



## Modular builder shifts to relief effort

### EverBlock thrives by converting spaces into temporary hospitals

BY DIANE HESS

When Covid-19 loomed on the verge of becoming a global pandemic, Arnon Rosan, founder and CEO of EverBlock Systems in Manhattan, feared it would be the end of his five-year-old business.

“We had a companywide call to figure out where to sell our products,” said Rosan, whose firm manufactures large-scale, Lego-like blocks, divider walls and modular flooring. “Office buildings and schools were closing, and no one was doing events. These were all big parts of our business.”

What Rosan realized in mid-March, as EverBlock’s sales prospects seemed bleak, was that there was an opportunity in the relief effort. The nation’s emergency rooms had begun to overflow, and there was going to be a need for temporary hospitals. It dawned on him that his modular components could be used to convert raw spaces, such as gymnasiums and convention centers, into treatment zones for Covid-19 patients.

“I had my sales team call every governor’s office and health department in the country,” said Rosan. “Pretty soon the bites started coming in, and then we got our first big hit from New Orleans.”

EverBlock turned a New Orleans convention center into a hospital with 2,000 beds. It sent 40 pallets of interlocking flooring for tented structures in South Carolina. It provided structures for temporary hospitals in Paramus, N.J. And in mid-



### How businesses are adapting to the coronavirus crisis

May, when Mayor Bill de Blasio proposed an expansion of coronavirus testing to 20,000 procedures per day, city reps reached out to EverBlock to help assemble 500 Covid-19 testing rooms across nine locations.

Engineers built the first beta site in a gym at P.S. 17 on Forrest Avenue in the Bronx. Once they received the building material, the team completed 30 10-foot-by-10-foot pods in less than a day.

“If they had to use traditional framing, Sheetrock and taping, it would have taken two weeks,” said Rosan.

EverBlock’s revenue for 2020 is expected to top \$20 million, which is up from last year’s \$7.5 million. The firm has already booked \$17 million so far this year.

The company has kept all 14 employees working through the pandemic and is considering hiring two more. The company also outsources work to three independent factories.

### Disaster experience

Rosan has relied on prior disaster-relief experience to build his business. As CEO of Signature Systems Group, a flooring business he owned for 20 years and sold in 2012, he provided tent flooring after Hurricanes Katrina, Ike and Sandy. He did the same following the 2010



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SOPHIA GERMER

earthquake in Haiti.

“When we got the order for a hospital in New Orleans, which equaled more than a year of business, we had to make it happen,” said Rosan.

EverBlock had a week to get thousands of wall panels and building blocks to Louisiana. Before his supply chains became stressed, Rosan reserved 25 truckloads of fiberglass and fire-retardant plastic. He also cleared his 10,000-square-foot warehouse on Whittier Street in the Bronx for storage.

When Rosan first created EverBlock Systems, he thought the company’s multicolor, whimsical forms would be used solely for children’s furniture. The concept quickly evolved. EverBlock began doing branding and marketing events, and it caught the eye of school-



teachers. The firm once built a giant pyramid for a classroom study of Egypt. In the past two years, tech companies, including Amazon, Google and Apple, got in on the action, using the blocks to build out their offices.

“All of our products are completely modular,” said Rosan. “One day they might be a 10-foot-by-10-foot Covid testing room with a little door, and the next day they could become a classroom.”

In the midst of the pandemic, Rosan is fielding calls from heads of corporations considering how they will bring their employees back to work, in addition to doctor offices, medical clinics and schools.

“I would love to see events come back as well as creative school programs,” Rosan said. “But the reality is, most of our work, until there is a vaccine or effective treatment, will be about dividing spaces and social distancing.” ■