

# ROLLING DOOR TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A FRESH INTERVIEW WITH A SEASONED EXPERT



Steve Hahn

Rolling doors aren't as sexy and glamorous as residential garage doors. Rolling doors rarely get the spotlight, but they provide enormous opportunity for the professional door dealer.

If you've never installed a rolling door, this article will tell you what you're missing. If you've been installing them for some time, this article will identify some key trends and advancements that you may have missed.

To gain insights into the rolling door industry, we turned to Steve Hahn, a rolling door veteran of 43 years. Steve has been attending industry conventions since the 1970s and has been writing articles and presenting workshops for more than 25 years.

As an industry leader, Steve has been the president of ARDI, the chair of the DASMA Rolling Door Division, and has served on the NFPA 80 Technical Committee since 1992. Since 2000, he has been the product manager for Lawrence Doors, where he also serves on the management team.

## About Rolling Doors

**Our surveys consistently indicate that about 75 percent of door dealers consider rolling doors to be an important part of their business. What would you say to the other 25 percent to encourage them to include rolling doors in their business?**

**SH:** Rolling door products are extremely versatile and present many opportunities that are unavailable with other types of doors. Rolling doors offer fire and smoke protection, storefront security, and compact designs for service counters, openings with limited clearances, and other places where other types of doors just won't work.

But, depending upon a dealer's business model, geographic location, vehicles, equipment, personnel, and general capabilities, rolling doors may not be a viable choice for every dealer to sell. It is critical that a dealer have the necessary equipment and training to properly install and service rolling door products.

**Are there certain U.S. markets where rolling doors are more common?**

**SH:** It's been my experience that most major metropolitan areas and industrial centers more consistently use a variety of rolling door products, but many smaller markets frequently utilize them as well for commercial, retail, and institutional buildings.

**Some might think that rolling doors haven't changed much in the last 25 years. Why is that not true?**

**SH:** As someone who remembers when flat slats and insulated doors were first introduced, I'd have to say that rolling doors are constantly changing. Some changes—such as powder-coat finishes—are very noticeable. Other changes—such as designs for wind load, impact resistance, thermal performance, and seismic requirements—are maybe less recognizable, but very significant. I think there has also been an increasing global influence on our products, especially in the areas of automation and safety.

**What have been the top three most significant innovations for rolling doors in the last 10-15 years?**

**SH:** (1) The introduction of high-performance service doors and grilles. (2) Advances in thermal performance and air infiltration. (3) The impact of UL 325-2010 and subsequent editions on operators and sensing systems.

**What is the biggest rolling door installation problem that you often hear about?**

**SH:** I don't really hear of "big" problems that are common or frequent. What I mostly hear about are simple problems that are generally related to not following the installation instructions. All rolling doors are not the same, and there can be some specific differences from one from product to another that an installer will not be aware of without reading the instructions.

**What are the top three add-on sales for those who sell rolling doors?**

**SH:** I'm not sure I can identify a specific "top three," but I can definitely say there are many opportunities for those who can truly sell—not just bid—rolling door products and articulate features and benefits to their customers. Dealers who adopt a philosophy of trying to provide the best product for the application and evaluate the real needs of the customer can become very successful and profitable.

For example, point out to your customer that the photo eyes



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**Do you support the IDEA rolling door certification program?**

**SH:** I do support the certification program as a method of education and training that also offers some possible marketable benefits. Generally speaking, I think any valid education and training is good, whether it be in the form of manufacturer training, industry-sponsored workshops and forums, trade association articles, or other credible means of expanding sales, technical, and general business knowledge.

**In some other markets (like Australia), roll-up doors are popular in residential applications. What are the barriers to that happening in North America?**

**SH:** The most obvious obstacles to me are cost and aesthetics. Rolling doors are typically much more costly than residential garage doors, and they can't compare visually with the myriad of designs and styles that garage doors now offer.

**What's in the future for the rolling door industry?**

**SH:** Rolling doors have thrived for more than a century, and I expect that to continue. The future will be limited only by our creativity, innovativeness, and adaptability to changing trends in the marketplace.

**About Rolling Fire Doors**

**Are there certain markets where rolling fire doors are more common?**

**SH:** I think the answer is very much the same as for (non-fire-rated) rolling doors we previously discussed. The difference is that, while there are often alternatives to rolling doors on non-fire-rated openings, there really aren't that many alternatives to rolling fire doors.

