twitter-inspired installation—a scrolling, visual Twitter feed displaying all tweets generated from the show floor. DP arranged for a group of Citizen Bloggers, comprising more than 30 design students, to cover the event and tweet about their findings. The "experiment" was a huge success, with a minimum of one tweet per minute for three straight days.

"Last year everyone walking by was like, 'What is Twitter?'" says Slevin. "The purpose of the installation was to express how Twitter is a tool to generate useful information...how the Web can help the way we work. It was able to help thousands experience NeoCon® as though they were in the Mart themselves."

Building on last year's success, Designer Pages is adding another key player to the collaboration:

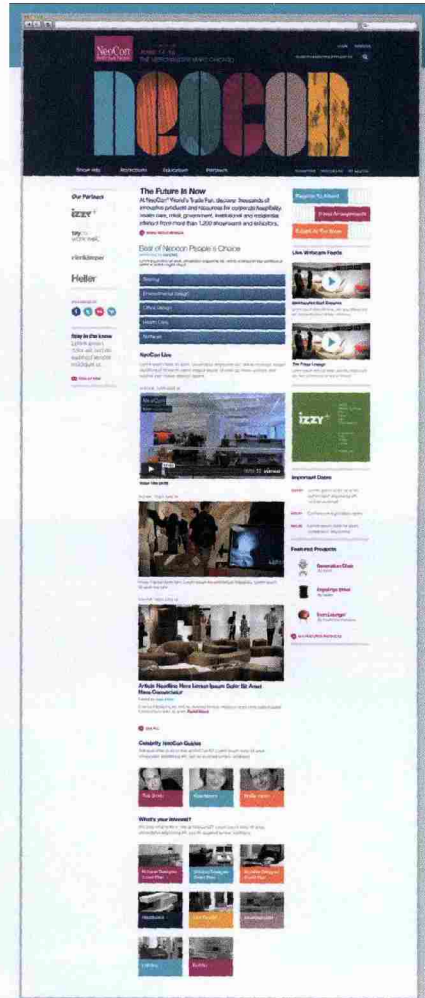
*Contract* magazine will help generate content and support for NeoCon® Live (live.neocon.com), the show's virtual press room and a one-stop-news-shop for the A&D community. The online platform will aggregate and display live editorial content, photos, and videos from a variety of design blogs, publications, and tweets and encourage others to join in the conversation.

This year more than 40 Citizen Bloggers, including *Contract* associate editor Stacy Straczynski, will contribute to NeoCon® Live's real-time updates, as they tweet about new products and seminars. As an added bonus, the three most prolific bloggers will win an opportunity to be regular contributors to *Contract's* TalkContract.com blog for a year.

According to Slevin, The NeoCon® Live portion is very much tied to the Twitter application from last year in that both aim to showcase that in an environment like NeoCon® all attendees can offer valuable information to collectively paint a picture of the day's events.

"In collaboration with the Mart and *Contract* magazine, we have the support to gain more participation, more contributions," Slevin says. "We're trying to create a global feed of the editorials from every source so attendees can access it very easily. Having *Contract* contribute is going to validate that exercise deeply."

*Contract* also is helping DP gain support for the new My NeoCon® component, the event's first online tool that allows members of the A&D community to plan their show experience on a printable NeoCon® Guide of the Mart and preview products showing on the floor. The tool includes a heavy social component, which allows users to share their product picks and NeoCon® Guide with colleagues. *Contract* editor-in-chief Jennifer Busch is one of six design celebrities who is actively sharing her NeoCon® Guide at my.neocon.com.



"As we celebrate our 50th anniversary and look to the future, *Contract* is happy to be working with Designer Pages to help push NeoCon®—and the industry—into the digital age," says Busch. "The opportunity dovetails nicely with our own goals of expanding our online presence and offerings."

Even more capabilities will be available at future NeoCon® events. DP and MMPI are planning a mobile integrated product search that will enable attendees to snap photos of their favorite products and save them to a virtual NeoCon.com and DesignerPages.com workspace. The key to acceptance of these new features among the social media-hesitant A&D community will be a gradual integration and providing the "what's in it for me factor." 