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NeoCon's momentum builds toward 2012

By Amy Joyce Rush

Merchandise Mart Properties Inc. (MMPI) has reported that attendance at last month's NeoCon was up 4 percent. But more important, said newly named president of MMPI Mark Falanga, was the level of conversations and the buzz of new business that took place during the Chicago show. And, Falanga said that the 2012 event is already off to a strong start.

"It's a nice increase but aside from the numbers, when you walk around the show, there was a feeling. Every showroom and booth was pleased with the quality and quantity of traffic. I think that, by in large, the common sentiment was that there was a lot more specific talk about projects than in the last several years and a sense that business has picked up," said Falanga.

Falanga said that there is optimism in the marketplace that business has returned.



Newly named president of MMPI, Mark Falanga

"Businesses that have held off are opening up their wallets. Those companies that continue to invest in new products will benefit."

With NeoCon 2011 having come to a successful close, Falanga and his team are looking ahead to what they expect to be a robust 2012 show.

"We had a strong re-sign — something around 70 or 80 percent of exhibitors re-signed for next year. That's the most tangible indicator for us."

He said that one trend is companies expanding their show space and that this is affecting current 2012 numbers. "Re-sign would be even better if it wasn't for requested expansions. We need to re-sort the floor plan and it's too complicated to sort out at the show."

On deck for NeoCon 2012 is the continued building of products at the show. "Expect us to deepen the level of resources of each category that we are in and expand new cat-

egories and pavilions," said Falanga.

One thing that will be added in 2012 is a pavilion dedicated to the education sector. "To me, there has been a sea change in the type of furniture available for the education market place. Long ago, the desks were more traditional and isolating people. The furniture available today for education purposes has taken on the same trend as office furniture — fun, exciting and [about] facilitating collaborative efforts. It's a great trend for floor coverings too. That should be an area to expect to see more of next year as well as more variety in new categories such as lighting."

As far as floor covering-specific plans, Falanga said, "I think that we would like to do more with tile and stone. This campaign is a campaign of making new friends while keeping the old ones. We've had a great experience with floor covering and we want to continue to broaden that category and its total representation and offering here. We want to provide the best for the design community." **FCW**