

DOORKING CELEBRATES 75 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY



As DoorKing, one of the leading gate operator and access control manufacturers in the industry, embarks on its 75th anniversary year, we thought it was a perfect time to learn more about the company’s fascinating origin and history.

BY VICKI JONES, EDITOR

D+AS interviewed DoorKing President Thomas “Tom” Richmond who revealed the interesting details behind the 75-year journey of this family-owned business.

1. Can you tell us how DoorKing was formed?

As the story goes, the founder of DoorKing, M.K. “Rich” Richmond, served in the South Pacific during World War II. On his way there, he stopped in Los Angeles and liked the area. After being discharged in 1946, Rich was in Seattle discussing postwar plans with friends. Someone mentioned that electronic garage door openers were becoming popular, and that L.A. might be a good market for them.

Remembering how much he liked the area, Rich decided to move to L.A., where he began working for George Varnum automating bank vault doors. But this didn’t last long. Rich wanted to start his own business. Recalling the discussion in Seattle, he took his experience working for Varnum and decided to go into the garage door opener business.

Working out of a garage that was converted to an assembly line, the first door openers were built in 1947. Rich officially started DoorKing in 1948 and began building and installing garage door openers.

At the time, garage door openers were expensive and only wealthy people could afford them. The business was good and DoorKing continued its growth for the next 20+ years.

As the garage door opener market expanded, larger corporations started to move into the L.A. market, driving down the price of the openers. Rich realized that he could

DoorKing products through the years.



Model 240
(from 1975)



Model 810
(from 1977)

not compete with these mass merchandizers and still make a decent profit. So in the early 1970s, he started an ornamental iron installation company installing fences and gates.

2. When did DoorKing start manufacturing its own gate operators?

The ornamental iron, fence, gate, and garage door businesses were doing well. There were just a couple of small companies building gate operators at the time, and they were expensive. Rather than purchase other companies’ gate operators for his fence and gate business, Rich decided to build his own gate operators. The first DoorKing swing gate operators, Models 480 and 600, were built in 1971. The operators had a cast aluminum housing and were similar in appearance to Varnum and Customline gate operators.

3. When did you start working for your father?

I started working in the family business in the mid-1970s installing gate operators and access controls for the fence and gate side of the installation business. I realized early on that the garage door opener business was becoming very competitive and that the profit margins were shrinking.

On the other hand, the fencing and gate automation business was growing, was very profitable, and had a great future. I convinced my dad that the fence and gate automation should be the primary focus of the company. So we decided to get out of the garage door opener business. We took all of the garage door opener parts and

tooling to the dump, so that we would never be tempted to make them again.

The gate operator line continued to expand. We introduced new models with solid-state gate operator circuit boards in 1977. We knew we had a good product line, so in the early 1980s, we decided to start selling our gate operators to other fence and gate installers.

We exhibited at our first trade show, the Far Western Garage Door Association (FWGDA), at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas. We continued to introduce new innovations into our gate operators, like plug-in loop detectors, magnetic limit settings, and our first microprocessor-based control circuit in 1981.

4. How did DoorKing become such a key player in the access control side of the industry?

The installation business was going great and access control became an important part of that business. We were using Trigon and Entryguard telephone entry systems at the time. Then, we decided to design and build our own telephone entry system rather than purchasing them from other manufacturers.

We introduced our first telephone entry system, the Model 1801, in 1983. We also started to make our own keypads. The access control product line has continued to grow since then.

5. DoorKing started off in the installation business. When did the company transition into strictly manufacturing and why?

As the company grew, we wanted to put more emphasis in wholesaling our products to other installation companies. We hired a sales manager and a marketing manager to focus on this part of the business, which was growing at a rapid rate.

In 1995, we decided to change the company's business model from that of a manufacturer and installer to only manufacturing. We already had a strong following of distributors and dealers, and it was a natural progression if we wanted the company to continue its growth.

We had several long-time employees who worked in the installation division, and rather than selling off that part of the company, the assets of that division were simply given to them. They continue to operate their company to this day.

6. How has maintaining the same Inglewood, California location for 75 years helped and/or hindered the progress of the company?

Well, we really haven't been in the same location for 75 years! When the garage door opener business started to gain momentum, a building was purchased on Sawtelle Blvd. in Los Angeles. The company moved to larger facilities on W. Hyde Park Blvd. in Inglewood in the late 1970s.

As the growth continued, a second building was purchased in 1988 on Glasgow Ave. in Inglewood — our current headquarters. For several years, the company operated out of both the Hyde Park and Glasgow facilities, which are about a half-mile from each other.



