

TRULY EXPOSED: Garage Door Techs Caught on National Canadian TV

By Tom Wadsworth, Editor

Editor's Note:

A year ago, on May 15, 2011, "Dateline NBC" exposed unethical practices of garage door technicians in a special prime-time hidden-camera investigation. The show sent shockwaves through our industry.

Just when you thought our industry's reputation couldn't get any worse, a nationwide television broadcast in Canada exposed even more abuses by garage door technicians. Besides gross overcharging and installing unneeded parts, the broadcast showed a technician urinating in a corner of the garage.

In the following pages, our coverage touches on several key aspects of this disturbing story. As always, our goal is to lead the industry to higher levels of professionalism.

First, here's a quick synopsis of the broadcast.

Marketplace

A Summary of the Broadcast

Show Title: CBC Marketplace

Episode Title: "When The Repairman Knocks"

Broadcast Date: Friday, March 2, 2012, 8:00 p.m. (ET)

Host: Tom Harrington

Location of Home: Toronto, Canada

Appliances Affected: Toilet, Faucet, Dishwasher, and Garage Door

Viewers of the Episode: 1,351,000 people (Source: CBC)

Link to Video: <http://www.cbc.ca/marketplace/2012/whentherepairmanknocks/>

Two Garage Door Problems: On the day before technicians are called, a new opener is installed by a garage door expert, Tom Adams of Superior Garage Doors, who also tilts the photo-eyes out of alignment and pushes the vacation switch.

Technician #1: Jason of JP Overhead Door diagnoses the problems correctly and fixes them.

Technician #2: James of Double Star Garage Doors does the same. Harrington: "Neither charged more than 100 bucks."

Technician #3: Mark from the North York franchise of "Dormaster, a national chain" recommends a new circuit board and surge protector. When the homeowner exits the garage, he aligns the photo-eyes.

Technician #4: Rem from "Promaster" also says it needs a new circuit board and a surge protector. Harrington: "We contacted those last two companies (Dormaster and Promaster) after we'd seen many complaints online about the work they do."

Technician #5: Adam from Access Garage Doors also says it needs a new circuit board and surge protection. After the homeowner goes inside the house, Adam adjusts the photo-eyes then urinates into a bucket in the corner of the garage. Harrington: "I don't know what to say about this at all. [deep sigh] Oh, my God."

Tom Harrington, CBC

BEHIND THE SCENES

An Interview With the Garage Door Expert

To find out key details that were not shown on the broadcast, we talked to Tom Adams of Superior Garage Doors of Whitby, Ontario, the garage door expert for the broadcast.

Adams is an IDEA-certified residential garage door installer and a member of the International Door Association (IDA). In the past two years, he has devoted much time to exposing unethical practices in the Canadian garage door industry.

How did you get selected as the garage door expert?

I got a call in September (2011) from a CBC associate producer who mentioned my web page on "Fraud in the Garage Door Industry." We ended up talking for more than an hour over three phone calls.

How did CBC determine which door companies to call?

I asked them up front if they wanted me to recommend any companies. But they made all the choices. I made no comments before they selected anyone to call.

I understand that they used the Yellow Pages and went online to Google and Kijiji, which is like an Angie's List and eBay mixed together.

When did all this take place?

We did the shoot during the last week of September. I installed the new operator on a Wednesday. Then they started calling repair guys to come in on Thursday and Friday.

It was quite a production. They had six hidden cameras in the garage and two outside. They had Tom Harrington, one security guy, two videographers, a sound guy, an associate producer, the producer, and Jennifer, the "homeowner."

Did you think the setup was fair?

I thought it was fair. CBC asked me repeatedly if this was a common situation (misaligned photo-eyes and vacation switches). We typically get customers calling with these problems several times every week.

The garage door seemed to be rather old and in possible need of repair. In retrospect, do you think the overall setup could've been better?

The door was a cedar door from about 1970. I inspected it carefully and confirmed that it was

fine. One roller could've been replaced, but only one tech noticed it. Other than that roller, it had heavy-duty hardware in exceptional shape.

How many techs came to the house?

In all, 10 companies were called. One of them had two guys who arrived in an Astro van. Those two didn't even know how to disconnect the door from the opener. CBC didn't even show those guys on the show. They quoted \$1,100 for a broken door and \$500 for a new opener.

Of the 10 companies, how many correctly diagnosed the problem?

Four of the 10 knew what they were doing. One of the four good guys was Dodds Garage Door Systems. They simply talked them through the problem on the phone.

Six of the 10 tried to rip off the customer, and three of those didn't charge any tax. The broadcast showed three techs who all tried to run up a big bill. That was Dormaster, Promaster, and Access Garage Doors.

