

Stepping Up to CDOs

Are you prepared to handle commercial operators?

By Roy Bardowell

Editor's Note: Roy Bardowell is arguably the industry's most experienced CDO (Commercial Door Operator) technician and trainer. In the door industry for 37 years, he has become an expert in door and gate operators. As a trainer, he has received high marks for his dozens of CDO troubleshooting workshops at Expo and at IDA regional events.



In my experience, good CDO technicians are hard to find. The reason is simple. Evolution!

Many door companies start as a one-man show, installing and servicing residential doors and operators. In the United States, there are probably 5,000 companies like this, operating out of a pickup truck with a few 6-foot stepladders.

Taking the Big Step

As your door business grows, the normal trend would be to expand into commercial door work. The step to commercial door and operator work is a big one and an expensive one because two installers are usually needed for the larger and heavier sectional and rolling doors.

You also need a bigger rack and possibly a stronger truck to hold six types of ladders. The work also requires two sets of tools, a good welding machine, someone who can weld, and a trailer to haul new and old doors.

Your insurance rates will also increase. In some cases, OSHA no longer permits ladders on higher jobs but demands a scissor lift or cherry picker to do any service at all. Instead of renting, you would do better to purchase a scissor lift and trailer since rentals can cost \$700 per week.

Just Like Residential?

Many residential door techs look at a commercial sectional door as a heavier and taller residential door that can be installed with the same technique. You can get away with this philosophy until it comes time to install the operator. A CDO is not a bigger residential operator, nor can it be wired as such.

Here's a case in point. I know of a door technician who installed his first 10' x 12'

commercial door after 20 years of doing nothing but residential work. After a 60-minute service call on how to wire the Open-Close-Stop push-button station, he wanted to know where the radio transmitters and the photo-eyes were. He didn't know that these items were add-ons.

Extra Components, Extra Costs

When he was told that the photo-eye and radio controls totaled \$175 extra, he had a hissy fit. A few days later, when he received the extra items, I spent another 90 minutes helping him wire the photo-eyes and connect the radio.

Then he wanted to know if he could remove the 3-button station now that the radio was connected. Imagine his shock when I told him that the stop button was there to comply with UL 325.

He knew nothing of local codes or the National Electrical Code. His idea of wiring was to use bell wire throughout the installation, and none of the wiring was in conduit as demanded by local code. He was clearly not prepared to service the operator, and his work was certainly not ready for a visit from an inspector.

Get it Right, Get Trained

I suggested to him that he get some good CDO training, but he balked at the time and expense required. Instead, he will waste countless hours trying to figure out an operator problem and spend extra money on every job because he will not educate himself.

I have observed this scenario many times over the last 20 years. That's why I have made it my goal to train others whenever possible and encourage a *change in mindset*.

Making the decision to sell, install, and service CDOs is a big step, but it's a good step. It's an appropriate product line for any door dealer, it helps to diversify and strengthen your business, and the margins are typically much better than new residential construction.

But you need a new mindset to tackle this end of the business. You need to prepare yourself for the learning curve required, and you need to commit to getting good training.

New DVD Training

Fortunately, good training is widely available. You can often get it from CDO manufacturers or at the IDA Expo and regional conferences.

In addition, IDEA just released the DoorTech DVD on Commercial Door Operator Troubleshooting. This 48-minute video covers fundamentals of common components, wiring diagrams, UL 325, and

general troubleshooting.

The program doesn't cover everything, but it's a good first step in your ongoing CDO training. For purchase information, contact IDA at 800-355-4432 or at www.doors.org. ■

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Contact Roy Bardowell
at www.roydoor.com or
roybardowell@aol.com.