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Business Spotlight: All Patched Up

Ed Peaco
Contributing Writer

Having weathered years of doldrums since the 2008 economic contraction, Eric Shryer's Screenmobile franchise made a resurgence in 2012 in concert with building and remodeling projects.

During the last 15 years, and gaining momentum in the last five, Shryer has been cultivating his niche of all things screened by serving homeowners, on site and in a showroom with a shop.

"We knew that if we could survive, we would come back with the economy, and this year, Springfield has been very nice," he says, referring to the nearly 50 percent revenue growth in 2012.

Home-based business
Before Screenmobile, Shryer left the increasingly competitive field of construction contracting and worked as an installation contractor with Builders Square Inc. He says he liked the rhythm of going home to home, and he searched for a franchise business that would allow him to work in that manner.

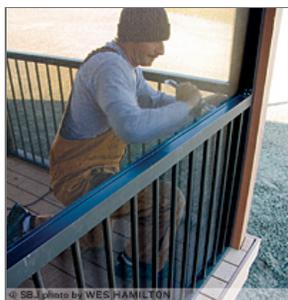
"I decided I needed to become specialized," he says. "I found this niche, in just the screening world, and nobody else was doing it."

He opened a Screenmobile franchise in 1997, working out of his home and garage. Total startup costs were \$52,000, he says. After five years, he moved into a storage unit.

During this period, customers occasionally went to his home to drop off screen doors and windows needing repair after such mishaps as pets scratching through the mesh or people walking through a sliding screen door.



Screenmobile franchisee Eric Shryer says he entered the screening business to capitalize on a niche in the Springfield-area market.



Nathan Bilyeu works on a screened-in porch, a custom job performed by the local Screenmobile franchise.

[Click here for more photos.](#)

The Screenmobile of Springfield, MO Inc.

Owner: Eric Shryer
Founded: 1997
Address: 1821 W. Sunset St., Springfield, MO 65807
Phone: (417) 883-4114
Fax: (417) 883-4116
Web: Screenmobile.com/springfield
Email: screenmobileofspringfield@gmail.com
Services/Products: Screen repairs and screen products
2012 Revenues: \$300,000
Employees: 2

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In 2007, Shryer opened his current location, 1821 W. Sunset St. near Kansas Expressway, and his walk-in traffic grew to become half of the small-repair segment of his business. Costs of the move to Sunset Street were minimal, roughly \$2,000 for office and shop equipment and a few furnishings, he says. Rent is \$1,000 a month.

Shryer pays Screenmobile royalties of 5 percent of sales and a \$75 monthly national advertising fee. He has a 10-year licensing agreement, covering seven counties, that is up for renewal in four years.

Currently, a Screenmobile franchise requires more than \$70,000, including the franchise license, territory fee, trailer and tool package, training, web-based business operating system, technology kit, uniform package and marketing startup package. The Southern California-based Screenmobile Corp. – started by the Walker family in the early 1980s – began franchising in 1984 and today has 86 locations. It ranked No. 435 in Entrepreneur magazine's 2013 Franchise 500.

Simple to complex jobs

Shryer says his business is split between simple repairs and custom jobs such as screened-in porches. Walk-in repairs start at \$13.50 to rescreen a small window, and mobile service has a \$70 minimum.

New screen-enclosure projects have an average cost of \$2,500 and range from \$1,200 to \$7,000, he says. Screenmobile products also include retractable awnings that cost \$2,000 to \$4,000 apiece and roll-up sunscreens at \$300 to \$2,000.

Of the 90 enclosures completed in 2012, about 75 percent were for new home construction, Shryer says. One of his homebuilding clients, Rick Ramsey, says Shryer and his crew have installed about six porch enclosures for him, ranging in cost from \$2,500 to \$4,500.

"They get in and out, and they don't drag a project. They get it done, and they do it right," says Ramsey, owner of Ramsey Building Co., adding that Screenmobile products perform well.

Springfield homeowner Robert Blackshear engaged Shryer twice during a four-year period to install sun-blocking screens to keep the west-facing part of his house more comfortable.

"It became so hot there in the summertime that we could hardly stay in that part of the house," says Blackshear, a Mercy physician at White River Anesthesia Associates in Branson.

In 2008, Screenmobile installed the screens, and they were so effective that Blackshear decided to replace all 20 window screens in the house – a \$1,330 job, Blackshear says.

In August, Blackshear spent another \$2,000 on five roll-up sun-blocking screens for his screen-enclosed porch, and he says the investment not only made the west side of the house livable as never before but also reduced energy costs by some 20 percent.

Last year was the first since 2008 Shryer's operations exceeded \$300,000 in revenue.

In late 2011, builders were asking for screen-enclosure estimates in large numbers, and after a lag time of six to 10 months for construction, those estimates turned into orders, he says. A year later, he's seeing another surge of estimate requests, which Shryer hopes to turn into sales throughout 2013.

Shryer says he plans to add another worker in the spring when seasonal business picks up. During 2012, he says it was a challenge to keep the showroom door open during busy periods when all hands could be working in the field.

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