

I was invited to visit the Genie Garage Door Opener Company in Mt. Hope, Ohio. I had never been to Ohio on purpose before, nor had I ever attended an event like this. As I came to understand better after arrival, the event is a somewhat new marketing effort companies are making to get one-on-one with people who have a presence on the Internet and can communicate about products. Bloggers are what they are known as, and again after a bit of learning on my part, I was amazed to find out how big of a deal this has become and will continue to be. The method of communication through websites and postings along with reader feedback is quickly becoming the primary influential source of purchasing information consumers look to before transferring their money to a person or product.

The people who put this event together, The Genie Company and SBC Advertising, are in my opinion ahead of most other companies in the home maintenance, improvement, safety and repair sector. With very few exceptions, tools, hardware, and related items tend to be pulled in kicking and screaming into front line marketing opportunities and techniques. Genie, however, appears to be not only keeping up, but leading the pack. As I flip thorough trade magazines, flyers, attachments to emails, they all tend to look the same and more often than not, I just pass right by them. Garage door openers were probably in those presentations multiple times and I did not pay attention. And how much did those companies spend to try to get me to take notice?

Genie and SBC have found the way to present product information and people. And I think that is what I liked the best. Not only did I get to learn about a company, but I got to meet and talk to the people that make the company what it is. Just like in my business as a remodeler, people buy from people, and if you know more about who you are dealing with, you are more likely to do business with them. Everyone I met at The Genie Company had that fire for what they do and was proud of it and what they make. Good job folks.

So, back to the trip. Boise to Salt Lake to Detroit to Canton, Ohio. Then off the plane and into the waiting transportation from Krista at SBC. Marc Lyman, a blogger from San Diego made the last leg of the trip on the same plane as I did and we jumped in the SUV and headed out. Marc's blog is, get this, HomeFixated.com. Yes, we had a few words about trademarks and copyrights and agreed that everything was just fine. He has put together a good site and I encourage you to cruise through it when you get a chance. Krista welcomed us to the meeting and let us know who else was coming and from where. Ethan Hagen from OneProjectCloser.com in Maryland and Tabatha Muntzinger from CharlesandHudson.com out of Dayton, Ohio, were the other two attendees we'd catch up to in about an hour. A few others that were invited and couldn't make it missed out on a great experience. Oh well, too bad for them.

I didn't know what to expect from "Ohio". Or at least this part of Ohio. The northeast area was an unexpected treat. Amish country for sure -- everywhere you turn was a postcard view of the most beautiful rural farm countryside imaginable. The trees were beginning to turn color for the fall, and the last of the harvests were being gathered. The picturesque barns and farm houses, all in white, were placed with the setting sun and all looked like a quiet oasis from crazy city life. I felt as if a portal

had been opened to a different world. For a guy that likes to work a garden, fix fences, tend to animals, and work on old houses, this may be the place to be later in life. I know, why wait. Anyhow, the place was awe inspiring. We settled in to the newly built and beautiful Berlin Grande Hotel in the town of Berlin just a few minutes drive from The Genie Company headquarters in Mt. Hope.

For the evening, we walked to a restaurant just down the hill from the hotel and had a really great meal of what most would call comfort food. Fried Chicken, ham, corn, green beans, mashed potatoes, gravy, dinner rolls with the famous, Amish peanut butter spread, three or four pasta and noodle salads, green salad with bacon, mushrooms, olives and cheese, ice tea, and finished off with peach pie and hand whipped cream. OK, yes I was stuffed. This was a solid, traditional meal with plenty of stored energy for those going out to do the daily work. Me, I was just stuffed. We had a nice relaxed conversation with Mike Kridel, President of the Genie Company, and Dave Osso, the head of Marketing and Development. I think they were surprised that our group had so many questions for them!

The next morning we gathered at 8:00 a.m. and headed out to see the Baltic, Ohio, plant where the Genie garage door openers are assembled. We met Rick Johnson the plant's operations manager who, along with Mike and Dave, gave us a walkthrough of the product line. I'll get more into those specifics later, but for now, know that there are 12 different openers in the complete product line.

We were presented a PowerPoint presentation on the company, history, organization, production facilities and systems of assembly and distribution. We again threw out quite a few questions and were treated to direct and confident answers. It is good to have this level of upper management so in-tune with the minute details of product and plant operation. I have talked to other company persons of these positions that would not have been able to answer the same questions. Following the sit down, we were invited to walk the 203,000 square foot factory and see the assembly of the openers themselves. I was pleasantly surprised (again) to see the amount of human hands on the work being done on the products. The plant employs 119 people and runs three shifts every weekday. The work environment was spotless, safe, well-organized, and as expected, laid out for maximum efficiency and ergonomics. Don't tell anyone, but many secret and confidential techniques and equipment are used to make a Genie garage door opener.

When built, the openers are packaged up and loaded on pallets, ready to be shipped to distribution centers and stores selling Genie products. In the warehouse, there are 75,000 openers ready to ship on a moment's notice. Pretty impressive. I'll get into more on the openers and features elsewhere and later, but I must say, that until now, I did not realize there was so much engineering, technology, and consumer research involved in that thing that makes my garage door go up and down. And not only that, but the passion these people have to make the best product they can at a price us consumers can handle.

While it would be nice to have been told that 100 percent of every product, component, and sub assembly for every unit made was 100 percent unquestionably made in the USA, this would have been an unrealistic expectation on my part in today's competitive global electronic economy. Not only that, but much like the way I go about my remodeling business, there are often others that can do it better at

a cost that, in the end, will benefit my customer better than me trying to do it all. The Genie Company recognizes this and yet maintains the position that they will do as much as possible to keep the product and the jobs that go with it as close as possible while still maintaining their competitiveness. Good job guys. I wish you continued success.

Following the plant tour, we were taken what seemed like just a few miles away to the company headquarters building. Now I know it was further than that, but the beautiful countryside just seems to make time stand still around this part of Ohio. Set in the hills of Mt. Hope, the building is an architectural beauty and award-winner. Views out of every window in this building are stunning. I'd challenge any corporate employee here to have a screensaver any more spectacular than what is right outside their windows.

Mike Kridel, company president, gave us a presentation about the company's marketing position and future plans for the product line. He again thanked us for the time we made to come see his company and products. We thanked him for the hospitality and the realization we now had of such an innovative and important product in so many homes that often goes somewhat unappreciated. We talked about why people choose which openers they do, what features are important to them, who the competition is, what they are trying to target, who is moving forward and who is following. We also talked about customer service and technical support after the purchase and what the frequently asked questions are. A marketing notation I found interesting was that when unassisted by a list, consumers who were asked to name garage door opener brands stated Genie 40 percent of the time. This lead consumers in brand recall over all other brands. This put Genie #1 at the top of the percentages.

So that is what the tour was, and company is about. We said good bye, split up and headed back to our hometowns. There is much more obviously like which opener is right for your home, what features are available and which ones should you bring into your life. I will soon be documenting my experiences installing a new Genie garage door opener. I have the typical double car garage door that jumps and jerks as it is being opened, wakes up the neighbors as it goes up and down, and when it hits 28 degrees out side, quits working all together. It also is so out of date there are no safety beams to prevent something from getting damaged or squished, and we as a family are down to one transmitter. I wonder who has the other one. Hmmm. Anyway, stay tuned (or clicked) for more on that soon.

In the meantime, take a look and a listen to your garage door opener. Think there is room for improvement? For product information check out www.geniecompany.com