

Retractable Screen Sales Continue to Gain Momentum

Demand is growing as awareness among homeowners increases

By Kevin Eaton

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The familiar summer sound of screen doors slamming shut may be harder to hear in the future. Retractable screens are gaining momentum and a host of suppliers, manufacturers and retailers are working to replace the slam of a door with the quiet swoosh of a screen retracting into its housing.

Serving the same purpose as a traditional screen—providing ventilation while keeping insects out—the retractable screen allows a homeowner to have openings free of visible insect screens when a door or window is closed. Installed in the natural recess of the door or window, the retractable screen is similar in design to a classroom projection screen, rolling up into a housing when not in use. The casing is mounted either horizontally or vertically, and the insect screen coils outward following the sash to the other side of the opening where it locks into place.

“They are not always in your face; it’s there when you want it and it goes back into its housing when you don’t,” explains Myrna Pula, marketing systems manager, Preferred Engineering Products.



The retractable screen has been available in the United States since as early as 1925 from the Rolscreen Co. That company evolved to become Pella Corp., and it stills offers retractable screens in its product line. Although available in the United States, the screens have been more successful in Canada, Europe and other countries.

“It’s changing. Retractable screens are a well known product in Europe; we have three facilities in Europe,” reports Randy Deering, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Genius Retractable Screen Systems, a vendor to the OEM market and national retailers. “In North America, the product is still in its infancy. About nine out of 10 have not seen or heard about a

retractable screen.”

Those aware of the retractable screen are usually impressed with how easy it is to use, according to Deering. The fact that these screens create an unobstructed view and represent one of the few methods available to screen a double French door is making retractable screens an increasingly growing trend, he says. The retractable screen also solves screening problems in tricky-to-screen windows like the outward swinging casements.

People traveling in Europe see these in action, where they’re a common product, and they come back looking for them, says Phil Tyson, CEO of AGI Group, a retail company. According to Tyson, demand for retractable screens is growing at a rate of 100 percent to 150 percent a year.

Helping spur this growth, he reports, is the simple fact that installing retractable screens in a home gives them visibility and spurs more sales in the area. “I can show you histories where one person gets it, and then we get 15 sales in a two-block area,” he says. “There was a condo in the Florida Keys with 150 units where the wind whistled down the hall and the wind problem was messing up screen doors. They did a test with the retractable screens and people loved them. First it was a test; then all 150 got them.”

While the potential of the retractable screen is known, people’s fervor for them has surprised even some manufacturers. Seiki Screen Systems, which has been a leading supplier of retractable screen products to the Japanese market for years and which recently entered the North American market, was showing them as an add-on to a back door and was surprised to find homeowners wanting to put

them on front doors as well. “We were at a small [trade] show in Toronto, just to gauge the interest, and it went better than we were anticipating,” says Doug Clapp, director of technical support, Seiki Screen Systems. “We thought that customers would only put them on back doors, but they were suggesting putting it on the front door.”

In addition to the increasing attention from consumers, Seiki has seen greater interest from manufacturers and distributors. Retractable screens are not strictly an after-market product, and window and door manufacturers are incorporating preassembled screens in their products. According to Deering, more manufacturers are offering retractable screens as a feature or option as the public is becoming more aware of them.

Optimism is high among suppliers, but they do note some limitations to retractable screens. “With a swing screen there is no maintenance, but with retractable screens, you have to keep the track clean. They are not good in high-traffic areas and are more of a delicate product,” says Kevin Procida, sales manager, R. Lang Co.

There is also a safety concern, and one of the worries retailers face when selling the retractable screen is its placement. Because it is not a safety device and not intended to be used as a barrier to stop children or pets, some retailers will not sell the retractable screen if it’s to be used near a pool. “They don’t work as a barrier. It’s a very false sense of security and only a bolt closes it,” notes Walker. “These are near pools sometimes, and if you have to give up a sale for child safety then so be it.”

Retailers such as the California-based mobile screening company, Screenmobile, are optimistic about the future of the retractable screen. “I think we are still on an upward trend. I don’t think we have hit the peak yet,” says Scott Walker, president of Screenmobile. “It’s the best thing since sliced bread in the screening business.”

A current assessment of retractable screen sales is not yet available, but suppliers estimate the product represents from 1 percent to 15 percent of the entire screen business. They also agree that retractable screen numbers will continue to grow and become a larger segment of total screen sales in the next five to 10 years. Suitable for retrofit on millions of already installed windows and doors, retractable screens are expected to eventually represent a large share of the entire screen market. “In the next 10 years, it will balance out so each [retractable and flat screens] will get 50 percent of the market,” says Clapp. “The more they become popular, the lower the price will go. There will be a point when retractable screens overtake flat screens.”

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