

# HOW THE CORONAVIRUS HURT THE DOOR AND ACCESS INDUSTRY

National survey reveals effects and survival tactics

By Vicki Jones, Editor

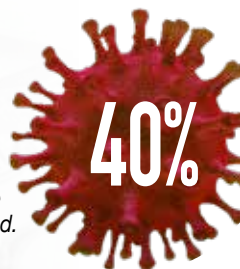
The door and access systems industry has been radically hurt by the new coronavirus pandemic that hit the United States in early 2020. Thanks to a new D+AS nationwide dealer survey\*, we now know how badly our companies were initially affected and how they are responding and adapting to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus.

By April 20, 2020, all 50 states were under a disaster declaration for the first time in U.S. history. Shelter-in-place quarantines were the nationwide norm, schools were transformed into distance learning centers, and all “non-essential” businesses were expected to shut down *until further notice*.

## The “essential” gray area

Businesses within the garage door and access systems industry were categorized as “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce,” according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency.

*\*Door + Access Systems Newsmagazine distributed a 10-question survey about the effects of the coronavirus crisis on dealers in our industry. The online survey was conducted April 10-20, 2020. Email invitations were sent to 2,792 garage door and gate dealers throughout the United States and Canada. A total of 237 dealers (9%) responded.*



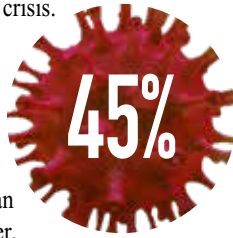
Once they were deemed “essential” by federal and state governments, most garage door and access dealers, distributors, and manufacturers were allowed to, and opted to, stay open.

How was business for the companies that stayed open? Our nationwide survey of door and gate dealers provides some answers.

### How business was hurt

Our survey revealed that many companies had an immediate decline in business in the initial weeks of the coronavirus crisis.

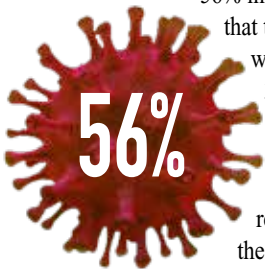
45% of survey respondents reported that their sales had decreased more than 20% in March. Only 12% of dealers reported an increase in sales. However, data that will be gathered during April and May might reveal drastically different numbers.



Jeff Renne of Raynor Door Authority of Sauk Valley in Dixon, Ill., has been running a door dealership for 36 years, and his company felt the effects as soon as the shelter-in-place began.

Renne said, “Telephone calls have dropped off, and people are apprehensive. Plus, as stocks tumble, people are reluctant to make big purchases like buying a new garage door.”

56% indicated (as of mid-April) that their company is operating with usual business hours, 39% had adjusted office hours, and 5% reported that they had to close temporarily due to the restrictions in place during the coronavirus outbreak.



### Layoffs: The last resort

0% of dealer respondents had permanently closed by mid-April. However, the survey was circulated via email, so if a company had closed, they might have been unable to respond. This would obviously skew these results.

3% of dealers who responded to our poll had implemented layoffs or temporarily closed their doors as of April 2020.

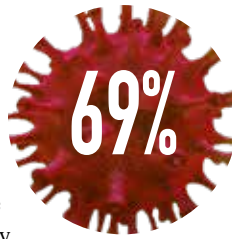
One dealer said, “I laid off half of my technicians,” while another reported that the company “reduced staff by one-third by the end of March.” Other dealers were able to minimize expenses and “tread water” by adjusting office hours and staggering employee schedules.

### Embracing technology

40% of dealers reported that they implemented or increased online transactions/sales to date

during the coronavirus crisis.

69% of our survey respondents revealed that email communication was the online business tool they used the most during this time. Social media (38%) and website communications (35%) were the second and third most used.



Other online tools that saw an increased use by dealers included Zoom meetings, instant messaging, Facetime, texting and sending photos via cell phone, and online credit card processing.

### Keeping employees safe

Many dealers adopted various strategies to keep their employees safe from the virus. A few dealers reported that an employee had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

3% of survey respondents indicated that a member of their company had tested positive for COVID-19, and another 4% reported that an employee had symptoms but had not yet been tested.

100% of respondents implemented new or additional hygiene or prevention measures during the crisis. The top three new procedures used were:

- 1) Social distancing (97%)
- 2) Using hand sanitizers on jobsites (86%)
- 3) Closing the store/showroom floor to customer traffic (56%)

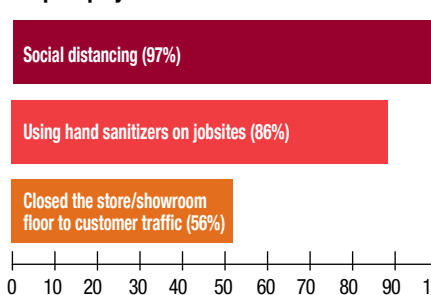


### Survival tactics

We asked dealers to share their most beneficial tactics for dealing with the crisis. Our survey respondents shared many valuable takeaways. Here is our list of the top seven ideas.

- Remind customers that you’re open!
- Take daily temperatures of staff.

