In discussing the rapid development of demountable partitions with the Southern Building Code Congress in 1968, J. H. Bacon of National Gypsum Company said: “Perhaps the only major problem the building official may face with the onrush of movable partitions is to get the office address fast enough, in light of his busy schedule. With a movable partition, you can’t be sure that today’s address will be the same tomorrow.”

With the present booming market in demountable (or movable) partitions, it would appear that Mr. Bacon’s tongue-in-cheek forecast of nine years ago has become today’s reality.

The reasons for the rapid and steady increase in the use of demountable partitions are several and can be summed up simply as an idea whose time has come. It is one of the fastest growing segments of the building industry and the profit potential is excellent.

Wayne Vaughn is generally given much credit for the impetus and development of demountable partitions during the 50’s, and there are partitions in the field today that bear his name. Much developmental work was done by several gypsum companies in the early 50’s to mid 60’s and then demand for the product began to steadily increase.

Growth in use of the product since 1967 has been phenomenal with demand for demountable partitions virtually doubling each year (Continued on Page 28)
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with the exception of 1975. Increasing demand for flexibility in office layout in particular has prompted the development of partitions that meet performance requirements previously only met by permanent systems. These demands have been met so well by the gypsum manufacturers that there are many markets today where demountable partitions are the rule and fixed partitions the exception. In addition, much commercial remodeling today involves tearing down fixed walls to replace them with movable ones.

Basically, demountable partitions are high performance interior partitions for office, institutional and school buildings which combine the design flexibility to movable walls with the appearance and serviceability of permanent walls. Their advantages are many and significant in today's construction market.

They can be taken down and reinstalled in a matter of hours, without damage or expensive material replacement, thereby meeting tenant requirements now and in the future. This is of critical importance, since today’s building owner wants action fast. Once a tenant has served notice he is going to move, the building owner wants that space readied for a new tenant as quickly as possible. His prime interest is a local contractor who will give him rapid, quality service. The contractors who can do the job fast and well are assured of repeat business. If you have the material available to you and can deliver in a hurry, you are in an excellent position to capitalize on business from office building managers in a hurry. And the potential for profit in demountable partitions is great.

Today’s demountable partitions are versatile and esthetically pleasing. They offer a freedom of design that makes them adaptable to virtually any building plan or to any change in plan for that matter. Bank rail, corners and ceiling systems use the same basic components, differing only in type and placement of studs. Building managers today are interested in the total life cost of a building, not just the expense of installation. Relocation, maintenance and remodeling expenses are important considerations. Modern demountable partitions are better looking with trim, sharp, clean lines. A leased building owner knows he is in competition with the guy down the street. He knows that if his space is better looking, it will give him a decided advantage.

Time savings can be a big selling point. A job can often be completed in one or two days by one contracting crew. A one-time shot that saves time—and time is money to a leasing agent. It bears repeating here that availability is very important to the contractor. The contractor who has all of the components in stock is at a definite advantage. Some tenants will want different things and the man who can satisfy these needs most rapidly has the inside track on getting the job.

The biggest single stumbling block in selling the customer on the use of demountable partitions is the original installed unit cost. This will have to be an important part of your selling story. The cost gap between movable and permanent partitions has been narrowing for years. Today it is possible to have a demountable partition at no greater cost than a permanent partition. A contractor should be ready to point out the cost advantages already mentioned, plus the time and cost savings gained by other related trades due to the speed with which a demountable partition can be installed.

The contractor bidding a demountable partition job should keep the entire interior job in mind. He will have to talk about building codes, fire and sound ratings. He must have complete and accurate information when he bids the job. His bid must be in compliance with the code. A comprehensive source for this information is the Gypsum Association Fire Resistance Manual. The most recent edition lists some 23 demountable partitions. Such information is also available from individual manufacturers.

A great many building owners who have successfully and profitably leased space to tenants for long periods of time are strong in their insistence on demountable partitions. They have learned from experience the advantages of taking down and moving a wall without the bother of a lot of debris, dust, and interruption of office work.
It might also be pointed out that movable partitions which are not part of the original building qualify for an investment tax credit of 10%—another important advantage to the owner.

The increasing awareness of the many advantages of demountable partitions by building owners and managers makes it easy to see why this market has been leaping ahead in recent years. The job still has to be bid and sold, but the market demand for the versatility of demountable partitions makes it an increasing source of business—

and profit—for the forward-looking contractor. With the 1977 construction forecast for office buildings and schools up 10%, and stores and other commercial structures up 20%, the contractor looking to the future is looking more and more to demountable partitions.