WOMEN in Modular Construction

Their love of the industry, the challenges they’ve overcome, and the future of modular.

A Look Back at World of Modular 2020

Inside Dodge Data & Analytics’ Latest SmartMarket Report

Government Affairs Continuing to Make Progress
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Hello Readers,

I want to first thank you for electing me as the chair of the board of directors of MBI this year. Since being voted in at our annual conference, it seems like everything has been turned upside down due to the coronavirus. But I want to take a minute to highlight some of accomplishments of our industry and our association.

The 2020 World of Modular Conference was by all accounts a tremendous success. Perhaps it was lucky that held the event a little earlier in the year than we normally do, just wrapping up our conference before the shutdowns began. Over 900 people participated in the event making it the second largest industry conference ever held. I want to thank the exhibitors, sponsors, and all attendees who showed up to make this a great event.

Then things changed the following week as many of our schools and business were closed. But our industry responded quickly to this challenge. As Chair, I created a COVID Task Force to help guide the MBI staff during those chaotic early weeks. MBI reached out to its members to gather data and created a crisis response page with updates, company capabilities, and other resources to help end users address massive space needs quickly. The MBI team has been aggressively promoting the industry to federal, state, provincial, and local policy makers and has directly contacted over 500 government representatives to help educate them on our industry. I want to thank all our members who have provided MBI with valuable information and data to help position the industry in the best possible light.

Prior to this crisis, the focus of this edition of Modular Advantage was to highlight various female leaders in our industry. And while some of the interviews were conducted “pre-crisis,” we felt it was important to share those stories here to demonstrate the diversity and opportunity within the modular construction industry.

If you have any questions, concerns, or story ideas for future editions, I encourage you to reach out to the team at MBI. Thank you for your continued support of the industry association.

Sincerely,

Drew Welborn

Whitley Manufacturing

MBI Board Chair
Thank you to the 2020 MBI Corporate Sponsors

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A LOOK BACK AT MODULAR.ORG
Diana Atvars, Jackson Main Architects

“We’ve had tons of visitors to our booth so far. It’s been amazing.”
Michele Blackburn, Johns Mansville

“MBI has done a great job delivering the best possible experience.”
Pedro Tavares, R&S Tavares Associates

“This is best trade show for the modular market in the United States.”
Andy Berube, Stack Modular

“World of Modular has been fantastic. It gets busier and busier every year.”
Ronald Lanzo, AFR Furniture Rental

“I’ve been doing trade shows for five decades. We accomplished more today than we’ve done in the last two months in terms of contacts.”
Brett Callaghan, Progress Carolina, LLC

“I came here wanting to implement modular construction into our company and I’m just awestruck. There’s so much information. It’s a very good show.”
SAVE THE DATE

2021 WORLD OF MODULAR
ANNUAL CONVENTION & TRADESHOW
MARCH 6-9, 2021
San Diego
Earlier this year, Dodge Data & Analytics, with the support of the Modular Building Institute, released the findings of a landmark study that provides a comprehensive look of the current state and future expectations for prefabrication and modular construction. The Prefabrication and Modular Construction 2020 SmartMarket Report takes a close look at critical drivers, obstacles and benefits of using these construction methods based on insight from the architects, engineers and contractors already leveraging them.

Just before presenting these findings at MBI’s World of Modular, Donna Laquidara-Carr, Industry Insights Research Director for Dodge Data & Analytics, made time for a quick interview. Here is the abridged version of our conversation.

Tell me about your team. Who are the people doing the research and handling the data?

On our team at Dodge there were three of us working on this project. Steve Jones, who is our Senior Director of Industry Insights, was the primary author of this report. He was also very involved in the overall vision of what it should be about. Susan Barnett is our person who handles research. She is our research guru—the one who makes sure none of our questions were biased, and everything makes sense and everything is clear and understandable and unambiguous. And then I’m sort of the jack-of-all-trades in the middle. I help with the initial survey content. I work with the partners to keep them organized. I edit the report. I help with the press release at the end. Essentially, I’m the person on the ground running the day-to-day.

