

Suppliers create tools for success

By Tarja Kern

[LAS VEGAS] Tile and stone companies brought their "A game" to Surfaces 2013, delivering merchandising tools and sure-fire new products that will prepare dealers for the housing rebound that the industry is eagerly anticipating.

"The show has been spectacular," said Bob Baldocchi, director of marketing at Emser Tile. "We are all about showing new products and merchandising and design concepts, and we've had great reactions. I think the traffic for the show has been a little bit down, but we've had very targeted, meaningful appointments with our key contacts. People we want to see, we've seen."

Added Glen Bush, operations and sales manager at EmilAmerica, "We've gotten a lot of newer leads over last year, and we have a lot of business to follow up on and hopefully close."

There was a lot of optimism across the show floors.

"Business has been fantastic," said Sean Cilona, marketing director for Florida Tile. "Last year was one of our best years, and we are definitely seeing growth year over year."

The Florida Tile team opted for a low-key meeting room on the show floor instead of a booth so that it could hold one-on-one meetings with customers. Cilona said the company aims to expand its distribution on the West Coast and in the Southwest.

"Our main business before the downturn was new construction and we lost that when the market went down," said Eddie Bedrosian, marketing director at Bedrosian's Tile & Stone. "Then remodels and foreclosures were big for us. Now, we're seeing movement in the business."

Lori Kirk-Rolley, senior marketing director at Dal-Tile also sees forward movement: "We are beginning to see some really positive indicators in building and home construction. Projections are pretty good going into 2013 from NAHB [National Association of Home Builders], and most importantly, our customers are experiencing some good things."



Tim Perdieu, owner, Tile & Stone Warehouse

Farrell Gerber, owner of Tile Redi, reported improvement on the commercial end of the business. "On our end, hospitality renovation has really been on an uptick," he said. "On the residential side, people are staying in their homes and they want to remodel their bathrooms, put something in there that is upscale and nice — and they can do themselves."

Show attendees reported that the new format, which separated tile and stone from soft surfaces, also made a positive difference.

"It has been a lot more upbeat than most shows in the past," said Shaun Coe, sales representative for NCC Tiles, a manufacturer and distributor in Anaheim, Calif. "I think that the separation from the carpet and hard surface is definitely helping to keep the concentration."

Tim Perdieu, owner of Tile & Stone Warehouse in Merriam, Kan., also noted that the show layout worked well. "We are here looking for new product, and I am looking for some new stuff that my vendors don't have. If we can find things that are unique that they don't have, then my customers won't be shopping around. We picked up a bunch of stuff from MarMe [Tile & Stone]. Their price point

appeal. White marbles, detailed mosaics, faux stone with tons of variation, and wood looks with lots of texture dominated the aisles.

"We are finding that people are looking for new and exotics, we offer some of those things, and the number one thing is value," said Coe of NCC Tiles.

Sizes continue to increase, with manufacturers rolling out super-sized porcelains that can be used on the walls, stair treads and countertops. Bedrosian's Tile & Stone, for example, showcased 5 x 10 marble-look porcelain that Bedrosian said they plan to use as exterior cladding on a new showroom soon. The company revamped its entire product line over the past year, which included more

than 3,000 SKUs, and introduced a dozen new glass lines at Surfaces.

Surfaces provided Crossville with an opportunity to get feedback from retailers on a prototype merchandising system for high-end showrooms that the company is developing for launch at the Coverings Show in April. "It's much more comprehensive, taking some of the best of our distributor showrooms, like our grouted panels and color wall, with some of the more functional attributes of a flooring showroom, like a wing

rack, and blending them all together," said Lindsey Waldrep, vice president of marketing for Crossville. "From a marketing standpoint, our strategy for commercial and residential is to be more in touch with our retailers and our designers and putting ourselves in positions where we can do that."

Emser Tile revealed a new merchandising concept, called "Design Made Easy," that simplifies the selection process for the homeowner. "We built a system that can bring together coordinated looks and lifestyles by pointing you in the direction of the types of products you want or editing out looks or concepts that you don't want so that you can narrow your search," Baldocchi said.



Design Made Easy is a new merchandising concept by Emser Tile.