Model 1810
(from 1984)



Model 1812
(from 1989)

When neighboring buildings on Glasgow became available in 1994, the company consolidated all of its operations at the Glasgow Avenue facilities. We are now operating out of seven buildings.

So, we have technically been in the same location since 1988. This has certainly been an asset, because we are right off the 405 freeway and only about three miles from Los Angeles International Airport. We have also been able to maintain a very strong employee base being in the same location for so many years.

7. Why is it important that DoorKing products are built on American soil with as many domestically sourced parts as possible?

Since its foundation, DoorKing has always been a very design oriented, hands-on manufacturer. It was, and still is, important for the company to produce as many items in-house as possible. This allows us to control the quality of our products and gives our engineering team the ability to make necessary changes and updates quickly.

This is especially true for most of our electronic circuit boards. They are manufactured in-house, not offshore. There are some exceptions to this, but that's a result of the quantities that we are selling now. Transmitters for example — we simply don't have the space or capacity to manufacture these in-house anymore, so those products are outsourced to another vendor.

8. How has DoorKing adapted to the recent supply chain issues?

We have the same issues and obstacles to overcome as all other manufacturers in the country. You have to learn to adopt to the changing supply line issues, or you may find yourself scrambling to just stay in business.

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DOORKING
RADIO CONTROLLED
GARAGE DOOR
OPENER

the best for...
QUALITY • DESIGN • DEPENDABILITY

OUTSTANDING FEATURES:

- MAXIMUM SAFETY
- EASY INSTALLATION
- WORKS ON ANY DOOR
- MULTIPLE UNITS
- PRECISION ENGINEERING
- QUIET, EFFICIENT OPERATION

You merely press a button on your auto dash. It opens and closes your garage door automatically while you sit in your car.

DOORKING is economical... the initial cost for installation is surprisingly low, saves you time and money.

DOORKING is convenient... especially during rainy weather, you just press the button and drive right into your garage.

DOORKING is simple and safe... nothing intricate or complicated, just a small transmitter mounted behind your instrument panel which activates the mechanism controlling your garage door and garage light.

DOORKING is fully automatic... by pressing the button on your dashboard as you enter your driveway a radio signal electronically operates the drive mechanism and turns on your garage light at the same time.

Guarantee
The DOORKING unit carries a complete five year warranty for a period of 90 days. If it is installed by an authorized DoorKing dealer, each unit is also warranted for one year against defective parts, with the exception of bulb tubes which are guaranteed for 90 days.

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9. DoorKing has always been an advocate for safety in the industry. Can you elaborate on why this important and how this philosophy influences the design of your products?

Safety has always been a consideration in product design. The original DoorKing garage door opener used an oscillator switch, which would shut off the power if an object got in the way with a minimal amount of pressure. Back in the late 1940s, this was a very innovative and unique safety feature.

We also created magnetic counters for our gate operators, measuring the RPM of the output shaft. Back in those days, most everyone was using simple current-sensing circuits. The magnetic counter creates a very effective sensing system that is still in use today.

Today's society is very litigious, so you have to design and manufacture products that are safe and meet current safety standards.

10. DoorKing now has 15 regional sales managers and operates from seven facilities. What does the future look like for DoorKing?

We have been very fortunate to be in the position we are in today. We have a great management team in place that is always looking to the future and examining ways to expand and evolve.

Where do we need to go with our current product line? What products and services do we need to continue the growth? What infrastructure changes do we need to make internally? How do we manage our customer base? These are things we look at continuously. We have a great core group of people who have a lot of energy and are positioning the company to grow now and well into the future.

11. Why do you think it's important for companies (newly formed and/or established for years) to be active in the industry?

As DoorKing continued to grow, my marketing director made it clear to me that we needed to be active in the industry if we were going to become a key player. We didn't want to be just another company selling products.

A look inside DoorKing's electronics department where their circuit boards are manufactured.



Reels of electronic components (resistors, capacitors, transistors, etc.) that are used with the surface mount technology insertion machine.



The computer control for the surface mount machine.

Being involved has given us the opportunity to help create industry standards, develop great relationships, and it allows us to stay ahead in the ever-changing regulatory environment we all find ourselves in these days.

12. What is the secret to DoorKing's longevity and success?

There is really no secret. You need to have great people. We would not be where we are today if it wasn't for the dedication of all our employees. Treat your employees well, reward them, and they will do their best for you and remain loyal to the company.

We have an executive management team in place that has worked together for over 30 years. We have employees who have been with us for over 40 years. Many of our hourly staff and managers have been with us for 20 years and longer.

