

SURVEY:

WHAT do customers WANT in a garage door?

Landmark D+AS study helps you maximize sales efforts

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What's most important to customers when they buy a garage door?

Price? Durability? Thermal efficiency? Warranty? A new landmark industry survey reveals helpful answers to these questions for both residential and commercial customers.

Behind the survey

Over the years we've often been asked if a study existed that revealed what customers are looking for when they buy a new garage door. While some individual garage door manufacturers may have conducted such a study, we've never seen the results shared with the industry as a whole. So we sought to conduct our own study.

Ideally, such a survey would ask a thousand consumers key questions about what they were looking for in a new garage door. But it's difficult to identify and contact a thousand consumers who have recently purchased a garage door.

Maximizing the survey value

Instead, we took our survey to door dealers, the people who are in daily contact with purchasers of garage doors. Talking to one dealer can potentially give us the responses of dozens or even hundreds of consumers. In other words, getting input from 100 dealers might be the equivalent of getting input from 1,000 consumers or more.

When we crafted our survey questions for dealers, we were careful to ask for their assessment of the purchasing priorities for a "typical customer." We wanted each respondent to do their best to get inside the heads of their customers.

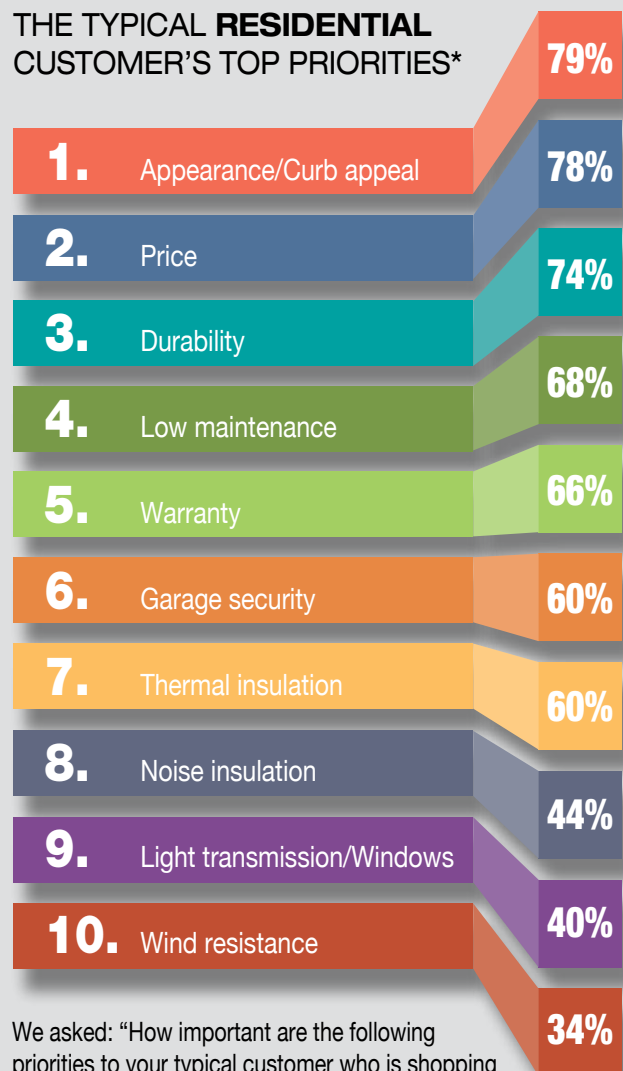
Residential and commercial

To broaden the potential benefit of this survey, we didn't just ask about residential customers' priorities. We also asked about those of commercial garage door customers. As door dealers know, the priorities of these two groups are different.

For each group, we provided a list of door attributes as likely priorities. The list for residential garage doors and the list for commercial doors were similar, but also included qualities specific to each market. The list was randomized for each respondent so that each item's position in the list didn't affect the results.

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THE TYPICAL RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMER'S TOP PRIORITIES*



We asked: "How important are the following priorities to your typical customer who is shopping for a residential garage door?" The answers above show a weighted average of all responses. A higher percentage indicates that customers attach a higher degree of importance to that priority.

*Invitations to our online survey, conducted from Jan. 29 to Feb. 10, 2016, were sent to 1,749 garage door dealers throughout the United States and Canada. Of the 312 dealers who completed the survey, 267 completed the residential survey, and 226 completed the commercial survey.