**What are the best rolling fire door innovations in the last 25 years or so?**

**SH:** Here are four.

- (1) The single most significant innovation is the offering of highly reliable, easily or automatically resettable fire door closing systems offered by many manufacturers. This made traditional tension-release and gear-dropout designs obsolete, eliminated the complexity of resetting, and vastly improved the performance and reputation of rolling fire doors.
- (2) Labeled retrofit fire door operators allow many older fire doors that do not operate or automatically close properly, but are otherwise acceptable, to be upgraded to those same easy or automatic-reset systems.

provided standard with the motor operator do comply with UL 325, but since they must be installed 6" above the floor, they may not adequately protect against some risks. Can the door close on a vehicle because the bumper will be above the path of the photo eyes? Recommend the additional protection offered by a sensing edge, second set of photo eyes, light curtain, loop detectors, or other appropriate sensors.

Or promote the value of installing high-performance grilles instead of just high-cycle grilles. In a large condominium complex or office building, longer product life and lower long-term maintenance costs far outweigh the additional initial cost.

Selling is not always about being the least expensive. Often it's about making a customer feel confident about you and the product you're offering.

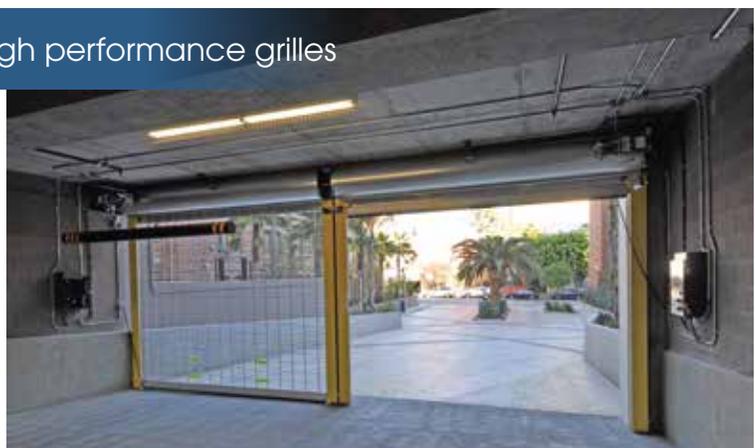
**What is the #1 fact about rolling doors that dealers need to know?**

**SH:** They are rugged and durable products, available in many different models suitable for almost any (but not every) application. When they are properly selected, installed, and maintained, they can provide decades of service.

**Rolling door certification and rolling fire door certification are the #2 and #3 most popular IDEA certifications. Why are they so popular?**

**SH:** For the past several decades, industry associations have continually promoted the importance and value of education. I believe that message awakened our industry and drove an overall improvement in professionalism. The popularity of those certifications also likely mirrors the popularity of those products in the marketplace.

High performance grilles



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- (3) S-label doors comply with code requirements for air-leakage-rated assemblies where rolling fire doors are commonly installed.
- (4) Insulated fire doors can now provide thermal and acoustical benefits for both interior and exterior fire-rated openings.

### What is the biggest rolling fire door installation mistake that dealers make?

**SH:** Unfortunately, there are two common critical mistakes that can adversely affect the performance of a rolling fire door in a fire condition, and both are related to incorrectly installing the fusible link release cable or chain. NFPA 80 requires a fusible link to be located within 12" of the ceiling on both sides of the wall (but not in the triangular dead-air space 4" back from the wall or 4" down from the ceiling).



S-label fire doors

Also, the linkage cable or chain must be routed to make sure that the door will close when any fusible link separates, and that includes the link on the opposite side of the wall. I'm aware of too many cases where this is not done correctly.

### What are some top add-on sales for rolling fire doors?

**SH:** Customers only buy fire doors because they are required by code, so it's a bit more difficult to upsell. As with any product, carefully evaluate the application and make sure what you sell is correct and appropriate.

First ask whether the door will always be open except in event of a fire or whether it will be used frequently. Then, is an air-leakage-rated S-label door required? Will the door be connected to an alarm system or detectors? Is the customer insured by a company that will require an FM-approved door?

### What is the #1 fact about rolling fire doors that dealers need to know?

**SH:** Rolling fire doors are a critical component of a life-safety system. Consequently, they need to be installed correctly, tested annually, and maintained in accordance with all the requirements of NFPA 80 (and NFPA 105 for S-label doors) to ensure the best possibility of performing as intended in a real fire condition. Selling them comes with a greater responsibility and liability, but it can also provide a great business opportunity for a professional door dealer. ■

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