13. How has DoorKing successfully adapted its products to the evolving technology of the industry?

Evolutionary wise, the operator control circuits have come a long way. Early on, DoorKing was on the leading edge of this electronic evolution making door and gate operators with transistorized circuits. DoorKing was also the first manufacturer to use a microprocessor in its gate operator circuit boards in 1981. This was revolutionary at the time. We also introduced automated limit settings by using magnetic counters and switches in our designs.

Fast forward to the 21st century. The internet is changing everything and opening new opportunities for both manufacturers and dealers. Cloud-based systems are becoming commonplace in the industry. They are a great tool to manage access control systems, to monitor an entry or exit, to download diagnostics, open a door or gate from your smartphone, turn on a light, etc.

14. What has been the most significant challenge DoorKing has faced in 75 years?

The COVID pandemic was certainly a challenge. Our customer service, sales, engineering, and accounting staff were able to work from home, but our manufacturing facilities were shut down for two months while we retrofitted these areas to comply with Los Angeles County health requirements.

Our primary goal was to keep our employees safe. We had to install plastic barriers and shields in the offices and manufacturing areas, and the HVAC system was completely renovated and HEPA filters installed.

15. How will the company celebrate its 75th milestone achievement?

Yes, it is a great achievement, and we all acknowledge that, but internally, it will be business as usual. The marketing people will be promoting our anniversary, and the sales group may do some specials, but I mainly leave those things up to them.

DOOR KING ACTIVELY PARTICIPATES IN THE FOLLOWING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS:

- American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE)
- American Fence Association (AFA)
- Canadian Security Association (CANASA)
- Canadian Door Institute (CDI)
- Door & Access Systems Manufacturers Association (DASMA)
- International Door Association (IDA)
- International Parking & Mobility Institute (IPMI)
- National Apartment Association (NAA)
- National Ornamental & Miscellaneous Metals Association (NOMMA)
- National Parking Association (NPA)
- Security Industry Association (SIA)
- Self-Storage Association (SSA)

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FROM THE PAGES OF HISTORY

DoorKing



1947 M.K. "Rich" Richmond, working out of a garage, builds his first garage door opener.

1948 Rich officially forms DoorKing and opens his first retail shop in Los Angeles.

1959 Assembly line opens.

1962 DoorKing revises company logo.

1970 DoorKing ornamental iron fences and gates installation company started.

1971 DoorKing starts manufacturing their own swing gate operators for the installation business.

Mid-1970s Rich's son, Thomas Richmond, begins working for DoorKing by installing products for the fence and gate side of the business.

1975 Company stops building garage door operators to focus on the fence and gate installation business.

1977 DoorKing introduces new gate operator models featuring solid-state circuit boards.

1980s DoorKing begins to sell their gate operators to other installation companies and exhibits at its first trade show — the Far Western Garage Door Association — at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas.

1981 First gate operator circuit board featuring microprocessors is built.

1982 Company redesigns logo into name plate style and places it on all entry system products.

1983 DoorKing builds its first functional hands-free telephone entry system (model 1801 and lighted phone directory).

1984 Models 1804 and 1810 telephone entry systems are introduced.

1985 DoorKing begins to manufacture parking gate operators.

1989 First residential "No Phone Line" telephone intercom system, the 1812, is released.

1994 First remote access account manager software is developed for telephone entry systems.

1995 DoorKing's ornamental iron fence and gate installation business is shut down and the company pivots to solely manufacturing.

1995 DoorKing builds their own RF remote controls (MicroClik system).

1999 MicroPlus rotating code RF controls are introduced.

2000 9200 series of heavy-duty slide gate operators are introduced.

2005 Company creates one of the largest maximum security slide gate systems in existence — the 9500 Series slide gate operator line.

2007 First 6"-per-second, high-speed emergency close product is introduced for government applications.

DoorKing unveils 2.4 GHz wireless control option for complete perimeter access system.

2009 DoorKing adds Access Plus — IP-addressable and PC-programmable options.

2011 DoorKing introduces IM Server, a hybrid programming option that allows users to program their modem-connected telephone entry systems via an internet-connected computer.

2013 Current company logo is introduced.

2015 Wireless Adapter for cellular voice, data, and video is released.

2018 DoorKing "Cloud" access control system management is introduced.

2019 900 MHz wireless access control systems are introduced.

2020 2112 residential video intercom system is introduced.

2021 Enhanced parking gate lane barriers are introduced.

2022 ProxPlus Secure card reader line is introduced.

2023 Traffic control wedge barriers are introduced.

DoorKing celebrates 75 years in the door, gate, and access control industry. ■