

SYSTEMS CHECK

Modular trends for a changing economy

When budgets get crunched and the economy gets tough, modular systems get looked at a lot more closely. While some designers look at systems as an alternative to what has traditionally been a custom mentality in the U.S., economic realities are prompting more and more creative departments to see how they can push the limits of more affordable systems.

The new economy has forced designers to take a close look at how to design with systems and get more creative with them.

“When systems were first introduced to the marketplace they were used in very generic ways, and I think the initial perception from the design community was that there were a lot of limits placed on systems. Over the years they’ve become so sophisticated that designers recognize that and they are able to create truly custom designs using systems, and many times within a budget that has been greatly reduced,” says Octanorm USA president Norm Freidrich.

Here’s a look at what systems experts are talking about in 2010.

Fabric Integration. There’s a lot of structure combined with fabric out on show

floors, and don’t expect that to change anytime soon. The trend is to go big and light, as clients don’t want to reduce the image, and designers want to reduce the weight.

That’s what we’ve been focusing on the last couple of years, and we’ve been developing a multitude of ways to attach fabric graphics to modular structures,” Freidrich says.

Fabric graphics have come a long way, and with new advances in dye sublimation, designers are able to print on a variety of different tension fabrics.

“They are able to do it in much larger formats, but they’re also able to conform to a lot of different shapes. Not just rectangles, squares, and linear shapes, but curved shapes,” Freidrich says.

Rental Options. Many modular systems were developed in Europe, where clients

usually don’t purchase structures; they pay for a design that is dismantled and reused after the show for other projects.

Because end-user clients have seen success overseas with this concept, it is now becoming a larger part of what they are doing in North America.

“Even the word rental had a negative stigma because people thought they were getting a used car. But systems have become very sophisticated. I think people are learning to live with less. When you learn to work and do more with less you end up becoming a much more efficient organization and the exhibit managers out there are learning that this may be something they need to do—rentals, systems aren’t such a bad idea.” Freidrich says.

One-stop. Offering clients simple, one-stop solutions that are extremely versatile and easy to work with is another trend.

“We’re offering more one-stop solutions where designers can select from four different extrusions, and that allow for customization from project to project,” says Patrick Carrig, a manager with Orbus.

Providing clients with custom-tailored renderings for each project, and the flexibility of dye sublimation fabric printing for a full range of graphics, adds to the convenience factor.

Green. Two years ago, the green revolution seemed poised to be the next-big-thing, but, “the reality of the situation is that it costs more to be green. I think if people take a look at systems they’ll realize it doesn’t cost more to be green, it costs less. I think it’s been put on hold because of our economic situation as a nation,” Freidrich says.

But that doesn’t mean that green’s rise to the top will be halted.

“I think we will revisit the whole concept of green exhibiting and sustainable products in the exhibition industry and it will really start to take effect,” Freidrich says. ■