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Rating each attribute

We then asked each respondent “how important” was each attribute on the list, asking them to gauge the level of that importance. For each item, the respondent could select from seven choices: 0% importance, 10% importance, 30% importance, 50% importance, 70% importance, 90% importance, and 100% importance.

This allowed the survey software to easily calculate a weighted average for each attribute. If a respondent selected 30% importance, it was given a score of 30, while a 90% importance was given a score of 90. If an attribute scored a weighted average of 69, then it can be considered to have 69% importance to the typical customer.

“IT SEEMS LIKE PEOPLE ARE MIGRATING TO THE QUALITY DOORS”

The residential results

Our survey asked, “How important are the following priorities to YOUR TYPICAL CUSTOMER who is shopping for a residential garage door?” The question was completed by 267 door dealers nationwide who sell residential garage doors.

Perhaps surprisingly, Appearance/Curb appeal edged out Price for the number one spot in a list of 10 attributes/priorities. Here are the top five by weighted average:

1. Appearance/Curb appeal 78.9%
2. Price 78.3%
3. Durability 73.5%
4. Low maintenance 67.9%
5. Warranty 65.5%

For years, many in the industry have said that “Price is king.” Price is still a dominant factor for residential customers, but this study reveals that the appearance of the door is now the top priority.

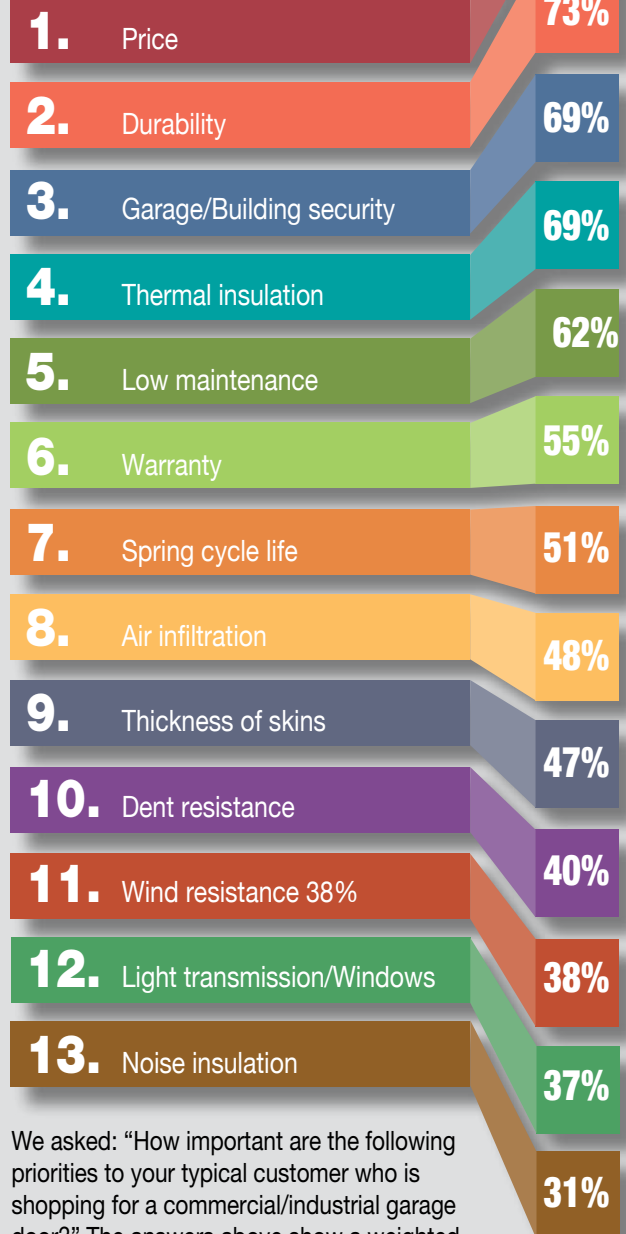
The GarageWowNow national public relations campaign, now in its tenth year, may have played a role in getting consumers to think about style, curb appeal, and design integration with the home’s architecture. Every year, the campaign exposes millions of Americans to the concept and value of better quality and better-looking garage doors.

Priority depends on sales effort

The survey also asked the dealers how often they attempt to upsell these customers to a higher-quality door. Dealers who attempt to upsell less than a third of customers are much more likely to say that Price is the customer’s most important priority. These dealers clearly rated Price as most important:

1. Price 83.5%
2. Appearance/Curb appeal 75.0%
3. Durability 74.9%

The typical COMMERCIAL customer’s top priorities*



We asked: “How important are the following priorities to your typical customer who is shopping for a commercial/industrial garage door?” The answers above show a weighted average of all responses. A higher percentage indicates that customers attach a higher degree of importance to that priority.