### The top three new procedures used to keep employees and customers safe

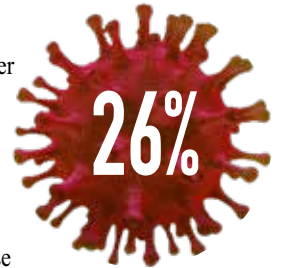


- Offer online sales transactions.
- Promote contact-free service to customers.
- Give employees the opportunity to work from home.
- Use time to catch up, clean shop, organize, and prepare.
- Boost your online presence on social media.

### Procedures worth keeping

We asked dealers, “What changes have you implemented that will likely continue to be used after the crisis is over?”

26% of respondents answered “none.” One dealer wrote, “None of them! When this is over, we will do what we’ve always done.”



Other dealers reported that they will continue to use some of the new procedures.

24% will keep the increased cleaning policies such as hand sanitizing, wiping down surfaces, etc., and 24% will maintain social distancing.

Several others indicated that their new strategy of accepting online payments will continue. Others said that telecommuting and electronic communications will persist into the post-pandemic period.

### Manufacturer response

Manufacturers and distribution companies were not included in our survey, but several of them openly shared their new procedures. We monitored more than 20 of these firms, and most of them were clearly affected by the pandemic, changing operations in various ways.

Most of the manufacturers that we observed remained open and continued operating with a normal production schedule. Some manufacturers communicated updates on websites, posted updates on social media sites, and distributed regular email notifications to keep their dealers and suppliers informed.

Many discontinued business travel, implemented work-from-home policies, and reduced personal interactions with external supplier and customers. For example, Clopay continued manufacturing while conducting temperature scans, social distancing, frequent deep-cleaning of work and common spaces, and providing sanitizer and disinfectant throughout facilities.

### Temporary halt in production

The newsletter of California-based DoorKing announced a temporary halt in manufacturing as of March 23. It also stated that all

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employees who worked in the main office would be working from home.

DoorKing's shipping was limited to repair items via will-call pickups only. Tech support, order entry, and sales employees remained available to assist customers. Production, in a limited capacity, was scheduled to restart on May 15.

Similarly, Haas Door announced a "temporary stop to production operations from March 27 to April 13. Many departments, including customer service, are working from home and available to our dealers."

HySecurity temporarily closed its Seattle, Wash., factory on April 16, after a team member tested positive for COVID-19. The company announced plans to reopen on April 23 and that all operator and parts shipments were on hold until the facility reopened. The company said that supply would not be delayed beyond the temporary closure.

### Global reach

Some manufacturers outside the U.S. were required to shut down. In Quebec, the government shut down all businesses, schools, and manufacturing plants on March 17.

Garaga's plant in Quebec temporarily shut down manufacturing while its staff continued to conduct meetings from home via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The Quebec plant reopened on April 20.

Australian-based manufacturer Automatic Technology America (ATA) kept its manufacturing plant open and adapted company procedures.

Wayne Horton, ATA vice president of sales, said, "At this time, we have no known staff affected by COVID-19. We are monitoring the situation daily, including talking with relevant government authorities, suppliers, and customers." Beginning March 16, ATA sales teams began working from home and stayed connected with customers through "tele-sales."

### Trickle-down effect

Many wholesale distributors in the industry, including Controlled Products, Encon Electronics, Gates and Controls, and Southwest Automated Security, chose to remain open.

These suppliers were forced to rely on inventory on hand from any manufacturer that had halted production. They also suffered a reduction in sales as some installing dealers temporarily closed their doors.

### Getting government grants

The garage door, gate, and access systems industry is made up of small companies.

According to our latest readership survey, 35% of garage door companies consist of 1 to 5 employees.

The good news is that federal, state, and local governments are offering grants, loans, and additional programs designed specifically for small businesses. Many of our dealers reported they had already applied for assistance.

61% of dealers who responded to our survey had applied for the Payroll Protection Program as of April 20, and 23% had applied for a small business loan such as the SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL). Of those dealers, two confirmed

they had been approved or had already received funds.

As of April 22, Congress was nearing completion of a nearly \$500 billion relief bill for small businesses. Our survey was conducted prior to the availability of these funds.

For detailed information on the programs available, see the related story, "Meeting the COVID-19 challenge" on pp. 36. ■

Send your thoughts or updates to the editor at [vicki@vjonesmedia.com](mailto:vicki@vjonesmedia.com).

## HELP FROM THE TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

When stay-at-home orders first went into effect, organizations such as DASMA, IDA, and AFA immediately began providing critical information to companies in the door, gate, and access industries.

76% of survey respondents reported that the coronavirus information or guidance received from the industry's trade associations was either "extremely helpful" or "somewhat helpful."

DASMA released a special bulletin for manufacturers and dealers, emphasizing that the industry's products "provide essential access and egress to our nation's buildings and facilities. Manufacture and service of these doors and access systems is even more critical now as the nation deals with the COVID-19 crisis."

IDA and AFA provided communications that dealers could use. One such document was a Service Tech Letter provided by IDA. The letter served as notification to customers and authorities that this technician is an essential worker.

The letter stated, "This service technician is operating pursuant to the CDC guidelines regarding maintaining 'social distancing' and other safe working practices," and that he/she has permission to work according to federal and state guidelines that recognize such duties as an "essential service."

For other industry-related news and advice pertaining to COVID-19 for dealers, visit [www.americanfenceassociation.com](http://www.americanfenceassociation.com) and [www.doors.org](http://www.doors.org). Manufacturers should review a helpful 5-page list of FAQs distributed by the CDC. Just do an online search for "Manufacturing Facility Protocols."

