

SALES OF EXTERNAL BLINDS CONTINUE TO HEAT UP AS AWARENESS GROWS OF THEIR ABILITY TO MITIGATE NOT ONLY THE GLARE AND HIGH TEMPERATURES OF SUMMER BUT ALSO ADVERSE CLIMATIC CONDITIONS DURING THE COOLER MONTHS.
BELINDA SMART REPORTS.



CLIMATE AWARE SALES AT SHEER BLINDS

Paul Anderson, general manager of Sheer Blinds, notes a marked increase in demand for external venetians in recent seasons, largely due to increased awareness of the impact external shading has on reducing household energy costs.

“The impending Carbon Tax has made people think more carefully about measures that can be taken to implement reductions in energy consumption. Our aim as a business is not only to raise people’s awareness relating to environmental issues but to actively participate in creating change.”

Sheer Blinds' EV range includes 80 Rolled Edge Slats with either Side Channels or Wire Guides, with the option of ladder braid or Hagofixing available. The same applies to the 120 S Wind Stable System, while 100 Flat systems are also available with wire guides and are really only utilised in sheltered areas where a minimal stack height is required.

"The benefits of using external venetians as a form of shading are that not only can they be lowered and retracted but the slats can be incrementally adjusted to effectively control the entry of natural light whilst maintaining surrounding views. In the warmer months slats can be angled to reflect UV radiation and reduce solar transmission and heat gain through glass. During cooler periods blades can be adjusted to allow the entrance of natural light and enhance passive heat transfer through glass."

Anderson suggests the most effective form of shading for the Australian climate is the combination of an external venetian with an internal roller blind or curtain.

"There are still only a handful of manufacturers of these blinds in Australia with the majority of retailers and brand specific representatives opting to import finished product from Europe."

"We use German Geiger motors to drive the blinds and Somfy Modulis In-Line Receivers and Handsets to operate them. We also recommend the use of Somfy Eolis Wind Sensors to automatically retract the blinds should prevailing conditions dictate the need."

"Our blinds have been developed and engineered for our climate, which differs significantly from European countries in that strong northerly winds occur in the warmer months and are associated with high temperatures as opposed to the reverse in the northern hemisphere. We are also affected by the low westerly sun in cooler months which can be utilised as it makes its way under household eaves and soffits to passively warm a home."

EXTERNAL STRAIGHT DROP ROLLER BLINDS ARE ALSO PROVING VERY POPULAR AND CAN BE UTILISED IN A DIVERSE RANGE OF SETTINGS, ANDERSON SAYS.

External straight drop Roller Blinds are also proving very popular and can be utilised in a diverse range of settings, Anderson says.

"There is no doubt they are also a very effective means of shading expanses of glazing. We currently utilise components and hardware sourced from EMA International, which have been designed and engineered locally by Peter and John Doogan. We have found that there is no doubt these are the most functional and robust systems on the market. We have trialled and tested most of the leading brands and found all of them to have shortcomings, but since changing over to EMA a couple of years ago we have encountered no such issues. We feel Somfy and Becker are still the market leaders in terms of providing the most reliable operating systems and technologies."

Sheer Blinds recently upgraded its Miller Weldmaster to a six metre Extreme unit which means the company will now be able to manufacture these blinds more efficiently and will also be able to introduce the EMA Zip System to its range of external products.

Meanwhile Anderson suggests widespread changes in prevailing weather conditions have exerted a dampening effect on demand for folding arm awnings over the last year.





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"El Nina has definitely had an effect on the popularity of this type of product in particular. With the return of El Nino it will be interesting to see if interest increases. These awnings are extremely popular in Europe but have yet to take off here. They obviously have a very limited scope in that they are only really to be used as sun shelters in mild conditions and should not be used in the rain. Nevertheless, we still manufacture Turnils Cabrera and Ibiza systems which we have found to be very reliable. These are available with a range of options including cassettes, pelmets and valances."

Sheer Blinds value adds to its core manufacturing offer with an installation, design and consultation service for its entire product range.

"External blinds must be secured and fastened correctly to building structures to ensure optimum operating parameters and safety. Unfortunately with the way the industry is going at the moment and considering our current economic climate we find ourselves constantly being called out to help assist in fixing other people's mistakes due to poor workmanship. These types of blinds can be extremely dangerous if not installed correctly and are in essence more of a building product than a blind. We have recently employed an experienced licensed builder to manage our external shading division for this very reason."

"We are all for introducing legislation to license installers to prevent these sorts of issues arising in the future. This, of course, should be applied to internal blinds as well. It might help clean up the industry and protect reputable businesses."