How long did it take you and your team—start to finish—to put together and release the SMR?

Overall, I would say the whole process took about 9 months. The first part is the research and that’s
actually the longer part. We had to bring several partners together. We had to work on a survey that satisfied everyone’s needs and still met the time limit—which is only 10-12 minutes. So that was a rather long and involved process. But we expected it to be.

So how did you go about obtaining the data you used in the SMR?

Dodge has a lot of resources internally to do this kind of research. We used our panel of architects and contractors—and this is unique in the industry: we have about 3,000 contractors and about 5,000 architects who have agreed, “Yes, we will take your surveys.” So that allows us to have a very quick turnaround with surveys and get a pretty well-balanced feedback. So we relied on that network for our architect and contractor responses. In addition to that, to get the engineers we went to the larger Dodge database because Dodge has a lot of contacts. And we also had research partners. MBI, for example, was really a critical research partner. MBI made sure we were actually getting modular builders who might not be in our Dodge database and who definitely wouldn’t be on our panels.

What resources do you use to collect the data, and how is it analyzed once you have it?

Almost everything in the report is based on an online survey. We have an internal survey program that we use that’s rather sophisticated and that’s where Susan comes in. She
manages that piece of it. We also did in-depth interviews with owners. MBI helped us to find owners who are engaged in modular building. So we talked to several owners as part of a qualitative review, and it really did add additional insights. Especially when you look at the findings, which say the big thing you need in order to get modular going is the owner saying, “Yes.” So, we thought that piece was particularly important. And those interviews were done by phone. Just calling up the owners and having a very structured interview.

**What made you decide to conduct this research in the first place?**

We had done a study on prefabrication and modular construction back in 2011. And for the last couple of years, we realized that now was a really good time to return to it. We had originally hoped to be able to compare our current findings to past findings, but when we looked at the study we’d done in 2011, we had lumped modular and prefab together. Now, I don’t know if that made sense in 2011, but it certainly does not make sense now. So, we had to scrap the old one and just start from scratch. But we’ve known for a while—we do a lot of research on BIM, by the way—that BIM is an important resource for promoting prefabrication and modular and that it can really make those processes a lot easier. We were interested to see if these processes—which have been around for decades—really were getting new attention and new life.

**What impact do you hope this data will have on the industry?**

It’s interesting, because when I think about the impact I’m thinking more about the impact on the industry members at large—prepping them for the idea that this is really going to be something that takes off. So getting them ready for it was really what was primary for me.

On the other hand, I think that if you’re well-versed in modular, none of the findings are going to be that surprising. But it’s very helpful—instead of you just saying to a client or a potential partner “Well, this is how we think productivity has improved”—to have third-party research conducted across the industry that confirms what you say and what you know to be so powerful about this method of construction, that has real value to the industry.

**Did anything surprise you during the process of collecting the data? Anything unexpected?**

I think the only thing that I was surprised with in the data—and it’s funny how often this keeps happening—is that we know how important early collaboration is to these efforts. So, we just assumed that everyone was going to find design-bid-build a huge hindrance to modular prefabrication projects. In fact, only 20% report that it’s an actual hindrance. So, there’s obviously more positive comments about more collaborative methods.
A CLOSER LOOK

The charts below detail how architects/engineers, GCs/CMs, and trade contractors measure the top impacts of modular construction.¹

### Architects/Engineers (% Reporting Medium, High, or Very High Contribution)

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but this notion that you have to have the delivery system to do this successfully, I think the study rather debunks it.

**And lastly, what's next on your to-do list? Is there a new report in the works?**

There's always a new report in the works! Right now we're trying to launch a heavy civil quarterly. We're just in the process of getting that put together with a series of partners. And that's really going to be exciting. It's going to be a quarterly publication that's going to look at the heavy civil construction world and gauge the health of that industry on a quarter-by-quarter basis. And it's going to cover special “feature” topics every time, too. So, that should be very interesting.
Women in Modular Construction

The modular construction industry is not afraid to challenge conventions. Women in our corner of the construction industry challenge conventions every day simply because of their gender. Here, thirteen women share their thoughts on the effect of their gender on their career, what they love about the industry, current challenges in the field, and the future of modular construction. It would be easy to have an entire story focused on each woman’s comments, but this article shares brief highlights of each conversation.

