

The 2011 Carriage House Sales Report: Lessons Learned

Carriage House Door Sales Inch Upward

By Tom Wadsworth, CDDC
Editor, Door & Access Systems

Carriage house doors account for 15 percent of the typical North American door dealer's residential garage door sales, according to a new nationwide survey by Door & Access Systems newsmagazine.

The new survey, conducted in early August, revealed that carriage-style doors have been gradually making up a larger share of annual residential garage door sales. In 2005, our first carriage house door survey revealed that 6.4 percent of residential sales were carriage doors. That number jumped to 10.8 percent in 2007, 13.5 percent in 2009, and now to 15.1 percent in 2011. (See survey methodology at the end of this story.)

Photo: Wayne-Dalton Model 9700 (steel)

Why They Buy

For the first time, our biennial survey asked dealers, “Why do customers buy a carriage house door?” We gave dealers four optional answers, and they could check all answers that applied. The results:

- 79 percent said, “They love the look.”
- 68 percent said, “They like having something different than other homes in their area.”
- 66 percent said, “It increases the curb appeal of their home.”
- Only 2 percent said, “I’ve never sold a carriage house door.”

Wilkes, Wilkesboro, N.C. “It’s nice to have more choices after all these years, considering raised-panel steel doors all look pretty much the same.”

- “Customers love when a great-looking carriage house door ties all the elements of their house together,” added Wayne Pawlowski of Garage Door Guy in Barnegat, N.J.
- “Carriage house doors are a necessary staple of our business,” remarked Shoals Overhead Door of Muscle Shoals, Ala. “It’s smart for the homeowner to differentiate their home while adding value to their home.”

The Lesson. It’s a mistake to assume that customers only want the cheapest door possible. Clearly, many consumers are aware of carriage house doors, even to the point of specifically asking for one when they contact a local dealer.

Promotion Pays

Since media messaging is having an impact on sales of carriage-style doors, we wondered how many dealers are actively investing in promoting these doors. Our survey asked dealers, “Have you ever paid for advertising that promotes carriage house doors?”

“Customers love when a great-looking carriage house door ties all the elements of their house together”



Photo: Amarr Classica Bordeaux (steel)

The Lesson: These results may help dealers with their selling strategies for these doors. Since “the look” is such a dominant factor in the customer’s purchase decision, dealers should optimize opportunities for customers to see what the unique appearance of carriage doors can do for a home.

That could happen in showrooms, print ads, or home show displays—wherever the appearance of these doors can be maximized. “The look” may sell itself.

The other two factors (differentiating their homes and increasing curb appeal) should not be ignored. If two-thirds of all dealers say that these two factors contribute to the purchase decision, these factors are also powerful sales tools.

We Like the Look

Several dealers volunteered comments raving about the visual appeal of these doors.

- “Selling carriage house doors has provided for much better margins than conventional doors, and the consumers LOVE the look,” wrote Steve Baker of Garage Doors of

Do Customers Know About Carriage Doors?

Since 2007, the industry has invested more than \$400,000 in the GarageWowNow national public relations campaign. The effort has successfully generated hundreds of news media articles about carriage doors in magazines and newspapers and on television, radio, and the Internet. In addition, manufacturers and dealers have been advertising carriage doors in product literature, on websites, in the media, and in many other ways.

But is the message getting to the consumer?

To find out, we asked dealers, “Have you ever had a customer specifically ask for a carriage house door?” We were surprised at the results. A remarkable 97 percent of dealers answered “Yes.”

Pressing further, we asked dealers, “Have you ever had a customer say that he/she heard or read about carriage house doors in a news story (TV, magazine, newspaper, website, etc.)?” A majority (53%) responded “Yes.”

About three out of every five dealers (58%) answered “Yes.”

We filtered all responses to determine whether dealers who were selling more carriage doors were more likely to be advertising. The answer was a clear “Yes.” Three out of every four dealers (76%) whose carriage door sales were more than 25 percent of their total residential sales were paying for advertising these products.

The Lesson. Promotion pays. “To make money, you need to spend money.” Dealers who invest in advertising carriage doors are selling more of them. Local efforts to promote carriage doors can add to the impact of national advertising by manufacturers and the initiatives of GarageWowNow.

Where to Advertise?

If dealers responded “Yes” to the advertising question, we then asked, “What medium did you use to promote these doors?” Survey respondents could choose from a standard list

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of advertising media.

The most popular medium of choice was “our company website” (68%), followed by “newspaper” (42%), “our Yellow Pages ad” (42%), and “direct mail” (39%). Others were further down the list, such as “television” (20%), “radio” (19%), and “billboard” (7%). Many dealers added comments, noting that they also used local magazines, home shows, truck graphics, and even on-hold messages to promote carriage doors.

