Demountables Still a Good Market

The Open Office Movement Actually Stimulated Demountable Partition Sales So It’s Still an Expanding, Profitable Market

For awhile there, some people were advancing the idea that the open office revolution had replaced demountable partitions in the minds of smart building owners. There are a number of fallacies in that argument.

For one thing, open office planning is not exactly a revolution and has accounted for considerably less business than many of its proponents would have you believe.

The other thing is: demountable partitions dropped off along with all other construction during the recent recession but bounced back just as lustily. Demountable sales among AWCI contractors alone last year amounted to some $50,000,000. That’s a lot of demountable partitions.

The economics that made demountable partitions the attractive buy in the past are still operating. Inflation has indeed struck the demountable market, too, but building developers and owners recognize the speed, efficiency, and profit potential in partitioning off a building with demountables.

For the contractors who are in the business, prospects are still strong—and improving steadily. With the currently booming market in demountables, it would appear that this is a product whose time is near-to-coming . . . if not already here.

It is still fast growing. It still has excellent prospects. The profit potential remains outstanding.

From the time that the late Wayne Vaughn provided the initial impetus and development of demountable partitions in the 50s, demountables have continued to grow. Partitions bearing his name are still installed—and many regard a “Vaughn Wall” as the epitome of excellence — along with outstanding systems by major manufacturers. Once demountables got
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The specifications on noise, strength, flexibility, etc. were so well met by the gypsum manufacturers that there are numerous markets currently where demountable partitions are regularly accepted over permanent, traditional walls. In short, demountables are the rule not the exception in many cases.

Ready Market . . .

From a fundamental viewpoint, contractors will find the most ready markets where high performance interior partitioning is needed in office, institutional and school buildings. It’s in these areas where design flexibility of movable walls combine with appearance and serviceability. A contractor can actually tear out and install new panels while the building is occupied and used.

When a contractor can inform a buyer that work can proceed in the building even while office routines go on uninterrupted, the benefits of demountables get a positive hearing.

Their other 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.

Versatile Systems . . .

Today’s demountable partitions are versatile and aesthetically 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. Modem 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.

Entire Job . . .

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 modern 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.