How is the Image of Modular Construction Changing?

Ewelina Woźniak-Szpakiewicz is the CEO and Managing Director of DMD Modular, based in Cracow, Poland. She’s also an inaugural member of MBI’s European Council.

“Modular construction combines many different values and attributes,” she says. “The combination of challenges, innovation, experimentation, and international relationships yields unique solutions.”

The result is the improved image of modular construction.

“More architects are becoming interested, and the projects are getting more exciting. This has accelerated the delivery of high quality, complex, innovative solutions and is sweeping away the old perceptions of ugly, cheap, temporary solutions.” Woźniak-Szpakiewicz says.

“The hospitality market is a serious driver of this change in perception. When industry titans like Marriott or Hilton launch modular programs, it has a huge impact on the image of modular construction.”
How Does Modular Design Differ From Conventional Design?

Based in Chicago, USA, Angela Spadoni is the Director of Residential Architecture at Skender.

“In modular design, the architects and designers interact from the beginning with the construction and manufacturing team — even before schematic design. In conventional construction, architects often work in a bubble with consultants for quite some time before bringing the contractors on board.”

Although the process is different, the results are aesthetically comparable.

“There’s nothing in my past work in conventional construction that I couldn’t do modularly. In fact, my interest in modular stemmed from my frustration that many architectural components for multi-family residential construction are repetitive. I hope as time progresses, we’ll standardize more of the repetitive elements such as bathrooms and kitchens, so we don’t have to spend so much time re-drawing those. Then we can focus more on elements like the exterior and be more creative there and push the boundaries, design-wise.”

How Can Diversity Help in Modular Construction?

“How Can Diversity Help in Modular Construction?”

“Right now, modular is the sexy part of construction. It’s exciting and fun,” says Kathy Wilmot, Co-owner of Wilmot Modular Structures, based in Maryland, USA. “I’m glad to see more women getting involved — more women contractors, architects, engineers.”

But being a woman in construction can be challenging.

“A man is automatically perceived as knowing what he’s doing. A woman has to prove that she knows what she’s talking about. So, my biggest advice to women entering this industry is to become an expert at what you’re doing, and know how to explain it succinctly and simply — so you come across as the expert you are.”

Men in the industry can help, Wilmot adds.

“Women can bring a different perspective to boards. Diversity of all kinds results in better decisions. Once men in leadership roles appreciate that, they’ll want to have more women and minorities involved.”

Why Is It a Good Time for Women to Get Involved?

“I’m used to being in uncomfortable situations and feeling out of my element. I’m an immigrant, a minority, a business owner, an architect,” says Sara Logan, the Vice President of Design at Volumetric Building Companies in Boston, USA.

“I walk into a room and people are often surprised — they have no idea how I fit in. I’ve felt somewhat of an outsider since I came to the United States, so being a woman in construction doesn’t seem any different. There still aren’t a lot of women in the industry and I would encourage them to get into it.”

Mitzi Garcia
Logan thinks that now is an especially good time for women to get involved.

“The modular industry is in its relative infancy, so gender roles are less-ingrained. You have more freedom to forge your own path and that’s one of the reasons this industry is so exciting to me. Everyone is blazing their own trail.”

How Can Education Help?

Mitzi Garcia is the Federal Contracts Manager for Modular Solutions in Arizona, USA.

“‘When I speak to girls and young women, they often don’t know what construction involves, or what modular construction is. I tell them about the many opportunities in construction that aren’t just hammering nails.’”

As well as educating others, Garcia has benefited from education about modular construction herself.

“I came from an administrative background, and when I decided to stay in the modular industry, MBI helped me learn. They have classes, training opportunities, and will even take one-on-one time with you. Through their mentor programs, you can meet people to discuss what they’ve tried and learned.”

“Education is key. Going into schools, talking with vocational students, using MBI resources — and also using our own websites and social media. People are looking online for information. We can provide it and help educate people about modular construction.”