On the show, it seemed like those three used the same tactics.

That's right. After the customer went in the house, the tech opened the operator, took out the good circuit board, and replaced it with a defective board.

Then the tech called the homeowner out and said that the opener had been struck by lightning or a power surge. They said the new board will cost \$220. But then they told her that the door also needed new rollers, new cables, and a surge protector. That brought the price up to \$548.

Remember ... the door didn't need rollers, hinges, or cables. The rollers on that door were not new, but they were steel rollers that were fine.

The quotes from Dormaster, Promaster, and Access Garage Doors were identical: \$548.

Tom Harrington seemed surprised when he heard the same pitch from different guys.

Definitely. When the third guy said it, they were all laughing in the control room. Tom Harrington said, "They're all reading from the same script!" He thought they all had to be from the same company.

So, the tech actually sold the customer the original board from the customer's own operator?

Exactly. They charged the customer \$220 for their own circuit board.

How did you know that they changed the boards?

It's all on tape. Before they came, I wrote my name on the original board. I did that because I knew what they usually do.

Knowing that some techs may take off with the good circuit board, I brought two new boards just in case. It turns out to have been a good idea.

Does CBC have videotape of you replacing the boards?

The CBC cameraman filmed me replacing the boards each time, as well as recording the serial numbers of the boards. The CBC lawyers were concerned about my confidence that the problem was not board related. They wanted to be sure that there was no other possible explanation for the trouble with the operator.

It looked like the vacation switch wasn't a problem for every tech.

The vacation switch was activated for all 10 techs. But when you change the circuit board, the vacation switch automatically comes out of lock.

Back to Promaster and Dormaster. Are they well known in your area?

They advertise heavily. In the Yellow Pages, Promaster is on the first page. They're located throughout Canada.

After the hidden camera investigation, did CBC try to contact them?

Yes, but CBC said they couldn't find the owners of Promaster or Dormaster.

CBC shows Adam urinating in the garage. Did he do anything else that wasn't televised?

Adam was in the garage for about 50 minutes. He took out a set of side cutters and snipped several strands of the cable. Later, he showed the customer the cable, then he twisted it and actually broke it with his hands. He also told her that she needed new bottom brackets.

All this is on videotape, but it didn't make the final edit. When Adam left, the door was inoperable. It took me an hour and a half to fix it.

How long did it take Adam to bring back the original circuit board?

Three days. The board that Adam took was a brand new board that we received from Chamberlain two days before it was installed.

How did the CBC people react to the urinating scene?

In that corner of the garage, there was a head-height camera and a waist-height camera right

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in front of the guy. The lower camera was like a camera inside a urinal. [laughs] Obviously, they only showed the view of the higher camera.

It was both embarrassing and hilarious at the same time. The audio guy and the camera guy were so embarrassed that they turned their heads away from the monitor.

I turned to Tom Harrington and said, "I'm so proud to be in the garage door industry."

How was the urine disposed of?

I have no idea. Adam left the bucket sit right there.

Now that you've been on national television, what kind of reaction are you getting from others in the garage door industry?

At first, a couple of dealers said I was making us look like crooks. Then, I started getting compliments. Some good dealers even wanted to be [identified as legitimate] on my website.

I got a call from a dealer in Ottawa who was related to one of the bad dealers. He was upset and said he was a legitimate businessman. But when I asked for his tax number, that was the end of the conversation.

The former operations manager for Promaster called me, and we met and talked for 2-1/2 hours. He said everyone is trained by A.J. Saad [of Dormaster] who tells them what to do. And he said that the script they all follow is showed on the show.

What are your friendly competitors saying about the show?

They want me to move ahead with developing a certification process that recognizes legitimate dealers. The problem with our industry is it's not regulated. Anybody can do garage doors and repairs.

I understand that there has been considerable fallout in the industry since the show. What's going on?

Within two weeks after the show, I heard that the Canada Revenue Agency seized the assets of one of the bad dealers in Mississauga. But that didn't stop them. They simply started doing business under a different name.

I also understand that several manufacturers have stopped supplying product to Dormaster and Promaster.

What Do You Say for Yourself?

On the CBC broadcast, three door companies (Dormaster, Promaster, and Access Garage Doors) were shown attempting to sell unneeded parts. We attempted to contact all these companies to hear their side of the story.

"F Ratings" From the Better Business Bureau

In March and early May, we checked the BBB's review of key door dealers that appeared to be related to the broadcast. The following dealers all had F ratings, the worst rating possible.