**Invitations to our online survey, conducted from Jan. 29 to Feb. 10, 2016, were sent to 1,749 garage door dealers throughout the United States and Canada. Of the 312 dealers who completed the survey, 267 completed the residential survey, and 226 completed the commercial survey.*

Conversely, dealers who are more aggressive with their sales efforts find that Price is less significant. Dealers who attempt to upsell at least two-thirds of customers rated Appearance/Curb appeal as number one:

1. Appearance/Curb appeal 81.6%
2. Price 76.1%
3. Durability 73.0%

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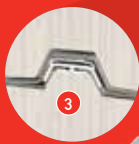
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The takeaway

The lesson: When dealers take time to educate customers about garage doors, customers are likely to more likely to see Appearance/Curb appeal as a top priority. “Many customers don’t know what they want, but they respond well to the upsell when they understand the reasons for a quality door,” said Peter Eldridge of Raynor Hawaii Overhead Door.

A Pennsylvania dealer lamented the prevailing focus on price. “The garage door industry is racing to the bottom,” he said. “Cheaper and cheaper products are being pushed in order to gain market share. It’s a constant race to be the lowest-cost provider at the expense of true quality.”

The commercial results

To learn customer priorities for purchasing commercial doors, our survey asked, “How important are the following priorities to YOUR TYPICAL CUSTOMER who is shopping for a commercial/industrial garage door?” The question was completed by 226 door dealers nationwide who sell commercial garage doors. (See chart on page 50.)

In the commercial ratings, Appearance drops significantly (to 47.0%) while Price clearly dominates in a list of 13 priorities. The top six for commercial customers are:

1. Price 81.4%
2. Durability 72.7%
3. Garage/Building security 68.8%
4. Thermal insulation 62.8%
5. Low maintenance 61.5%
6. Warranty 54.9%

The upside of upselling

The results were essentially the same for dealers who often attempt to upsell. Price dropped slightly in importance while the other priorities increased. Yet, the order of the top six remained essentially the same:

1. Price 80.2%
2. Durability 74.5%
3. Garage/Building security 72.0%
4. Low maintenance 63.9%
5. Thermal insulation 63.8%
6. Warranty 55.8%

For dealers who rarely attempt to upsell, the ranking remained similar. However, the lack of an upsell attempt had the opposite affect on each priority. Price increased in importance, while most of the other priorities dropped significantly:

1. Price 84.9%
2. Durability 68.9%
3. Garage/Building security 65.8%

4. Thermal insulation 62.6%
5. Warranty 56.4%
6. Low maintenance 54.7%

“The typical customer, whether residential or commercial, is very uneducated on overhead doors,” said Marvin Marner of M.C. Overhead Door in Cochran, Pa. “It is often up to us as a dealer to inform them of the options and help them choose a door with the features and upgrades that best fit their specific needs.”

The insulation factor

In competitive situations, particularly for commercial doors, our industry often puts focus on thermal performance. Dealers and manufacturers often quickly compare their R-values or U-factors against the same measurements of a competitor’s doors. This new study indicates that thermal insulation is a factor, but it is not in a typical customer’s top three priorities.

For commercial purchases, thermal insulation ranked #4 of 13 priorities. For residential purchases, it ranked #7 of 10 priorities. Insulation is still a noteworthy factor; even at #7 its weighted score was reasonably strong at 59.8%.

Word to the wise

What do you do with this information? Manufacturers would do well to keep these rankings of customers’ priorities in mind when developing new products and promoting those products to the marketplace. Dealers should do the same with their sales and promotional efforts.

For example, residential selling and advertising efforts should focus on the curb appeal of the doors under consideration. By using stunning product photos, you can draw the customer’s attention to the superior looks of an upgraded door. This will not only help you close the sale, it will also diminish the customer’s tendency to focus on price.

“It seems like people are migrating to the quality doors,” said Wayne Pawlowski at Garage Door Guy in Barnegat, N.J. “No longer is it ‘What’s the cheapest you got?’ They would rather spend a few extra dollars and get a better door.”

Whatever you do, don’t just be an order-taker who treats our product like a dull commodity, mindlessly reporting only the price to the customer. Instead, be the intelligent garage door consultant who helpfully educates each customer of the features and benefits of our products. ■