

Panel progress

Vista Group plc has steadily progressed into a major door company. For the past few years it has understated its position as one of the UK's largest manufacturers of PVC door panels and GRP composite doors. Now, the Wirral – based company is ready to step out of the shadows and shout loud about its achievements.

With so many suppliers in the door panel market, of all shapes and sizes, it is often very confusing for buyers. The question often asked is; isn't one door panel more or less the same as another? Vista's managing director, Keith Sadler, firmly believes that the answer is no. He says: "It is possible to make PVC door panels in a garage or other small premises for a relatively modest investment and there will always be a market for cheap products. We take a different approach. Vista has invested heavily in state of the art machinery that allows us to achieve consistently high quality levels."

Vista's programme of inward investment has been recognised through the many accreditations the company has achieved in recent years. They are currently one of only three companies in England to hold ENISO 9001:2000, LAPFAG approval and the highly regarded BBA accreditation. BBA is much sought after as it is an independent award for both white and woodgrain panels and tests for solar heat gain, twisting, warping and discolouration. Having passed all these tests with flying colours, Vista can confidently offer its customers a full 10 year guarantee.

Vista has found that the UK door panel market is presently quite buoyant and has been for some time. Despite heavy increases in raw material prices, the company has resisted the temptation to switch to cheaper materials suppliers to keep costs down. It retains its price competitiveness through productivity and without compromising on quality. In fact, because of the strict requirements of BBA accreditation, Vista can only use BBA accredited suppliers. As other manufacturers have cut the quality of their components, Vista has remained committed to producing a quality product time and time again.

"Three years ago, some commentators were predicting that the PVC door panel market would 'drop off the edge of a cliff'. Clearly, such predictions have proved to be inaccurate," says Keith Sadler. "I recall at one particular Interbuild exhibition being told by a large and well known panel manufacturer who were exhibiting composite doors, that the future of the door



Keith Sadler, MD, Vista Group

panel industry lay in composite doors and the panel was dead. Three years later, that same company doesn't make or sell composite doors, just panels. This only serves to illustrate the fact that panels are an accepted part of the market and have consumer confidence. I don't see that changing in the foreseeable future."

The single largest impact on the door panel market in recent years has come from the introduction of composite doors. Over five years ago, Vista began to invest in the research and development of its own range of composite doors. It is now seeing the benefit of this investment as the composite door market has undergone tremendous growth in the past few years. The government – backed decent homes initiative has empowered local authorities, ALMO's and RSL's to embark on a huge programme of investment in replacement windows and doors. Added to this, the newbuild market has also provided a boost to an already busy market.

Vista has traditionally supplied trade fabricators and installers with door panels. The introduction of composite doors, has allowed access to the social housing, newbuild and main contractor markets. Previously, these three markets fitted low cost wood or steel doors that needed painting on site and generally were poor looking with inadequate locking systems. The arrival of Vista's Welcome collection of

composite doors offers a through - colour product, five point security lock, triple seal outer frame and three way adjustable hinges. The specification is very high and even though the initial cost is higher, the reduced long term maintenance costs offer excellent value for money.

With Vista manufacturing both panels and composite doors under one roof, there are certain benefits that are passed on directly to the customer. In effect, Vista has become a one stop shop with customers benefiting from reduced administration costs through having just the one account. In the past there were two distinct markets for panels and composites but now they are moving closer as the end consumer understands more about composite doors. Composite doors offer a wider choice of colours and enhanced security but take longer to manufacture than door panels. Vista is working towards being able to manufacture and deliver a composite door in the same lead time as a panel.

All responsible manufacturers of building and related products should pay careful attention to environmental issues such as sustainability, recycling and energy efficiency, and Vista is no different. Keith Sadler says: "We have invested heavily to reduce waste including purchasing three compacting machines that allow us to recycle all cardboard and polythene which is then sold to our recycling partners. Our staff is then rewarded from any savings made. All polystyrene and PVCu waste is returned to the manufacturers for recycling and all wood products are sourced from sustainable forests. I would estimate that at least 70 – 80% of our waste is recycled. We also work closely with the carbon trust, constantly looking at ways to reduce waste gas and electricity. Our core materials for both panels and composites are CFC and ODP (Ozone Depletion Potential) zero, so not contributing to global warming issues."

Vista's core values remain the same. Quality products that are fully tested and accredited, plenty of choice, competitively priced and manufactured by an environmentally responsible company.

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