Dormaster Garage Doors & Windows

(877-903-6677) 5481 Dundas St W, Etobicoke, ON M9B 1B5 | www.promaster.ca

- Eight locations are listed in Ontario.
- BBB: "We have checked with the Ministry of Government Services and this business name is not a registered business name within the province of Ontario."
- A.J. Saad of Dormaster admits this is his location but disputes this rating. He told us that the BBB sent its inquiry to a different address than Dormaster's general mailing address, and Dormaster had no chance to resolve or dispute complaints. In late May, the BBB removed the F rating, changing it to an A- in early June.

Dormaster Garage Doors & Windows

(403-450-9005) 428 - 9 Avenue SE, Calgary, AB T2G 0R9 | www.promaster.ca

Pro-Master Garage Doors

(877-903-6677) 1499 Marine Drive, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1B8 | www.promaster.ca

- 19 locations are listed in British Columbia.
- BBB: "As of January 6, 2011, the BBB has contacted the city halls in the cities that this company claims to have physical addresses in and operates at. All of these city halls have indicated no record of a business license as needed for companies operating in their territory under the names Dormaster, Doormaster, or Promaster."
- A.J. Saad of Dormaster told us that this is not one of Dormaster's locations. Yet, the phone number and web address are the same as Dormaster's.

Pro-Master Garage Doors Service

(866-808-4555) 5035 Timberlea Blvd., Units 1-3, Mississauga, ON L4W 2W9 | www.pro-master.ca

Dormaster Responds

On the broadcast, Mark from Dormaster's North York franchise recommended a new circuit board and surge protector (for a brand new opener). A.J. Saad, Dormaster's operations manager, told us, "We always 'recommend' having a surge protector installed on all garage door openers," whether the customer buys it from Dormaster or installs it himself.

Since he did not see the unedited footage, Saad was reluctant to say whether Mark had made any mistakes. Saad questioned whether Tom Adams of Superior Garage Doors (the expert on the show) "had done something to extravagate the issue."

However, he said, if the only problem was misaligned sensors, "then I would say Mark had mistakenly misdiagnosed the problem."

Saad also noted that Mark was never employed by Dormaster, but is "a subcontractor used by many garage doors companies in the area." Yet, since the airing of the show, Saad said the North York franchise has not used Mark again.

Treated Fairly?

Saad feels the show did not treat his company fairly. "They implicated the whole company on the action of a misdiagnosis by one subcontractor," he said.

Saad also felt that Tom Adams of Superior

Garage Doors was not a "fair mediator" because Adams was a competitor who has openly opposed Saad's company.

Marwan Taha, a Dormaster business associate of Saad, also told us that it's "unethical" for CBC to use Adams as an expert since "he is advocating against our company."

Taha told us, "When CBC decided to do such a show, it was Superior Garage Doors that pushed for such program to air, and it was Superior Garage Doors to refer which companies to target." Tom Adams denies this.

Saad further stated that his company only replaces broken parts, or they "recommend the obvious when we see any wear and tear that needs attention."

The \$220 Circuit Board

We asked about charging \$220 for a circuit board. Saad replied, "We sell circuit boards from average price of \$98 to \$138, depending on the model." He thought that the \$220 price may have included a service call fee and a surge protector.

Overall, he felt that it was "unfair that we are getting linked to another company or companies with a bad reputation when clearly we are not."

Promaster.ca ≠ Promaster

Taha said that Dormaster is frustrated by the hassles and confusion created when others

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assume that his company is Promaster because his website is promaster.ca. "Management has decided that that domain name is bringing us nothing but problems with vendors or marketing issues," he said. Consequently, his company recently bought canadiandoor.ca as a potential resolution.

Cleaning Up

Noting the CBC show and the F ratings from the BBB, we also asked Saad, "What are you doing to clean up the reputation of your company?"

He replied that he puts "great emphasis on our employees or any subcontractors we use to pay extra attention (to) diagnostics." Additionally, his technicians are "not to speak of what the problem is until ... they know it for sure."

Pro-Master

Adel Qablawi is reportedly the owner of Pro-Master (pro-master.ca). We made several attempts to contact him or any manager from his company, but none of our calls were returned.

Access Garage Doors

Adam of Access Garage Doors is the technician who urinated in the customer's garage.

His website (www.accessdoor.ca) lists his primary phone number as 855-213-6677. On March 8, just six days after the CBC broadcast, we dialed that number. A male voice answered, "Hello" (not "Access Garage Doors" or "Garage Doors"). In the ensuing conversation, the voice sounded remarkably similar to that of the Adam on the CBC broadcast.

The male voice denied being Access Garage Doors or having any involvement with a garage door company. After we hung up, we looked at our phone to double-check the number we just dialed. It was the correct number as listed on Access Garage Door's website: 855-213-6677.

