Beyond the Door: How Automatic Entrance Solutions Are Helping Shape Safer, Smarter Buildings

For many people, an automatic door is something they barely notice.
You approach, it opens, you walk through, and it closes behind you.
But behind that seemingly simple interaction is a growing world of technology, engineering and expertise, and one that is playing an increasingly important role in how modern buildings operate.

Automatic entrance solutions are no longer simply about convenience. They can help buildings manage the movement of people, improve accessibility, support security strategies and create a more efficient experience for the people who use them every day.

That is something Jonathan Drummond, dormakaba's Vertical Solution Sales Lead, ESA Project and Service Sales, and Daniel Wright, Territory Salesperson, ESA Project and Service Sales, see first-hand in their work across the North of England and Scotland.

Jonathan is based in the North East and covers Scotland, while Daniel is based in the North West and also covers Scotland. Between them, they work with customers, consultants, contractors and end users across a diverse range of projects, including hospitals, bus terminals, government buildings and other complex, high-footfall environments.

For both, one of the most interesting developments is the changing perception of what an entrance actually does.

"An entrance is much more than simply a way of getting people into a building," says Jonathan. "It has to work for the people using it, but it also needs to fit into the wider operation of the building. That means thinking about security, accessibility, traffic flow, reliability and what happens when things don't go according to plan."

The entrance as part of the bigger picture

That change in thinking is important.

Historically, automatic doors might have been specified towards the end of a project, with the emphasis largely on appearance, convenience and compliance.

Today, the conversation is increasingly happening much earlier.
A hospital, for example, needs to think about the movement of patients, visitors and staff, often around the clock. A bus terminal may have thousands of people passing through its entrances during busy periods. A government building may need to accommodate public access while maintaining controlled movement into more restricted areas.
There is no single solution that works for all three.

That is why understanding the building and how it will be used is just as important as understanding the technology.

“Every project has a different set of challenges,” explains Daniel. “You can have two buildings that look very similar on a drawing, but the way people use them can be completely different. Our job is to understand what the customer is actually trying to achieve and then find an entrance solution that supports that.”

That might mean automatic sliding or swing doors, revolving doors, security revolving doors, interlocks, sensor barriers, speed gates or turnstiles or, increasingly, a combination of different technologies working together.

Where accessibility meets security

One of the most positive developments in entrance design is that security and accessibility no longer have to be viewed as competing priorities.

A well-designed automatic entrance can make a building easier to access while also helping manage how people move through it.

For someone using a wheelchair, pushing a pram or carrying equipment, an automatic entrance can remove a significant physical barrier. For a busy public building, the same system can help manage pedestrian flow and reduce congestion.

And where controlled access is required, entrance solutions can work alongside wider access control systems to create a more considered approach to security.

The result is a shift away from thinking about security as simply putting barriers in people's way.

Instead, the objective becomes managing movement intelligently.

Technology is becoming part of the building

This is where the industry is changing particularly quickly.

Modern entrance systems can form part of wider building systems, connecting with access control, sensors and other technologies to provide a more integrated approach.

That creates opportunities not only for security, but also for building operators. Reliability, monitoring and maintenance are increasingly important considerations. In a busy hospital or transport environment, for example, an entrance that is out of service can quickly become an operational problem rather than simply an inconvenience.

For Jonathan, this is one of the reasons conversations about automatic entrances are becoming more strategic.

“We’re seeing customers think much more about the whole life of the installation,” he says. “It’s not just about getting the doors installed and working on day one. They want reliability,

serviceability and confidence that the system will continue to perform as the building changes and develops."

That is particularly relevant as organisations become more focused on resilience and the total cost of ownership of their buildings.

The changing role of the specialist

This evolution also changes the role of the people specifying and supplying entrance solutions.

The conversation is increasingly less about selling a particular product and more about understanding a particular problem.

That might involve considering how an entrance interacts with an access control system, how people will move through a building at peak times, how accessibility requirements can be accommodated or how a solution can be maintained over many years.

For Daniel, that consultative approach is one of the most rewarding parts of the role.

"The interesting thing about working on these projects is that you're involved in something that people will use every day, often without giving it a second thought," he says. "If we've done our job properly, the entrance just works. It feels natural, it's accessible, it manages the flow of people and it supports the way the building is supposed to operate."

A new generation of entrance design

There is also a wider industry trend behind this.

As buildings become smarter and more connected, the components within them increasingly need to work together. Entrance systems are part of that evolution.

The introduction of Martyn's Law is one example of the wider conversation around building security and preparedness, but it is only one part of a much broader shift. Organisations are increasingly considering security, accessibility, resilience and user experience together rather than as separate issues.

That creates an opportunity for the automatic entrance sector.

The automatic door of the future is unlikely to be judged simply on how quickly it opens or how attractive it looks.

It will be judged on how effectively it contributes to the building around it.

For Jonathan and Daniel, that is already happening across the projects they support throughout the North of England and Scotland.

And perhaps that is the biggest change of all.

The entrance is no longer simply the place where a building begins.

It is becoming part of the way the building works.

For more information on our Automatic offerings and to see how we can assist with your project, please reach out to Jonathan and Daniel at Jonathan.drummond@dormakaba.com or Daniel.wright@dormakaba.com