

# BUILDEX Calgary 2009

Behind the scenes

## A Buildex founder has seen show concept grow

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Speaking on his cell phone as he prepared for Buildex Seattle, MMPI Vancouver vice-president Mark Stephenson reflected on the early days of the Buildex concept and how the idea has expanded over the years.

"We started Buildex years and years ago," Stephenson said, adding that the first show was held in Vancouver and concentrated on the property management component of the real estate community.

"Once we built Vancouver, we expanded to some other markets, including Calgary, Seattle and Edmonton," he explained.

Stephenson, whose show manager background includes time with Southham Inc. and Southex Exhibitors/DMG, became a partner in Media Edge Communications West Inc. in 1998, where he worked with three other partners, all from the east, to develop and expand their portfolio of shows, seminars and conferences.

"The plan was to build

the business up and sort of meet in the middle and hence why we started coming east into Alberta and why we went down south into Seattle," Stephenson said.

"The four of us built the business and I think we did quite a job establishing the business and growing it in the very cities that we discussed, including Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Seattle — those are all the cities that we perform in."

Four years ago, Stephenson and his partners were approached by Chicago-based Merchandise Mart Properties Inc. (MMPI) run by Christopher G. Kennedy, the son of the late American politician Robert F. Kennedy, to sell their company and its portfolio of trade shows and conferences.

In November of 2006, the deal was completed and Stephenson remained on as vice president with the same managerial responsibilities he had with his own firm.

Three years later, the Buildex brand has expanded to six markets, including the rebranding of the upcoming Calgary show.

"Our Calgary show — and all of our shows for that matter — are now under the Buildex umbrella, the Buildex brand," he said.

"We've gone through a transition in the last couple of years where we've had three different components of the industry: the prop-



Mark Stephenson is vice president of MMPI Vancouver, the company behind Buildex.

erty management, construction and interior design, and they all had their individual names, i.e. Construct Alberta or Design Trends Calgary, and they're now amalgamated under one roof (and) under one name which is Buildex."

He explained that the design component of the show, which brings together architects, interior designers, space planners and facility managers, was a natural to add to the property management and construction elements to

help create a three-pronged hybrid show.

It combines traditional vendor booths with seminars and keynote speakers.

With the expansion of shows into a number of North American cities, Stephenson is aware that different markets will face different issues, but that they are able to apply some of the same principles or seminars in all markets.

"I'd like to say that we pride ourselves on working very closely with all parts of the industry, all parts

of the real estate industry, to find out what the issues are, what these people — the architects, the builders, the designers — are dealing with day in, day out, and we build our conference content behind that," he said.

"So, we dig deep, we work with the key stakeholders, the key players, the key associations in the industry to learn what the issues are that we can further delve into and develop into our conference content, the seminars that attract people to our event."