SHEER BLINDS VALUE ADDS TO ITS CORE MANUFACTURING OFFER WITH AN INSTALLATION, DESIGN AND CONSULTATION SERVICE FOR ITS ENTIRE PRODUCT RANGE.



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"Over the last few years we have also been working closely with architects, designers and builders to help them understand the importance of some of these matters. It is far more effective to have the correct plans, specifications and procedures in place so that when it comes time to install these blinds, all the design and customisation necessary has been discussed and taken into consideration. This being said, they can be easily retro-fitted to existing structures and dwellings."

NBS NOTES YEAR-ROUND INTEREST

Francois Habib of National Blind Suppliers says the trend for utilising external blinds to create a second outdoor room continues apace, with demand growing in particular for channel guided systems. Whereas stronger sales used to be the hallmark of the warmer months leading into Christmas, Habib says sales of comparable products appropriate for the cooler months are also growing.

"Increasingly it's the builders who are using and promoting them as an al fresco solution all year round. Clear PVC is traditionally a strong seller for winter but increasingly we're seeing growing interest in mesh for use all year round as it offers heat and cold protection as well as visibility outwards. We offer a one channel system called Chameleon by EMA International, where the fabric runs down the side channel; and a Glide Lock system that locks into place for wind resistance. We do strong sales in both of those."

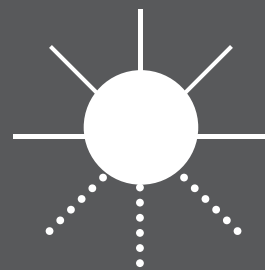


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"Our point of difference is in easy installation and a streamlined look. The side channels come in two pieces, with the second piece used for design purposes so that all holes and screws are covered."

Habib foresees significant future growth in external products such as motorised channel guided awnings. New trends in standard awnings include an aesthetic move to straight valance as opposed to scalloped valance awnings, he adds.

"We now offer the straight valance as standard and it's selling well. People tend to like that more streamlined look, particularly in modern homes."

QUALITY FOCUS AT BLINDS BY PETER MEYER

Simon Meyer of Peter Meyer Blinds confirms the company continues to differentiate itself in the market through a focus on quality, motorisation and tailor made solutions.

"One example is a tailor made solution for Merewether Surf Club. We won this contract because we designed this solution specifically," he says.

The company is also reporting a growing market for external metal venetians.

"We bring in a quality German Product by Warema, which really is the market leader. They offer full building management systems available for large commercial projects, down to tailored control systems for high end domestic projects. The prices on these imported products are now super competitive in comparison to

locally made products, but we also feel they offer a superior quality and greater selection. We are also seeing excellent growth in our side retention external roller blind systems where we weld a zipper onto the side of the fabric to offer greater wind stability. This system also allows you to fully enclose alfresco dining areas, something that has always been an issue in the Australian environment."

Blinds by Peter Meyer also manufactures its own Solare Teknica range. The Teknica range offers a number of key features: all blinds can be locked into the down position with a locking pin; all are available five metres wide, and offered with the same cassette; the roller blind range can be either front rolled to give projection out from glass or walls, or back rolled as normal.

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ALSO REPORTING A
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FOR EXTERNAL
METAL VENETIANS.

PETER MEYER

The Solare Teknica 1000 comprises a simple crank operated external roller (with or without cassette) that simply straps down into position. The Solare Teknica 2000 is a wire guided version of the external roller blind, available with or without a cassette. The Solare Teknica 3000 is a heavy duty system ideal for balconies. "Wire guided without a head box, this is the system to use when you are installing in windy areas."

The Solare Teknica 4000 is a premium external roller blind comprising a side channel external roller system whose key benefit is that the fabric is held within the side channel, unlike competing products where the fabric runs along the edge of the channel.

The Solare Teknica 5000 is a side retention system which uses welded zips to keep the fabric inside the floating side rail, while the Solare Teknica 5500 is a pivot arm awning which can be teamed with side rails, offering all the benefits of a folding arm awning at a greatly reduced price.

The Solare Teknica 6000 is described as an entry level folding arm awning that can be made up to 11m wide and is offered in motorised or manual options.

The Solare Teknica 7000 is suitable for courtyards and decks across commercial, hospitality and residential applications. Non-corrosive for coastal environments, this is a premium German designed system, fully cassetted to protect fabric and hardware from the elements, and is offered in clear anodised and custom powder coated finishes for cassette and arms. The system has a compact 140 x 250 cassette profile with a maximum size 7000 mm wide x 3500 mm projection fully retractable, and heavy duty folding arms bound by Dyneema tape for extra strong and smooth performance.

Along with the Solare Teknica range the company also offers exterior shutters, Sundream pergola and conservatory awnings, opening louvered roof systems and Corradi retractable outdoor rooms.

