

## Behind Every Door: Why Compliance, Specification and Technical Expertise are Redefining Access Control in FM

3 hours ago



Speaking exclusively to FM Business Daily recently, Gary Hewitt, Managing Director of [Door Controls Direct](#), explained how the role of door hardware and access control has changed beyond recognition, why FM teams increasingly need a supplier that combines technical depth with online convenience, and what good specification actually looks like in practice.

Door hardware is rarely the first thing an FM professional thinks about when reviewing a building's compliance or safety profile. Yet according to Gary, it's increasingly where some of the most significant operational and regulatory risks are found. "There is far greater focus today on how complete door systems perform, rather than simply looking at individual components in isolation," he said. "Areas such as fire door compliance, accessibility, life safety, escape hardware and auditability are now central to specification decisions across healthcare, education, commercial property and the public sector."

Door Controls Direct brings over a century of ironmongery heritage to a market it has spent the past two decades repositioning itself within. Originally a traditional ironmongery business with branches across Somerset and Dorset, the company has evolved into a major online supplier of specialist door hardware, combining nationwide reach and next-day delivery with a level of technical support more commonly associated with specialist distributors. "A lot of people find us online," Gary said, "but then they phone us for more detailed answers to their questions."

A sector transformed

The changes Gary has observed across the past decade go well beyond product innovation. The expectations placed on door systems, and the people responsible for specifying them, have shifted fundamentally. Cloud-based access control, monitored escape hardware, electronic locking, automated doors and smarter building integration have moved from niche applications into standard considerations, particularly in multi-site and high-risk environments where security, compliance and traceability are all under scrutiny.

Standards and certification requirements have kept pace. Third-party certification, test evidence, correct installation and ongoing maintenance are now expected across the industry, with organisations such as the Guild of Architectural Ironmongers playing an active role in driving awareness of the importance of correct specification. The principle that door hardware components should be viewed as part of a fully compliant, complete tested system has become the benchmark against which FM teams are increasingly being measured.

In an ideal scenario, Gary acknowledged, every ageing door set in an older building would be replaced in its entirety. In reality, FM teams are managing older estates with limited budgets, phased upgrade programmes and a mixture of legacy and modern systems. “That’s where a large part of our role now sits,” he said. “Helping facility managers identify problems within existing buildings and source compliant, high-quality replacement products that work effectively with older door frames and existing hardware.”

#### The case for technical expertise

As the environments FM managers are responsible for have grown more complex, the need for suppliers with genuine technical knowledge has grown with them. Balancing security, fire compliance, accessibility, budget and practical operational requirements simultaneously leaves little room for error. Gary was direct about the consequences of getting it wrong. “If products are specified, supplied or fitted incorrectly, it can create operational and compliance problems very quickly,” he said.

What he described is a shift in what customers are looking for when they approach a supplier. “They increasingly want reassurance as much as they want products. They want confidence that what they are fitting is compliant, suitable for the environment and going to work reliably long term.” Door Controls Direct responds to that through a sustained investment in technical knowledge: regular in-house training, close working relationships with manufacturers on technical sessions, and active membership of the Guild of Architectural Ironmongers, the Master Locksmiths Association and ADSA, the Automatic Door Suppliers Association.

The pace at which standards, technologies and customer expectations are evolving makes that investment non-negotiable, Gary said, particularly in sectors such as healthcare and education where buildings are under heavy daily use and downtime is not a practical option.

#### Security, accessibility and the invisible door

One of the most significant shifts in how door hardware is specified is the expectation that security and accessibility must now be achieved simultaneously, without one compromising the other. Gary described this as probably the biggest conversation in the industry at present. “Years ago, security solutions could sometimes feel intrusive or restrictive,” he said. “Today, users expect buildings to feel secure without creating friction in how people move through them.”

Healthcare illustrates the challenge well. Strong safeguarding and access control are non-negotiable, but so is smooth, intuitive movement for staff, patients and visitors who may be unfamiliar with the environment. Education creates different but equally demanding pressures: buildings must remain secure and durable while still feeling welcoming and easy to manage across large numbers of users. Technology has made the balance more achievable, with wireless access control, smart credentials, hold-open and swing-free door closers, automated doors and integrated systems all contributing to better outcomes.

Gary articulated an idea that sits at the heart of Door Controls Direct's approach to specification: that the best door hardware is the kind people barely notice. "A correctly specified door closer should open smoothly with minimum resistance and close quietly and safely behind the user without disruption," he said. "Behind that

seemingly simple experience, the door might be helping prevent the spread of fire and smoke, maintaining security, retaining heat, reducing noise transfer, supporting accessibility requirements or protecting privacy. Achieving all of those outcomes simultaneously is rarely accidental. It comes from good specification, quality products, proper installation and understanding how people actually interact with the building day-to-day."

Built for the whole life cycle

Gary's view of where Door Controls Direct fits in the FM market is precise. The company has a dedicated technical team that continues to work with architects, contractors and design teams at the specification stage of new projects. But the growing part of the business is the support it provides to FM professionals managing buildings already in use.

The combination of online convenience and specialist technical support is, he said, what makes the offer distinctive. Where a traditional distributor might provide depth of knowledge but limited speed or accessibility, and a purely transactional online supplier might deliver quickly but without the technical backing FM teams need, Door Controls Direct is positioned to provide both. "Our role is helping customers keep buildings safe, compliant, secure and operational throughout their entire life cycle," Gary said, "not just at the point of being first built."

For FM teams managing complex, multi-use estates under increasing compliance pressure, that whole-life perspective is precisely what the market needs more of.