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# Now Screening

## Vutec Strikes Gold With Silver Screen Technology

by Carolyn Heinze

For screen manufacturers, the challenges are not always black and white. During the 1990s, video screen developers acknowledged the gray area of the trade with the introduction of gray screens, which were designed to add intensity to projected black color—something that not all LCD and DLP projectors were capable of doing well. Some argue, however, that the introduction of gray has, in fact, set the industry back a step; according to critics like Howard Sinkoff, gray distorts colors, reduces contrast and degrades the image.

As president of Pompano Beach, FL-based Vutec Corporation, Sinkoff is entitled to his opinion. Since 1977, the company has offered high-gain video projection screens, beginning with its Hi-Gain curved screen, and eventually progressing onto the Retracta-Vu Pro, and the Vu-flex Pro Duplex.

"I was in the investment banking field back in the 1970s, and was approached by people out of Boston who were looking to raise funds for projection television," Sinkoff recalled. "A stockbroker that I knew had been with RCA for a number of years and knew about the technology. We went out to see this individual, who showed us a 13-inch television set. I remember lighting a cigarette in this dark room, and the picture disappeared."

At the time, Sinkoff believed that there was something to the technology, but declared that in



▲ Vutec's SilverStar demo draws a distinction between the product and the relative capabilities of a gray screen.



▲ (Above left) At Vutec's Pompano Beach, FL headquarters, (l-r) Hamid Ritoune, Rado Rybar and Vutec president Howard Sinkoff prepare a screen for shipment. (Above right) In the screen business since 1977, Sinkoff discusses an order with Vutec's southeast regional sales manager, Princess Valinzo.

order to get investors interested in it, the picture needed to be more reliable. "After about a year they just gave up on it, and I got involved and started to develop the product."

Sinkoff exhibited his first product in 1979 at the Consumer Electronics Show. "We got an enormous amount of interest in the screens, but not the rest of the product," he said. "We figured, why bother selling the whole product when the market is calling for just the screen?"

The rest is history. Most recently, Vutec introduced the SilverStar—a flat, front-projection screen designed for viewing at 180 degrees and featuring a gain of 4.5. Available in gains of 6.0 and 9.5, the SilverStar is used in a number of commercial and residential applications, including at trade shows, in retail outlets, museum displays, educational facilities and home theaters. The screen comes in a 4:3 format at 100 inches (diagonal), and 16:9 at 103 inches (diagonal). For large presentations, panels can be multiplexed.

The SilverStar really shines in Vutec's product demonstrations, Sinkoff declared. "When we demo it in a trade show environment, we display

the SilverStar with a white screen on the left and a gray screen on the right with one projector projecting onto the screens together. We don't have to say anymore; the brilliance of the picture is brighter than the ones it is sitting next to. The colors are magnificent; the reds are a brilliant red, the blues are a brilliant blue, and the white is white."

One of the most significant challenges faced by Vutec's development team during the making of the SilverStar involved the screen's material. "We had to match materials in order to make it; it's made up of about seven types of material," Sinkoff explained. "In order to get the desired result, we had to diffuse the picture so that we achieved 180-degree viewing."

Assembling the screen also posed a challenge. "When you have anything that is brighter than white, the screen must be absolutely perfect with no defects whatsoever, because it exaggerates any defects," Sinkoff said. "We required a laminator, and for this application we had to rebuild the machine completely in order to get the perfection that

was required. It took us about six months to find reliable sources that would give us the quality that we required."

The original SilverStar features a rigid wall and frame. Vutec's second rendition of the product enables users to roll the screen up via a motorized housing. "This will expand the market for the SilverStar tremendously," Sinkoff said.

In practical applications, Sinkoff argues that solid projection screen technology complements the projectors themselves. "When you think about the screen and its role in the entire installation, the only thing anyone ever watches is the screen, but everyone says, 'Oh, what a wonderful projector,'" he observed. "When they put a low-light projector on a SilverStar, they might think it's a bright projector. I think it improves any projector on the market."

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