The Lesson. Dealers are using visual media to sell a product that has visual appeal. As they say, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” For carriage doors, in particular, it makes sense to get the image of a carriage door in front of the consumer as often as possible.

Not for Every Home?

We also asked dealers, “Why don’t you sell more carriage house garage doors?” and offered several possible answers to check. More than half (51%) of our survey respondents said they don’t sell more of these doors because they are “suitable only for limited home designs.”

Other popular responses were:

- “Steel raised-panel doors are cheaper.” (42%)
- “The bad economy discourages customers from upgrading to a carriage house door.” (41%)
- “Carriage house doors are too expensive.” (38%)

“Price is #1,” wrote an Illinois dealer, “but in Chicago very few people want a fancy door in the alley.” His comment is a reminder that not every home has a nice garage that faces the street.

Contractor Constraints

Rob Jones of Best Overhead Door, Tualatin, Ore., noted, “Most production builders use raised-panel doors.” A Canadian dealer in Alberta agreed. “We do a lot of builder work,” he wrote. “It takes a while to turn the ship (to carriage doors).”

“Contractors don’t even think about selling their customers something better because they are getting hammered on price,” added a Maine dealer.

Not a Niche?

While some dealers view carriage doors as a niche product for a limited market, others see carriage doors as a viable option on most homes.

“With all the different styles of these

doors, customers can basically design their own look,” wrote one New Jersey dealer. Armed with that optimistic viewpoint, that dealer reported that 46 to 50 percent of his residential sales are carriage doors.

“When a customer walks into my showroom, all they see is carriage house doors. I have one for every budget on display,” added Rob Jones of Portland, Ore.

Dennis Bock of Brainerd Overhead Door in Brainerd, Minn., said his carriage door market is growing because of the increasing varieties of “stamped carriage house models, the improved quality of the product, new finishes and options, and the shorter lead times for orders.”

He said these recent changes from manufacturers have made these doors practical for a greater number of projects. “Six years ago, we rarely sold a carriage house door,” he added. “Today, every week we’re selling carriage house doors, either wood or steel.”

The Lesson. All carriage house doors don’t have crossbucks or antique hinge straps that could limit the ability of these doors to match common home architecture. Each year, manufacturers roll out new design variations of these doors that may be applicable to a large majority of your customers’ homes.

It’s the Economy

Some dealers noted that the sluggish economy is affecting sales in different ways.

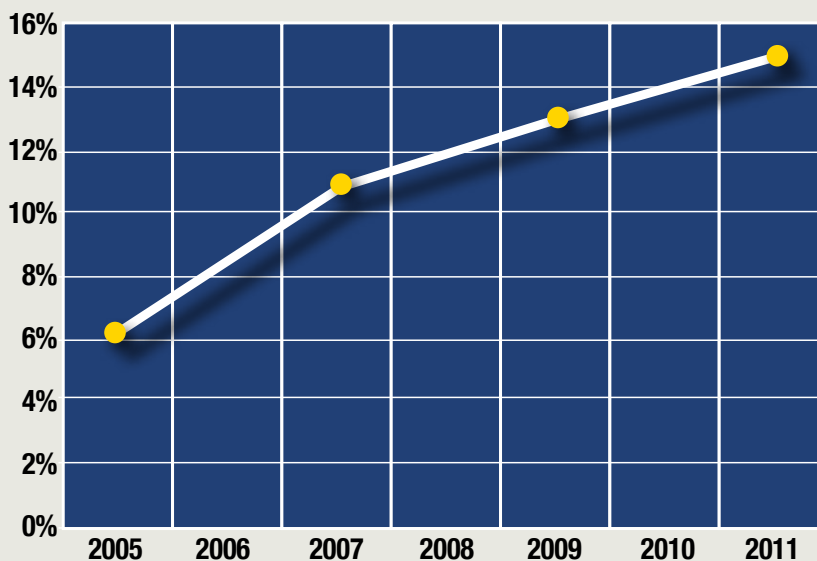
“There is no doubt the slow economy has slowed all residential sales,” said Randy Pehling of Quality Overhead Door, Rochester, Minn. “Upgrades for better insulated doors seem to be more of an interest to our buyers.”

“We love having carriage house doors as an option,” added Jim McGrath of Doors Galore in Clayton, Ohio, “but very few are sold each year due to the economy in our area.”

