

A New Concept in Portable Screens



The story behind the development of StageScreen® and FocalPoint™ by DRAPER®

FOUR YEARS AGO, Wayne Wagner was fed up. So the CEO of Wagner Media, one of the largest wholesale projection screen rental companies in the United States, picked up the phone. The man he called was John Pidgeon, the President of projection screen manufacturer Draper, Inc.

“Wayne called me and said, **‘I don’t like your folding screens,’**” according to Pidgeon. “Actually, he said ‘I don’t like anybody’s folding screens.’ We invited a group of key staging dealers to come provide feedback to us. Wayne provided a great deal of feedback at the focus group and since.” Pidgeon and his team listened.

Wagner’s initiative led to the development by Draper of a totally new concept in portable screens: Instead of hinged, folding frames Draper came up with a **modular design**, where screens are built from an inventory of pieces of various sizes.

“Talking with the rental dealers I heard several common complaints,” according to Kenneth Risher, Draper’s Product Design Engineer who was charged with bringing this new concept in screens to life. Those complaints included **‘a broken part equals a frame we can’t rent,’** ‘the current frames just don’t last in the rental market,’ ‘when you rent screens you’re lucky if half of the cranks come back—if you lose cranks or don’t have them all when setting up a screen you’re dead in the water’ and ‘if we do a really big or custom screen for a show, that frame is only used once since we’ll probably never do that size again.’ Risher decided that a “modular” idea would eliminate those complaints—and more.

“I wanted something modular, something that required less labor to manufacture, something that could be field-repaired and, of course, something **stronger than what was currently in the marketplace,**” according to Risher. “I wanted it to be completely intuitive to assemble around the globe, and I wanted to completely eliminate snaps and

tension the surface in a way that had never been done before, providing variable tension if possible, and something that was field-repairable.”

Thus were born the StageScreen®, a large venue truss screen, and its smaller cousin, the single-tube FocalPoint®. Both screens do away with such perennial folding screen issues as loose hinges, broken and bent frames, popped snaps, ripped viewing surfaces and pinched fingers. What they add, according to Wagner, is profit.

“The return on investment is going to be on a factor of three to four times what a standard truss screen would provide,” according to Wagner. “In the old days, we would buy four 16 x 9 screens with four front surfaces and four rear surfaces. With that product you could rent four screens.” The modular design of the StageScreen and FocalPoint, says Wagner, changes that.

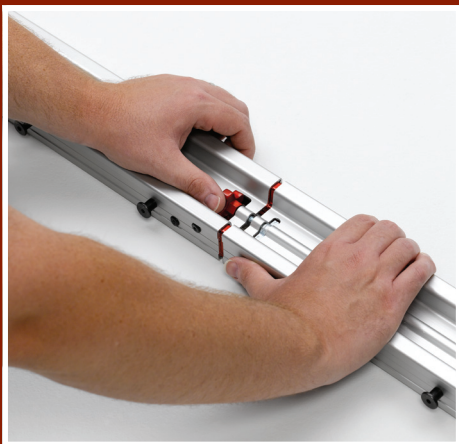
“You can rent all eight of those same surfaces because you are able to borrow pieces from other screens. So right there you can double your ROI because you can rent twice as many screens.”

In addition, the introduction of new projection formats has caused a dilemma in the marketplace. Nowadays, Wagner says for each screen size a dealer needs to have three formats: 4:3, 16:9 and 16:10. Once again, it’s StageScreen and FocalPoint to the rescue.

“You can reuse the same frame pieces and do all three formats with basically the same number of frame pieces. The only investment to add a 16:10 format to your inventory is the surface [and a few additional pieces].” And that, Wagner points out, is another doubling of ROI.

One of the early witnesses to the development of the StageScreen was James LeBoeuf, Operations Manager for MassAV in Billerica, Massachusetts, who traveled to Draper’s headquarters in Spiceland, Ind., for a preview of the StageScreen.





"It was hard to contain my excitement," according to LeBoeuf. **"When I came back I said 'imagine a screen with no cranks and no snaps-can you imagine that?'"**

Just as Risher predicted, LeBoeuf says the modular approach of Draper's StageScreen and FocalPoint solves all the problems inherent to folding screens.

"People catch their fingers in the latches, they're not that durable, they're prone to breakage, they have snaps that get crushed, they have cranks that get lost," he points out. "StageScreen solves all of those problems."

Once he saw it, LeBoeuf was so impressed by the StageScreen that he was keen to get one out on a job and into the hands of technicians.

"The first event I had it on was a large meeting for a pharmaceutical company. We were erecting a large truss structure in the glass foyer they had. They wanted to fly a screen, and I immediately jumped on the fact that I had the StageScreen." LeBoeuf adds that his opinion of the StageScreen was quickly reaffirmed by the technicians who were onsite.

"There's no trouble setting this up. I don't have to find cranks. It goes together. It's rigid. It's strong. And that was the exact feedback that I got."

LeBoeuf says even small items such as the move away from cranks, snaps and hinges affects the bottom line. "Just the fact of not having cranks is a huge burden off of my shoulders," he says. "I'm sure there are a hundred techs out there somewhere with piles of cranks sitting on their dresser that they took out of their pockets after a show and they never made it back into my frame kit."

Wagner says he, too, has received a great deal of positive feedback from people in the field who assemble the screens, and those who rent them out.

"The comment we get from people is 'Why are you still renting truss screens?' After they've had the StageScreen and FocalPoint, dealers and installers tell us they don't want to go back to the old technology." In fact, according to Wagner people who have used the StageScreen and FocalPoint would rather pay a premium to use them again. "The premium product sells better because it's so dramatically better than the other products."

"The impact to Draper has been fantastic in terms of re-introducing the Draper product offering to the AV

rental industry," according to Draper Rental Products Manager Jim Hoodlebrink. "People in the industry see we are listening to their concerns and they, in turn, are trying the new products and taking them on for complete inventory changes."

Just as Draper listened to Wagner when he approached the company with his concerns, he in turn is listening to those who are no longer interested in old-style truss and folding screens. Wagner Media is among those replacing old inventory with modular screens. While this might be a gamble in today's tight economy, Wagner says it is one that has paid off—in spades.

Wagner recently made a major purchase of FocalPoint screens in 8', 10', 12' and 14' widths for his offices in Houston, Orlando and Las Vegas. **In each width, the screen frame can be converted from NTSC format to 16:9 or 16:10 by exchanging just two frame sections**—a huge savings compared with buying complete screens for each format. All other frame and leg components are common to all three formats.

"The thing that we've run into, and we're kind of shocked at this, is that as we keep adding inventory there seem to be more orders. Everything we have in StageScreen is out almost every day. **The growth in that whole market for us is really tremendous.**" And Wagner isn't the only one who feels that way.

"It's just really the way to go and I hope it's the way of the future," enthuses LeBoeuf, "so much so that I hope I can abandon a lot of the other stuff and work with the more modular design that the StageScreen offers."

Comments like these are just what Draper's Risher likes to hear.

"I'm very happy with both designs. For the StageScreen in particular I left room for and had a variety of possible iterations in mind, and it's been fun seeing those iterations come about as the orders and custom requests come in.

"I'm always happy as a designer to force a paradigm shift," adds Risher. **"Forward thinking is the only way forward."**

For more information on the StageScreen or the FocalPoint, please visit their respective webpages at:

www.draperinc.com/go/StageScreen.htm

www.draperinc.com/go/FocalPoint.htm

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411 S. Pearl St., Spiceland, IN 47385 USA ■ 765-987-7999
www.draperinc.com ■ fax 765-987-1689

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