What’s Another Good Way to Learn?

“Find a mentor,” says Melissa Potter, a Journeyman Plumber at an ATCO facility in Calgary, Canada.

“When I was doing maintenance plumbing work for the University of Alberta, I worked with a group of older gentlemen. They taught me so many cool tricks! I was warned about one fellow, though. I was told he didn’t like women getting into plumbing. They avoided putting me with him,” Potter says. “Then, about eight months into the job, I got stuck with him. We ended up having a blast! I’ve been lucky — my gender has never been an issue.”

Potter loves learning, which is part of the appeal of working in modular construction.
“Usually, a jobsite is huge and you have a big area to work in by yourself. Modular is more challenging for a plumber. Here, you could have five or six people working in one room at the same time. It’s a quicker pace and we need to come up with safe solutions for tight working quarters.”

What Challenges Have You Faced With Modular Construction?

At ICON Architecture in Boston, USA, Kendra Halliwell is the Associate Principal, Practice and Design Team Leader.

“In general, you should be able to save four to six months of construction time by using modular construction. On one of our recent projects, the client’s goal was to get the building operational and rented out earlier, so off-site fabrication was the best option.”

That worked well and the building was rented out significantly sooner than would have happened if they’d used conventional construction. But there were logistical challenges. “There are very few modular construction companies in the northeast and they’re very busy. Some of them are booked a year and a half into the future. Our fabricator was a five-hour drive away,” Halliwell says.

“I’d love to see more modular factories serving this part of the country. The market is in need of more housing, and off-site fabrication may be the answer.”

Is Cost a Challenge?

Until recently, Zoe Kennedy was Marketing and Sales Manager for the UK subsidiary of De Meeuw, a large European modular manufacturing company. She’s now switched gears and is doing a Masters in Off-Site Housing Construction.

“The key advantage of modular construction is the consistent high quality. Modular can also produce time savings of up to 50% compared to conventional construction, which means quicker ROC [return of capital]. We still have to be competitive on cost, though. And I’ve seen off-site come in at 30% more expensive than conventional construction."

To counter this cost challenge, Kennedy says that modular construction companies need to think like manufacturers.

“Manufacturing companies need consistent volume, otherwise fixed overheads result in uncontrolled costs. Consistent throughput is the only way we are going to see off-site construction go mainstream and help solve the housing shortage.”

Is Sexism a Challenge in Construction?

“When I first started looking for a construction job, companies around here said they needed people,” says April Harmon, a framer at Volumetric Building Companies in North Carolina, USA.

“But as soon as they found out I was a woman, they said, ‘No, we can’t use you.’ I was told flat out that the problem was that I’m a woman. One person said, ‘That would be great if you’d work with us. Also, are you single?’ As soon as I didn’t want to date him, he didn’t want to hire me.”
Things are different at VBC. “I was able to get in here and prove myself. To some of the guys, I do still have to prove myself every day. A few will never come around.”

Most co-workers have, though. “I love that my co-workers come to me to answer their questions. It took a while for some of them, but they know I know my stuff. That’s been very rewarding.”

Are More Women Getting Involved?

Ronda Orchard has worked in modular construction since 1989 when she started at R Homes. She is now the Lead in Final Finishing at an ATCO facility in Idaho, USA and has worked there for seven years.

“When I started my first job, there were a few people who took me under their wing and taught me how to build floors, frame walls, everything. Some of those people are now working here at ATCO. When I first started at R Homes, it was all men. I never had a problem with that. I just respected them, and they’ve always respected me back. It’s only here at ATCO that I’ve noticed more women getting involved. Here, we’ve got women in framing, in HVAC, in our
Women are starting to migrate into modular construction and they’re finding that it’s good work.”

What’s It Like To Work in a Modular Construction Factory?

Shelly Coutu is a Production Worker at Metric Modular, in British Columbia, Canada. She’s worked in five different factory departments during her eight years there, including as a saw operator. She now spends some of her workday in the plant, and some helping with the company’s admin.

