

Padding Your Sales

How Tablets Are Revolutionizing the Garage Door Sales Process

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“This technology is a big step forward for our industry,” says Daniel Boulanger, marketing communication manager at Garaga. “It has changed the game for the way dealers do sales, much like cell phones changed the communication business.”

What's a Tablet?

Boulanger is talking about Garaga's new software program for selling garage doors on a computer tablet. In case the lingo is new to you, a tablet is a flat one-piece mobile computer typically operated by a touch screen. It's lightweight, easy to use, features a long battery life, and typically has a built-in camera. No mouse or keyboard is needed. Many newer models boast high-definition displays.

Apple's iPad, released in 2010, has been dominating the tablet market. Other popular models are Samsung's Galaxy, Amazon's Kindle Fire, Google's Nexus, and Microsoft's Surface. Already, more than a third of U.S. Internet users reportedly have one. Sales are skyrocketing, and in 2013, worldwide tablet shipments may exceed 200 million units and may even outsell laptops.

Garage Doors and Tablets

Garaga is one of several manufacturers that have created special software that helps dealers sell garage doors on tablets and often on smartphones. In the last 12 months in this magazine, four garage door manufacturers announced their new apps or software that works with tablets. The other manufacturers are Amarr, Northwest Door, and Overhead Door.

Each of these programs provide different functions, but the one common feature is the ability to take a photo of a customer's garage and insert an image of any of the company's many garage door models into the door opening. Similar visualization technology has been available for many years on garage door manufacturer websites and on proprietary software. But with handy camera-equipped computer tablets, the entire process can be done quickly and easily with one device.

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Lightweight and flat, tablets make it easy to present images and quotes to customers.





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Depending on the software used, the customized image can be incorporated into a detailed quote that can be instantly emailed to the customer. Some apps even allow the dealer to place the order with the manufacturer right from the same tablet.

“The Amarr tablet app, OnSite, is a game-changer in that it gives dealers the tools to schedule, quote, sell, and order a door during the initial site visit with a customer,” says Vickie Lents, marketing director.

A Mobile Showroom

When Garaga announced its iPad-compatible program in May 2012, its press release said that the dealer’s tablet “in effect, becomes a portable showroom in the palm of their hands.”

Using similar language, John Southard, marketing and product development manager of Northwest Door, says that his company’s app is called the “Virtual Showroom.”

A physical showroom can cost tens of thousands of dollars and only show a handful of door models. But when armed with a tablet and app, a salesperson can bring the showroom directly to the customer’s house and show them images of hundreds of doors placed directly into a photo of their own garage.

“Using an iPad is a less expensive way to have a good showroom,” says Martin Madden, CEO of Overhead Door of South Bend, Ind.

Beyond the Photo

Visualizing a new door in the customer’s garage is the core function of these new tablet programs. For example, Overhead Door’s DoorView program lets homeowners select overlay board colors, different window positions, various styles and configurations of decorative hardware, and more. But that’s only the beginning.

Images and door specs can be easily emailed, and homeowners can even post images of their transformed homes on Facebook.

He Comes Prepared

Dealers are finding some effective ways to use the added features of these programs. For example, listen to David Pace, a Garaga dealer and owner of Overhead Door of Nova Scotia in Dartmouth.

“When I go to a customer’s house, I pull up, take a photo of the house,

add all their contact data, prepare the quote, and then knock on the door. So when I’m sitting with them, I can show them pictures of their house with the new door and send them a full quote right there.”

But that’s not all. “I can even order the door right from the customer’s home and tell them what day it will ship from the factory.” If the call needs follow-up, he can set the Garaga app to remind him to follow up with that customer in a desired number of days.

Advanced Functionality

Amarr’s OnSite tool also allows the dealer to schedule site visits, quote a price that is tied to the dealer’s pricing and margins, provide alternative door upgrades, place the order while at the customer’s house, and even evaluate the dealer’s performance with a range of reports.