The last few years have seen summer seasons reporting a less than stellar trading due to "terrible wet weather and low temperatures", Meyer says.



"However, we have already seen a great surge in sales this season and with our new exterior roller blind range, better external venetian prices and excellent folding arm awning ranges, we are very excited about the season ahead."

"We have also invested heavily in a welding machine which sets our products apart from the rest who tend to still stitch their skins together. Welding is by far a stronger solution and won't deteriorate like yarn will over time. One key concern that we are seeing is inferior quality Chinese imports, companies selling purely on price and putting a potentially dangerous product into the market. When you have an awning that could weigh up to 200kgs, it needs to have quality components and excellent bracket options to ensure it is installed correctly and will stand the test of time. We offer a five year warranty on all our external range and have been manufacturing since 1987. We stand by our warranty and will be around to honour it."

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ROOF AWNINGS A STRONG SELLER AT BARTLETT BLINDS

Bartlett Blinds marketing executive Matt Brown confirms the company is experiencing growing demand for roof system awnings.

“Unlike traditional retractable awning styles, the new systems can be used in all weather conditions. These systems are fully enclosed in hardware tracking and come with all inclusive hardware components. The awning itself is manufactured from high quality solid PVC fabric. These systems are selling extremely well and we expect demand to increase further in the coming seasons. With a 12 metre width by six metre projection they are suitable for beer gardens, courtyards and general domestic use.”

Meanwhile demand for external sunblinds and awnings remains steady and consistent.

“We expect demand to increase considerably in the coming months with the warmer weather hitting. Whilst the traditional window shade sunblinds remain highly popular, the ability to now fully enclose any outdoor area means the Bartlett Panel Blinds are becoming more and more popular, particularly the motorised option. The Panel Blinds can be manufactured from Clear or Tinted PVC or mesh fabric.”

ZIPTRAK AND PNP SUNSHADE AT PINZ

Pinz is a leading manufacturer of the Ziptrak track guided blind system and is reporting growing sales and brand recognition for the product, confirms Pinz sales and marketing manager Kate Bessell.

“There have been a number of other brands releasing products into the enclosed side channel or ‘side retention’ product category recently, further illustrating the huge popularity that this type of vertical screening has with consumers. However Ziptrak’s unique balanced spring system and its ease of operation continues to put Ziptrak at the forefront for consumer satisfaction.”

“Meanwhile, further product developments with the Ziptrak system including the centre lock release mechanism and reverse handle continue to provide great consumer benefits and selling points for the retailer.”

“We see a long continuing life cycle for the Ziptrak product and this product category in general. New fabric offerings such as fully weldable textured block outs and reducing costs and options for motorisation all expand the applications for the product in the consumer’s home. The ability to look at the product as something suited to much more than a veranda or pergola application and have it considered for window shade, room darkening requirements or even fitted to permanent shade structures, all contribute to its continued popularity.

“Another very popular product offering that is growing within our range is our take on a modern straight drop awning,” says Bessell. “The PNP Sunshade incorporates high quality stainless steel fittings that are hand modified to produce a very functional and great looking twist on a spring operated awning. We have done away with the traditional awning hardware and really brought this product into the twenty-first century.”



MEANWHILE DEMAND FOR EXTERNAL SUNBLINDS AND AWNINGS REMAINS STEADY AND CONSISTENT.

BARTLETT BLINDS

“Although the PNP Sunshade works well in the typical veranda applications it’s unique latching system and slim line fitting allows it to also take on the classic auto awning as a window shade and works particularly well in bay window locations by sitting flush against the wall to minimise light gaps typically created by the bottom stand out of auto awnings.”

“This product provides not only great selling points such as minimised light gaps and high quality, easy to use hardware, it also has a fantastic aesthetic appeal really shining in the high end, architectural and design markets.”

CONTINUED UPTAKE FOR ACMEDA’S ZIPSCREEN

Acmeda’s Zipscreen product continues to retain and grow its position among window furnishings specialists. The product has been selling well at Total Window Concepts, according to TWC product manager Tony Popovic, who notes key benefits include its well-designed construction, self-aligning side channels and the ability to be custom-made to provide total fit from edge to edge, with no gaps.

“We picked up the product a few months ago and we’re now selling a lot of it. I think it’s going to do very well for us. It’s got a streamlined look that’s very modern and contemporary looking and it also offers a wide range of motorisation options. There’s a good range of colours, controls and enclosed box covers to choose from.”

Popovic added that interest in alfresco entertaining areas such as pergolas, verandas, and balconies looked set to continue to drive sales of Zipscreen, which offered protection from sun or wind and rain all year round.