“It’s nice that I work eight-hour days indoors, sometimes ten, if there’s overtime. I have friends and family who work long, hard days outside on conventional construction sites. They think it would be good to have my job!” she laughs.

“You do need to have a bit of a thick skin when you first start, though. The first couple of weeks were hard when I didn’t really know how to do very much, and didn’t know the safety procedures. There’s a big learning curve at the beginning. But I stuck it out and now I love working here.”

How Does Networking Help?

Phoenix Modular Elevator is based in Illinois, USA. Allison Allgaier is the Owner and President.

“We’re a teeny-tiny slice of the overall elevator market. There’s only one other company in the United States that makes modular elevators, but there are hundreds of conventional elevator companies. When contractors first discover us, they’re intrigued. But even if they hate the problems with site-built elevators and dealing with difficult elevator companies — it’s a case of the devil you know. With something
new and unfamiliar to them, like modular construction, they don’t know what might go wrong.”

This current lack of awareness and acceptance of modular construction is partly why networking has been so important for Allgaier.

“MBI is a great network. We can be in the exhibition section at the World of Modular and everyone gets modular. The value proposition is very apparent to them. We have a lot of repeat customers who are MBI members.”

How Can Collaboration Help?

“I’ve asked general contractors, ‘If you could get modular manufacturers to do one thing, what would it be?’” says Dafna Kaplan, Founder and CEO of Cassette, a modular design-build startup based in Los Angeles, USA.

“A big one was the standardization of the MEP [mechanical, electrical, plumbing] connections on modules. It’s an investment for general contractors to learn on their first modular project. But that investment pays off less if, when they go to the next project, things are done completely differently.”

“As providers, let’s come together and make it easier for the bold GCs who are learning to work on modular projects. Let’s try to agree on some standard things, like connections. Now’s the time to do this, while the industry is still small. It’s on my to-do list this year to reach out to colleagues in steel modular. I believe that the industry is in a place that rewards collaboration and knowledge-sharing. That collaboration excites me. It’s a thrilling time to be involved with modular construction.”

Zena Ryder is a freelance writer, specializing in writing about construction and healthcare. Her website is www.zenafreelancewriter.com.
modular.org is getting an
<UPGRADE>
Improved project database, member communities & more.
Stay tuned for your account activation email!
As John D. Rockefeller once said, “I always tried to turn every disaster into an opportunity.” Despite the unprecedented times we are living and working in surrounding COVID-19, it has presented opportunities for us to expand our outreach to regulators, emergency management leaders, state, federal and provincial leaders. Here at MBI, we’ve reached out to over 300 emergency management professionals in the US and Canada. Additionally, we’ve also completed the following work focused on promoting our industry during this pandemic:

- MBI has worked with the National Governor’s Association (NGA) to send a special email to all Governors with information about our industry and a link to our crisis response page. This information is now housed on the Resources Page for the NGA’s COVID-19 page for all Governors and their staff.
- The NGA’s liaison to The Federation for the Council of Canada Premiers also sent our information to every provincial Premier in Canada. MBI then followed up with each office.
- The President of the Western Governors Association shared this information with his Governors and confirmed many of their states were already working with some MBI members to meet their needs.
- Our information has been shared with the contacts MBI made at the NGA’s Winter Meeting for staffers. Most replied and were very appreciative of our offer for assistance.
- The Emergency Management Directors from every state and province have been given our industry information and crisis response link. Many responded and were appreciative of the outreach and complimented the information on our crisis response page.
- MBI’s lobbyist in Washington, DC, Max Perkins, has shared our industry’s information with FEMA and HUD staffers as well as members of Congress who oversee those entities.
- Max Perkins and I have also participated in weekly update calls with the NGA staff, governor’s staff and about 130 other companies
and organizations offering to provide assistance to the COVID-19 pandemic. These relationships will establish more pathways to information and influence that will allow MBI to promote the modular construction industry for other uses such as housing and future emergency response.

**Opportunity to Contact Local and State Representatives**

MBI has sent out the first emails in our new Phone2Action initiative. These emails allow members to directly contact their elected officials at the local, state, and provincial level.