Some dealers are combining the app’s features with Google Earth. John Southard says that, before going to the customer’s home, some Northwest Door dealers go to Google

Earth’s Street View to find an image of the target home. Using Northwest’s tablet app, the dealer then applies the configured garage door image to the home and emails the photo to the homeowner.

Is It Worth the Cost?

Tablets typically cost between \$300 and \$600, but if you purchase one with built-in 4G cellular data capability, the add-on cost can run \$100+. Then you’ll likely pay a monthly charge to a cellular carrier for data usage, just like on your cell phone.

Check with your garage door manufacturer to see if a data plan is needed for its tablet software. If so, the data plan will allow your tablet app to function wherever you can get cellular service.

The cost of the app will likely be free. Whatever the cost, this powerful sales tool will cost much less than older door visualization tools and be much more effective.

“With one sale, it basically paid for itself,” says Ryan Dissen of Oregon City (Ore.) Garage Door. His Northwest Door app was free.

The Learning Curve

But what if you’re not too nimble with computers? One of the drawbacks of earlier visualization software was the level of computer knowledge required. But user-friendliness may be the most appealing feature of these tablet programs.

“I’m not a computer genius by any means,” admits Ryan Dissen. “(The Northwest Door app) walks you through the process, step by step, and it’s real simple.”

“It’s very, very easy to use,” adds Martin

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Overhead Door’s DoorView makes it quick and easy to select a color.

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◀ Brad Mower of Done-Rite Garage Doors shows a customer the ease of using Northwest Door's app.

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Madden of Overhead's DoorView. "It's very user friendly; you just point and click."

Madden noted that he needed to make one accommodation for his sales guys: a stylus. Chuckling, he adds, "Experienced door-hanger fingers aren't always as delicate as needed for a touch screen."

Jimmy Davis of Carolina Garage Door Specialists in Raleigh says he worked with Amarr's OnSite program for a few months before actually using it in sales.

"For the initial setup, it took time to input all my margins," he says. "I wasn't used to doing pricing by margins, so there was a learning curve there. But if I don't like the final quote that the software generates, it's easy to adjust the price upward or downward as needed."

Time-Saver

Now that Jimmy Davis has entered all his own pricing into the program, the quoting process is very quick.

"Now, I don't have to sit down and figure out the price of every door," he says. "Plus, the office doesn't need to call me to ask for a price for every quote. It's all right there in the program—pricing, door pictures, options—and the office can send a quick email to the customer. It's a real time-saver."

Up and Running By Friday

David Pace hardly spent any time setting up his Garaga app and his new iPads.

"We bought them on a Wednesday, and we were up and running by Friday for a home show last spring," he says. "When we finished the show Sunday night, we had all the leads followed up before we left the show. Dealing with paper, that process can take a couple of weeks. The Garaga app is fantastic."

Indeed, it was hard to contain Pace's enthusiasm for his new sales tool.

"Just this morning, my sales fellow surveyed a job for two 12x12 commercial doors," he adds. "Within five minutes, he had a full quote emailed to the client."

So, the apps don't need to be used for residential sales only. Either way, your sales process is more efficient.

"It saves our people time and lets them move on to other opportunities," says Pace. "We're now able to do all sales faster and more professionally. It greatly improves the productivity of our day."

The Big Advantage: Upselling

Every dealer we interviewed praised the tablet program's ability to upsell customers to upscale doors. It only makes sense. When a homeowner can actually see a more attractive door on his own house, it's hard not to find the extra bucks for the investment.

"Amarr's OnSite definitely helps with upsells," says Jimmy Davis of Raleigh.

"We're now able to do all sales faster and more professionally. It greatly improves the productivity of our day."

Ryan Dissen adds that upselling has become his primary use of Northwest Door's app in his Oregon market. "It's a good tool for upselling. I've shown customers what their house would look like with better doors, and they typically go with it."

In Indiana, Martin Madden also testifies that Overhead Door's visualization tool has improved his company's ability to get customers to buy a premium product. "We've improved our sales of carriage-type doors and doors with windows."

