

>> UPDATE

EXTERNAL SUNSCREEN FABRICS

WIDER WIDTHS, DIVERSE WEAVE TYPES AND THE GROWTH OF ENVIRONMENTALLY ACCREDITED PRODUCT ARE THE KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EXTERNAL SUNSCREEN FABRICS MARKET, WRITES BELINDA SMART.



TONY BOND, managing director of Radins, says the trend for wider widths has continued to grow over the past two years with the change from the original 220cm width to the wider widths ranging from 250cm up to 320cm.

"The other change is the replacement of the traditional 2x1 weave by the 2x2 weave, allowing the fabric to be railroaded and therefore having a much wider capability for a finished product."

Wider widths, alongside the need to respond to traditional width demand has led to the introduction of multiple widths in one range, now commonplace with most key suppliers and bringing its own challenges.

"The challenge for importers such as Radins is that it creates further stock holding therefore creating the need for a very close look at inventory and greater forward planning when placing orders on our overseas suppliers."

Radins, one of the original importers of external mesh with its Vistaweave product, which was taken over from Nylex approximately 20 years ago and grew to be

the leading mesh on the Australian market, has responded to demand and introduced wider widths, with the introduction of a 243cm and 305 cm width across the board on all of plain colours and all fabrics now woven in a 2x2 weave construction.

"When the first 2x2 weave was introduced the feedback was that it was a bit too bulky for some. Radins then developed a slightly lighter yarn which is now being used in their newly released range of Vistaweave Plus in the plain colours only. All the stripes remain at the original 2x1 weave and the fabric is also 220cm wide."

Bond believes there is an oversupply of external mesh fabrics on the market at the moment, particularly given the bad weather experienced over the past two summers along the east coast of Australia.

"Having just returned from R&T Asia we noticed that there are now a large amount of companies that have now started weaving external mesh in Asia, some good and some particularly bad, that are offering their product at very low pricing which has caused the a fairly aggressive price war in the local market."

On the upside, Bond notes that the recognised mills around the world are those that have Greenguard Certification, meaning that the products produced must meet stringent chemical emissions requirements, such as being screened for more than 10000 volatile organic compounds VOCs, including formaldehyde, benzene and phthalate.

"There are a very few mills in Asia that actually have this certification and this will become a major issue over the next few years to ensure that these products are limited as to supply in Australia. It is important to educate the consumer about the Greenguard certification and this is currently a major factor in the marketing of external mesh within Australia. All of the products in the Radins Vistarange collection are still manufactured in the US by The Twitchell Corporation and are fully Greenguard Certified as well as being Flame Retardant."

Melissa Vine, Shann Australia national product manager - industrial fabrics, concurs that wider widths continue to be a growing trend. As a result, stripe designs that eliminate the joining pattern repeats common to narrower fabrics are selling well.

Wider width solutions do come with a caution however.

"The benefit to the end consumers is that they are getting a seamless blind. The downside is that the blind may start to sag or get the 'belly' effect in the middle if the fabric is not of a high quality."

Another emerging trend is that mesh, in particular with a five per cent openness factor, is increasingly replacing clear PVC in alfresco settings as end-users opt for materials that will enable their blinds to last longer. Product developments in mesh fabric will continue to evolve to meet the challenges and provide solutions to wider installations.

"One of the challenges we are facing at the moment is how to make these blinds wider. People prefer not to have seams in the middle of their blinds but to manufacture this product correctly they really are required. Developing a quality, stable mesh that can be railroaded successfully and still retain its shape will be a huge benefit, to the industry and end users. The coming season will see Shann introduce new colours and patterns into their window fabric ranges to provide these wider stripe and more stable product solutions."

Feedback from Shann representatives across the country also indicates state-specific challenges are affecting sales, Vine confirms.

"The weather in the Queensland market continues to have an impact. Months of constant poor weather has hindered both sales and installations. While we are endeavouring to do everything possible to offer value solutions, it remains challenging when weather has such a major impact on the market."

"THE WEATHER IN THE QUEENSLAND MARKET CONTINUES TO HAVE AN IMPACT. MONTHS OF CONSTANT POOR WEATHER HAS HINDERED BOTH SALES AND INSTALLATIONS."

MELISSA VINE, SHANN AUSTRALIA



LUXAFLEX EVO AWNING CABLE

Such challenges may promise a 'silver lining' going forward however, with Shann predicting strong growth following the slowdown of the last couple of seasons.

The next few years also look set to see the category develop further thanks to the use of innovative fabric constructions.

"There could be a push towards a tighter woven product to replace the traditional green back canvas. This will help with mould issues as well as creating a better shield against rain while maintaining visibility."

Jenny Brown, national marketing manager, Australian Window Furnishings, notes Luxaflex EverScreen External Screen Fabric, available as part of the new Luxaflex Evo Awnings range, is designed as a collection of modern, straight drop awnings that can be used on all windows, or to enclose a deck or veranda space.

"The EverScreen External Screen Fabric range includes a modern array of 24 colours, two of which are uniquely designed and exclusive to Luxaflex. The fabric comes in 3.2m widths and has a symmetrical weave, allowing products up to 5m wide x 2.9m drop with no fabric joins. The fabric meets the Greenguard certification for low chemical emissions and also includes microban which protects against the growth of bacteria, mould and mildew that can cause stains, odours and product deterioration."

"In terms of functionality, the EverScreen External Screen Fabric comes with a 10 per cent openness factor providing significant heat and glare reduction with UV protection whilst still maintaining a view. External sunscreens are traditionally used to increase comfort inside the home, though the trend we are seeing at the moment is that Evo Awnings are being used to enclose a deck or patio, creating a true indoor/outdoor room that can be used for the majority of the year."

"These products are very modern and can be used to extend the living space of modern homes, as well as add a modern touch to more traditional homes."

"Australians love to sit outdoors and use their alfresco spaces throughout the year. The home used to be all about interior features, such as the quality of the kitchen, whereas we are now seeing a trend towards the importance of outdoor spaces and ensuring a good flow from inside to outside. With this trend comes a focus on products that can extend the usability of those outdoor spaces so we feel confident that external sunscreen fabrics will continue to grow as a category."

Industry and end users can expect to see the emergence of expanded colour ranges and a wider variety of options in the sunscreen fabric category of the future, Brown says.

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