



Editorial

# What Happened After "THE WORST"

By Tom Wadsworth, CDDC, Editor of Door + Access Systems

The cover story of our fall issue, "GDS\*: The Worst Garage Door Company in the Nation," may have been the most potent story we've ever

published. Here's a list of noteworthy events that took place after our story hit the streets.

## Even more media exposure

From October 16 to 24, Dallas media erupted with their own exposés of GDS, which is now based in the Dallas area. The Dallas Morning News, one of the nation's top 10 city newspapers, published three stories by Dave Lieber, the paper's consumer watchdog. Quoting from dealers, homeowners, and former GDS employees, the stories revealed much of the same customer-unfriendly tactics identified in our own story.

On Oct. 18, the Dallas NBC television affiliate followed with its own report, containing similar information and personal information about GDS kingpin Pete Stephens. A day later, the Dallas CBS television affiliate aired its own exposé by investigative reporter Cristin Severance, a story they'd been working on for weeks. Severance's report included a hidden-camera investigation and footage of her walking onto GDS property and demanding answers from a company official.

## More exposure coming

Another story about GDS aired on Nov. 25 on the Cleveland NBC station, using footage of GDS customers and area dealers who complained of deceptive advertising tactics, shoddy workmanship, and overcharging.

In 2014 and 2015 alone, GDS received negative publicity in 14 different media stories from respected media outlets around the country, mostly television. In the unprecedented volume of responses we received to our fall story (see Letters to the Editor on pages 52-56), several dealers told us that they have shared our story with their local media, urging reporters to conduct their own investigations of GDS practices in several of its 34 markets.

## GDS insiders speak out

We were surprised when several current and former GDS employees contacted us after our story ran. All of them testified to the accuracy of our story, and all were willing to speak out and further expose the company's practices. To date, we have been contacted by eight current and former GDS employees, eager to share details about the company's ruthless tactics.

## GDS fires informant

We weren't the only medium that employees contacted. One female went on camera in the CBS Dallas report, warning consumers, "You will be

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overcharged.” She added that GDS was indeed the worst garage door company in the nation in “fleecing, overcharging, price hiking.”

Even though her identity was obscured in the CBS report, her voice was recognized, and GDS fired her immediately after the show.

### GDS responds

Two GDS insiders shared with us an internal letter written by Lance Willard, GDS chief operating officer, in an attempt to calm employee concerns. One insider described the letter as

“filled with rebuttals that have no factual basis.”

Ironically, several employees didn’t know about our article until they read Willard’s letter. When the letter mentioned that our story “expose(d) the personal life of our executives,” several employees were eager to find our story online and read it.

The letter closed by revealing that GDS “currently employ(s) 470 across the nation,” pledging that “we will not stop charging forward” and “we will continue to dominate the industry.”

### GDS changes names

One of their first moves in “charging forward” was to hide from their own name. They have changed the company name that appears on invoices in an apparent effort to hide from the bad reputation of “Garage Door Services.”

Their invoices now use different names in different markets. For example, one new invoice from Carrollton, Texas, now lists their name as “Yes Garage Door Services, LLC” with a phony address at 1001 East Hebron Parkway.

### Running from the licensing board

Our article reported that the GDS California contractor’s license (#927739) was suspended and that the California Contractors State License Board (CSLB) filed a disciplinary action against them on June 29 for advertising without a valid license.

Thanks to a tip from a local dealer, we now know that GDS responded to this action on July 23 by obtaining a different license (#1005791) under a different company name (Garage Door Service & Repair Inc). The CSLB is aware and has posted eight notices of “Investigations of Probable Violations” to licenses #927739 and #1005791. CSLB officials have seen our article, and they tell us that they continue to build their case against GDS.

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### BBB responds to article

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) also embraced our article, distributing it internally to BBB affiliates around the country and warning of GDS practices and name-changing schemes.

### Homeowners contact us

Homeowners don’t receive our magazine, but a half dozen homeowners contacted us after the article was posted online (see samples in Letters to the Editor). Disgruntled customers who are researching the offending company are finding our article while doing a Google search.

In one positive development, a 79-year-old California homeowner, whom we reported as abused by GDS with a \$2,600 invoice, finally received an \$1,800 settlement from GDS. The check, enabled with BBB assistance, arrived five months after the incident occurred. It appears that pressure from our article and the CSLB investigation may have helped. ■

*\*As noted in our fall story, Garage Door Services is not the same company as Garage Door Services of Houston, aka GDS of USA, the company that owns Windsor Door.*



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