

DiMare unfolds new booth design

If you haven't yet met architect Dario DiMare, chances are you haven't been to NEXPO before. Aside from being famous throughout the industry for his innovative newspaper facility designs—and the home-cooked meatballs he introduced at last year's conference—DiMare is infamous among NEXPO vendors for blowing away the competition with fanciful booth displays for his firm, Dario Designs Inc. (Booth 2114)

For four straight years, Dario Designs has won the award for best booth design at NEXPO, as voted on by conference organizers.

Most of his previous designs were based on a series of stacked or cascading cubes. This year, DiMare has exploded and unfolded the cube concept in his 100-foot-long-by-10-foot-wide booth, creating a zig-zagging series of connected panels that resemble a fan fold.

To continue the theme of bringing more clients "into the fold," DiMare sent out a mass mailing of fan-folded inserts on card stock, which can be folded into his trademark cube shape. Attendees who bring him a correctly assembled puzzle will win a prize, he said.

DiMare doesn't spend this much time and money on such bells and whistles just because he is a born showman—at least not entirely. "To him, NEXPO is an investment that always pays off. "Without a doubt, it's our best show," he said.

"Being at NEXPO is like advertising at the Super Bowl. Over the last four years we've walked out with a half-inch pile of business cards from interested clients, and a quarter-inch of the stack was for RFPs (request for proposals). We didn't have time to get to the bottom of the pile!" Last year, within a month after NEXPO, DiMare signed six new contracts and wrote a dozen other proposals, he said. This year's show started off just as well. On Friday evening, DiMare helped broker an agreement with the Frederick (Md.) News-Post to purchase a new press from TKS (Booth 2522). The eight-figure deal, he said, was consummated with a simple handshake.

"The face-to-face contact you get is critical," DiMare said. "We have 30 to 40 working meetings at each NEXPO—so many that I have to plan them months in advance. What would it cost to see that many people around the country individually? It would take three to four months, minimum. Here, we can do it all in four days."

NEXPO also provides vendors with vicarious credibility. DiMare said. "Potential clients see you working with all of their peers...that's why I pay out of my own pocket to come here. The money I spend will come back to me tenfold."

Today, his firm concentrates exclusively on consulting and design services for all aspects of newspaper facilities, from the newsroom to the packaging department. For the last five years, Dario Designs has worked on an average of 30 newspaper projects per year.

This year, DiMare will promote recent agreements



his company made with MKK Consulting Engineers in Denver, Speight Marshal & Francis in Virginia Beach, Va., and ES Millennium in Boston to provide his company with engineering, structural design, and environmental and safety auditing services, respectively. Representatives from each of the companies will be featured in DiMare's NEXPO booth. Success for DiMare, however, has hardly come overnight. His firm's cost projections were often a hard sell.

"We might say a project will cost \$150 a square foot, while some other firms might say they could do the same for \$100. But, does this lower estimate include all the other soft costs? Does this include the ink systems, fountain solution, vacuum design, RO water system? What about the compressors?"

If a customer took the lower bid, DiMare said he would follow up with them a few years after the project was complete to inquire as to how it went.

"They tell me, 'Dario, you were right'" he said. "I always say that if you do one bad project, you lose 20 more. If we have a chance to compete, we may lose the job but we'll win the customer in the long run. ■"