As we’ve seen with the COVID-19 pandemic, most decisions on building needs are being made at the local and state levels. Depending on a member’s location, that member may only have state representative contact information available, but these are still invaluable connections that will help our industry share our capabilities and build stronger foundational relationships for future opportunities.

**State, Federal and Provincial Government Affairs**

Even though most regulatory agencies and government officials are working around the clock to provide assistance to COVID-19, MBI is still working on other government affairs issues that can impact the modular construction industry.

Here is a summary of items MBI is working on:

**PRO Act HB2474:**

The PRO Act is an unprecedented attempt to fundamentally change dozens of well-established labor laws without regard to their detrimental impact on open-shop firms, union contractors, and the economy. If enacted, the PRO Act would completely upend decades of work to balance employee and employer rights and restrictions settled in courts, the National Labor Relations Board, and Congress.

This bill passed the House and was assigned to the Senate Labor committee. MBI’s DC lobbyist was able to speak to the Chair of the committee to confirm that that bill would not be voted on and would not pass through the Senate committee.

**Fannie Mae**

New underwriting guidelines and release of funds guidance specific to modular construction were originally scheduled to be sent out by the end of April but have been pushed back due to Fannie Mae’s COVID-19 response.
**CMHC-Canada**
As with Fannie Mae, MBI is awaiting CMHC’s reply to our request for the change in their release of funds for modular projects.

**UL2600-Canada**
This is still being considered in the lengthy adoption phase.

**New York**
*S5420/A2933:*
These companion bills would essentially require any structure built in New York City to use NYC union labor for their welding, plumbing, HVAC, etc. regardless of where the structure is manufactured.

Both of these bills have significant sponsors in both state houses and the original sponsors are well backed by the NYC unions.

MBI has retained a lobbying firm in New York that has already begun working on this bill for us.

The legislature is currently in recess, but our lobbyist has spoken to the Senate Majority Leader’s office and confirmed the Senate bill will not come up for a floor vote. The Assembly side is a bit more conservative and once they return from recess the sponsor of A2933 has confirmed he is willing to meet with our lobbyist to discuss our concerns with the bill.

MBI will continue to monitor this bill very closely and take actions necessary to defeat it. We’re somewhat confident that even though the legislative session has been extended due to COVID-19, most of the extended time will be focused on that issue. We will keep members updated on this important topic.

**Georgia**
*Fire Code Change:*
The new Fire Marshal issued new guidelines requiring relocatable classrooms larger than 1,000 sq. ft will be required to have sprinkler systems installed and to be located at least 30 feet apart.

Ted Miltiades, the Georgia Director of Building Codes and Industrialized Buildings, has confirmed his department will continue to approve structures per their building code guidelines, but since this is a new safety code regulation, that will be regulated via the Fire Marshal’s office. We’ve made numerous attempts to contact the Fire Marshal’s office with no reply. We also started outreach to the Georgia Governor’s office prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and continue to try and reach his office via multiple channels. MBI will continue to work on this issue.

**Massachusetts**
*BBRS Study Committee:*
MBI remains in regular contact with Dan Walsh and as of this point the Study Committee is not scheduled to make any recommendations to the BBRS to change any regulations for our industry.
THERE IS SIMPLY NO GREATER WAY TO REACH KEY PARTNERS IN THE OFFSITE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY!

The Offsite Construction Expo offers a focused presentation of the abilities of offsite construction across all markets.

It features exhibits from offsite construction contractors, traditional contractors that have integrated offsite methods, offsite factories, transportation companies, architects, engineers, BIM suppliers, materials suppliers, and consultants of all types of offsite construction processes.
SELF-BRIDGING MATE-LINE

Self-Bridging Mate-Line, a pressure-sensitive adhesive tape with built-in bridging material, provides rigidity within the mate-line to eliminate additional support materials needed when using traditional single-ply tapes. It is UV stable and stays flexible in hot and cold temperatures and will not crack from building movement.

Specially developed scrim laminated to a cured butyl rubber tape and rolled onto a release liner.