

The Future Of Modular Flooring



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Whether it’s repurposing space, refurbishing for new tenants, accommodating changes of technology or adapting to changing floor plan configurations, evolving business requirements mean that modern commercial building designs have to work harder than ever before.

Fixture and fittings manufacturers have to innovate as a result, providing agile and flexible solutions that work with changing building needs. This is never more true than for flooring solutions.

We caught up with IOBAC’s CEO, Paul Woolvine, to discuss how modular flooring has evolved to meet these challenges and why he believes IOBAC’s new MagTabs – recent winner at the National Flooring Innovation Awards 2019 – represent the future of modular flooring installation.

Evolution of Modular Flooring Installation

Modular carpet, also known as carpet tiles, was first invented in the 1970s by Dutch manufacturer, Heuga (later acquired by Interface), as a more versatile format to rolls, offering less wastage and easier transportation and storage. It rapidly gained popularity, especially in the growing office sector where its flexibility, simplicity and speed of installation were seen as key advantages.

Paul continues: “Originally carpet tiles were adhered using adhesives or tackifiers, with the objective of ensuring that the carpet tiles remained well adhered to the base. Future uplift and replacement of the carpet tile wasn’t a particularly high priority. However as times have moved on, various installation solutions have been developed which hold the carpet tile in place without the need for wet adhesives, meaning less mess and more flexibility. We wanted to go one step further and develop a new solution that enabled an even cleaner, more flexible and faster installation. So after listening to lots of feedback from the industry on how current solutions perform, IOBAC MagTabs were born”.

Strong Little Squares

MagTabs are little squares, magnetic on one side and self-adhesive on the other. They work by locking floor tiles both tightly to each other and also to a metallic base such as a metal raised access floor. Not only are the tiles held together horizontally as per conventional floating floor attachment solutions, but magnetic attraction also strongly fixes them to the floor in the vertical direction. This unique two-dimensional grip ensures tiles are secured well in place, movement-free, until the time comes to uplift them.

The solution maintains direct contact between all three components of the system, and unlike methods which incorporate floor tiles with self-adhesive or high friction backings, its performance is not as affected by potential dust contamination, reducing the risk of squeaky floors as a result.

Contamination-free access

Widely used in modern office buildings, data centres and larger retailers, raised access floors create a hidden void for the huge passage of data, mechanical and/or electrical services required in today’s working environments. Indeed, research suggests that a large corporation can have over 20,000 miles of cabling in a single facility.

Paul comments: “MagTabs affix flooring tiles directly to the raised metal access floor, with no need for any additional preparation bases to be used. They can be pre-loaded directly onto the metal floor, with the surface floor tiles loose laid on top, accelerating installation time by up to 30-40% versus other tab based systems. This installation method clearly eliminates the need for any messy tackifiers or wet adhesives, enabling a clean, odour free process.

Uplift of the surface tile, either for temporary access to the metal floor and services below, or for a more permanent change of design, is quick and clean – simply pick up the existing tile and replace. There’s no residue or contamination of either the tile or the metal floor. The metal floor remains uncontaminated and ready for installation of new tiles straight away, no preparation required, and the flooring that’s been uplifted is perfectly safe and fine to be reused elsewhere or be more easily recycled. The MagTabs themselves can either be recycled by the manufacturer or down-cycled by specialist waste contractors.”

In contrast, when adhesives are used, the flooring tile is more likely to be contaminated by not only the adhesive but also the subfloor to which it was adhered. This means that many flooring types are not suitable for recovery and reuse and are often difficult to dispose of in an environmentally friendly manner. Around 400,000 tonnes of waste carpet arise in the UK alone, with over half of this currently going into landfill. Using solutions such as MagTabs increases the volume of waste diverted from landfill, helping the cause of organisations including Carpet Recycling UK and Recofloor that promote the re-use, repurposing and recycling of flooring waste.

Design Freedom

MagTabs allow most carpet tiles in the world to be installed, as well as +4mm Luxury Vinyl Tiles, enabling multiple floor surface types to be installed seamlessly alongside each other. This increased design freedom is particularly welcomed in the office sector, where serviced offices and co-working spaces often have the need to differentiate spaces for particular uses and/or company branding.

New companies coming in can quickly and easily uplift the existing floor and replace with flooring affixed with MagTabs in-keeping with their unique brand identity. Meanwhile, the outgoing company can take its flooring and use elsewhere or recycle it in an environmentally-friendly manner.

Paul concludes “For all the reasons we’ve discussed – superior grab, contamination free floors and tiles, faster installation, easier uplift, design agility – we believe MagTabs really do deliver enhanced benefits in line with the changing needs of installers and building-owners, enabling fast and easy access and saving significant time, effort, and money in the process.”

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