In some cases, the economy has pushed consumers toward the less-expensive carriage doors. For example, Lee Graves of Graves

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Carriage House Door Sales as a Percentage of the Residential Market



SURVEY DETAILS

- The 2011 online survey was conducted July 29 – Aug. 6, 2011. Email invitations were sent to 1,924 garage door dealers throughout the United States and Canada. A total of 215 dealers (11%) responded.
- The survey defined a carriage house door as “any sectional door that appears to swing open via side hinges. It can be made of steel, wood, aluminum, vinyl, fiberglass, or any composite material.”
- The survey’s final averages (2005 = 6.1%, 2007 = 10.8%, 2009 = 13.0%, 2011 = 15.1%) were calculated by taking the average percent of each range offered in the survey. For example, when dealers said their carriage house door sales were “1-3%,” we assigned each of those dealers a sales percentage of 2%. When they checked “7-10%,” we assigned them a percentage of 8.5%. If “16-20%,” then we assigned them 18%, and so on.

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Overhead Doors in Cummings, Ga., is a big believer in the sales potential of carriage doors. He says they continue to account for about half of his overall door sales.

"However," he wrote, "in the past few years we're seeing a trend toward value-priced carriage doors like stamped steel carriage doors."

The Lesson. Our carriage door surveys repeatedly indicate that some dealers avoid this product because of the economy and the perceived high price. But many manufacturers now offer more affordable models of stamped steel carriage-style doors. If the economy has discouraged you from selling these doors, ask your supplier about the full range of models available.

Pricing Issues

As noted in the survey, 42 percent of dealers say the cheaper price of raised-panel doors has discouraged carriage door sales. Yet, some dealers have found that the higher price and greater appeal of these doors is exactly what some customers want.

"Carriage house doors are pricey," wrote Claude Thompson of Martin Garage Doors in Honolulu, Hawaii. "However, the appeal well

makes up the difference with satisfaction."

"Some customers want their house to stand out above the rest in their neighborhood," said Arthur Lockaby of Overhead Door of Corbin, Ky. "And they will pay a little more to get a different look."

A Maine dealer added, "Since the cost difference between raised-panel and stamped carriage house doors is so small, I feel that we should sell them to every customer."

"Carriage doors are the backbone of my company," wrote Ted Miner of Custom Overhead Door of Hudson Valley, N.Y. Since he usually sells at a higher price, he has become the "go-to" dealer when the customer wants a better door. "Carriage house doors fully support our company plan."

The Lesson. Sales of carriage doors often depend on the dealer's attitude. When dealers embrace the higher price and strategically target the style-minded consumer, they typically sell more carriage doors.

Closing Quotations

In closing, we share comments from three other dealers whose remarks were particularly memorable.

"Largest Piece of Furniture." Bob

Josselyn of Garage Doors of Naples (Fla.) coined a new phrase to describe carriage doors. (At least it was new to us.) He said that customers enjoy designing their own carriage house doors, "allowing us to transform the largest appliance in a home into the largest piece of furniture in the home."

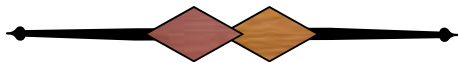
A Positive Reflection on You. Looking beyond the financial aspects of carriage doors, Brian Lucas of F&L Doors in Hazleton, Pa., believes that the doors elevate the role of the garage door dealer. "Carriage house doors have created an exciting opportunity for door companies to become a part of the design element of the new construction or remodeling of a home, providing a positive reflection on our company."

A Good Summary. Scott Hoffman of Doorworks in Wisconsin Rapids, Wis., perhaps summarized our entire article in his one comment. "Sales of carriage-house-style doors are increasing. I think there are three reasons. People are now more aware of curb appeal and how it increases home value, and because they want something that the other folks on the block don't have." ■

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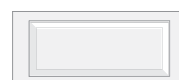
Raised Panel



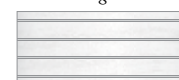
Carriage Panel



Colonial Panel



Ranch Panel



Plank Style Panel



Flush Panel

The Carriage House Sales Reports 2005-2011

What percentage of your total residential garage door sales are carriage house garage doors?

	2005	2007	2009	2011
Percentage of Sales	Percentage of All Respondents	Percentage of All Respondents	Percentage of All Respondents	Percentage of All Respondents
0%	9.5%	3.1%	3.3%	3.8%
1-3%	42.7%	24.5%	20.5%	18.9%
4-6%	20.5%	20.1%	19.7%	20.8%
7-10%	14.5%	18.2%	19.3%	10.8%
11-15%	4.1%	11.3%	10.2%	9.4%
16-20%	2.7%	6.9%	7.0%	10.4%
21-25%	0.9%	5.7%	4.5%	5.2%
26-30%	0.9%	3.1%	2.0%	3.8%
31-35%	0.9%	2.5%	3.3%	4.7%
36-40%	0.9%	1.3%	3.7%	3.3%
41-45%	0.0%	0.6%	1.6%	0.5%
46-50%	0.9%	1.3%	2.0%	3.8%
More than 50%	1.4%	1.3%	2.9%	4.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

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