At Northwest Door, John Southard says he sees good sales growth in upgraded doors and options. "Purchases made by dealers who use our app have increased, not just by door count but by dollars. This tells us that the app is a successful upgrade tool that is generating additional sales dollars for our dealer."

Good for the Industry

Kevin Jones, director of brand management for Overhead Door, believes these visualization

Tablet Seminar Coming to Expo 2013

If you'd like to learn more about selling doors with tablets, Expo 2013 will feature a special seminar with Maxime and Martin Gendreau of Garaga, a leading company in using this technology.

The Gendreaus' seminar is slated for Thursday, May 9, at the Gaylord Opryland Convention Center in Nashville. The seminar seeks to help attendees get the most out of their tablets. For more information, go to www.idaexpo.org.



A Quick Sketch of Garage Door Software for Tablets

Here are the industry's four new visualization sales tools for tablets that have been rolled out in the last 12 months. All of these programs allow the manufacturer's dealers to upload an image of the customer's home and try out a wide variety of the manufacturer's doors on the image.

Garaga

In May 2012, Garaga announced its iPad-compatible program for dealers. The program allows dealers to create three versions of quotes in less than three minutes. Quotes can also accept customers' electronic signatures.

The program's features require an iPad or compatible tablet, an Internet connection through a 3G or 4G network, or a hotspot connection for most smartphones.

Overhead Door

In August 2012, Overhead Door announced that it had upgraded its DoorView design center for iPad and tablet computer use. DoorView is Web-based, providing distributors with 24/7 access to the most current residential product offerings.

Northwest Door

In October 2012, Northwest Door introduced the 3.0 version of its garage door visualization app for Apple and Android tablet systems with a 10" or larger display.

Northwest Door's "Virtual Showroom" works with or without Internet access. The app is available at no charge from the iTunes App Store and at the Google Play Store for Android.

Amarr

In December 2012, Amarr announced its Door Designer Pro tablet and mobile phone app for dealers, featuring Amarr's OnSite software program.

Both apps can be freely downloaded from the iTunes or Google Play stores. Amarr also has a free OnSite booklet to help dealers understand the software's full range of capabilities.

tools could be a significant boost to the entire industry. "Visualization tools like DoorView can ultimately help our industry capitalize on its unique ability to increase curb appeal."

Martin Madden agrees. "This tool helps move the conversation beyond price and into aesthetics. That's critical for our industry."

Making Doors and ... Software?

Daniel Boulanger of Garaga sees that tablet apps are creating another potential shift for the industry. "We're now finding dealers asking us to develop new software, and specifically for the iPad. We're becoming something of a software company, too."

"In the past, we were judged by the quality of our doors and deliveries," he adds. "Now we're also being judged by our software."

How Do Customers React?

You might think that the typical customer would be blown away by the technology and that the dazzle factor would help nail the sale. But it's not necessarily so.

"The customer really doesn't say this is cool," says David Pace, the Nova Scotia dealer. "They're fairly used to seeing visual technology."

Ryan Dissen says the tablet's real advantage in the selling process is that "It gives you a better interaction with the customer."

"When you sit down with them to show them how it looks on their home, they appreciate the personalized approach and your spending extra time with them," he says. "Selling becomes more of a customer service where I'm really trying to meet their needs."

One Step Ahead

In spite of these programs' ease of use, non-computer-savvy dealers may be hesitant to use such digital technology to boost their sales. If that's you, your hesitation may be a key reason why your business begins to lose sales to your tablet-toting competitor.

"Among dealers, the adoption rate is mixed," says Vickie Lents of Amarr. "But once dealers have begun using OnSite, none have gone back to their non-technology ways of selling."

"Those who adopt the technology earlier definitely have a selling advantage in the marketplace," adds Kevin Jones of Overhead Door.

Indeed, when you can prepare a quote faster and more professionally and present it with appealing images of the new door on the customer's home, you will likely be leaving your paper-and-pen competitor in the dust.

With six potent words, David Pace summed up the critical advantage of selling doors with a tablet: "We're days ahead of our competition." ■



Amarr's Onsite also lets you schedule visits to customers.