We then dialed the Brampton number on the same website (905-457-5050). The same male answered the phone. Before we said anything, he immediately said, "I told you, you've got the wrong number."

We proceeded to ask several questions, but he continued to deny that he was involved in the garage door business.

Promaster Roots

A.J. Saad indicated that he knew Adam when they both worked for Promaster. Saad said he didn't train him because "Adam was in the garage door industry long before Promaster was even founded."

"Adam used to work for Promaster Garage Doors up until 2008," he said. Saad added that he is aware of "at least 12 companies (that) were founded in the last three years by workers who worked for Promaster at some point."

Affected Dealers Sound Off

Some door dealers who were not involved in the hidden camera investigation have been negatively affected by dealers who were exposed on the show.

Access Garage Doors, Delta, B.C.

After the broadcast, CBC soon posted the following message on its website: "The Toronto-based company named Access Garage Doors featured in our report has no affiliation with the same-named company based in Delta, B.C."

Mike Crowther, president of Access Garage Doors in Delta, told us

Who's Who?

If you're confused about the identity of "Dormaster" and "Promaster," you're not alone.

Dormaster or Promaster?

The website for Dormaster is www.promaster.ca, although dormaster.ca and doormaster.ca will automatically take you to promaster.ca. In the Dormaster logo at promaster.ca, the word "Superior" is placed vertically in tiny print before the word "Dormaster." Thus, Dormaster is also known as "Superior Dormaster."

The Internet Archive (www.archive.org) reveals that promaster.ca carried three different company names in 2010: "Pro-Master Garage Doors Service," "Door-Master Garage Doors Service," and "Superior Dormaster Garage Doors & Windows."

Pro-Master or Professional Masters?

Promaster.ca is not the same company as Pro-master.ca. At pro-master.ca (with the hyphen), the name at the top is "Professional Masters Garage Doors Service." But the first line of text says, "Welcome to Pro-Master Garage Door Service." Then, the paragraph about "Our Services" says, "Pro-Master Garage Doors provides you ..."

At the bottom of the pro-master.ca home page, 29 different company names are listed. All names begin with a city name and end with "Garage Doors," such as "Toronto Garage Doors" and "Scarborough Garage Doors."

Each of these 29 company names links to a page with an address and map to their location in that community; i.e., Scarborough Garage Doors takes you to a location in Scarborough.

We checked most of the addresses, and none of the addresses or map locations was an actual location of their business. The same is true at promaster.ca, except they list only 11 company names instead of 29.

that the name confusion led to several negative emails from viewers. One such email said, "Good luck with your company of thieves."

Canadian Doormaster

Another affected dealer is Hans Hart, president of Canadian Doormaster Electric, an IDA member in Burnaby, B.C. Around two years ago, a customer called Hart from Ontario (2,000 miles away). The customer complained that he had put down a deposit for an operator but wasn't getting any service or installation. "He found us via Google and reamed my guys over the coals," Hart told us.

Hart's website now includes a "Consumer Garage Door Fraud Alert" page. "Recently

someone has been selling doors and service in Vancouver claiming to be Canadian Doormaster Electric Ltd.," says his site.

The site says the offending company uses the website "promaster.ca" and goes by various names such as "Dormaster Garage Doors and Windows, Pro-Master, Promaster, Professional Master Garage Doors Service," and others.

Hart's site states, "They are fraudulently misrepresenting themselves as our company" and that "they often suggest repairs that are not necessary, overcharge, and do not honor their warranties."

Hart told us that he contacted the offending company, objected to their use of his name, and threatened to sue them. Nonetheless, "The owner

replied he can use the name any time he wants." Hart's battle continues.

Superior Garage Doors

Another affected dealer is Superior Garage Doors' Tom Adams, the garage door expert used on the CBC show. Adams said his problems started in August 2010 when he got a phone call from the Better Business Bureau of Southwest Ontario.

"They said they received a complaint against us in Guelph, but I told them that we've never done business there," said Adams.

The BBB faxed the invoice to Adams. "Sure enough, it had our name, but it wasn't us," said Adams.

He received 28 complaint calls over the next two weeks. After talking to complaining customers and getting copies of invoices, he learned that the offending company typically did cash transactions. "They would quote \$425 for an operator," says Adams, "but if you wanted a warranty with the operator, you needed to buy cables and lots of hardware."

Adams has a long list of stories from irate customers. "One customer paid \$1,800," he added. "Another guy was so mad that he was willing to come down and take them to court."

Adams' website includes a long list of garage door companies labeled as "fraudulent." "These people are frauds, trading on the good name and reputation of legitimate companies," says the site. "Their work is generally substandard and the prices are way out of line with industry norms."

His battle also continues. ■

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