

GOING inflatable

The use of inflatable screens for cinema applications is increasing. They remain, safe, flexible, and ideal both for indoor and outdoor applications. However, for those harbouring doubts, **Nick Turner**, of the German-based AIRSCREEN Company, explains why the world of inflatable screens is anything but 'a lot of hot air'.



Bouncy, unstable, and good only for children's parties. This might have been the response to *any* question on inflatable goods, let alone screens; but the AIRSCREEN Company GmbH & Co. KG, set about changing this with the world's original inflatable movie screen. From its base in Münster, North Rhine-Westphalia, the AIRSCREEN Company has been producing, distributing and selling inflatable screens for over 17 years. The screens come in sizes of up to 40m (133-ft.), and remain the world's largest. But what use is an inflatable screen? Indeed, where can it be used, why are they even needed, and what, if any, are the problems?

ALL ROUND FLEXIBLE USE

Currently serving customers in over 60 countries, AIRSCREEN acknowledges demand for inflatable screens certainly to be rising over time as, especially European, countries begin rediscovering the great outdoors. Sales in Australia, with its favourable climate, remain a certainty, but in countries like the UK, Germany, Dubai and Hong Kong, sales are also on the up. Their use on the beach in Dubai, or atop a German multi-storey car park, demonstrates the flexibility of inflatable screens as well as the ease of staging unique movie experiences with minimal effort. The screens can, and have, seen use anywhere and everywhere, from the beach to even on snow and water.

Being considerably more flexible than fixed screens, many operators have switched from static to inflatable screens for their events, and among the many events to make use of the AIRSCREEN include: drive-ins, open-air cinemas, public viewing events (e.g. Football), or even simply for advertising space. They are also much lighter than traditional screens, where, for example, a mid-sized 12m x 6m AIRSCREEN would weigh just 220 Kg. For fixed screens, the scaffolding *alone* would weigh significantly more, making the difference incomparable.

Meanwhile, the Drive-In Cinema market has enjoyed exceptional growth for inflatable screens, with increasing numbers of cinemas popping up all over Europe – using inflatable screens from AIRSCREEN. And the USA, home of the drive-in, has also tended to shift away from fixed to inflatable screens. The signs are good for this market, with the original inflatable AIRSCREEN sitting at the forefront. For open-air cinemas, the screens also find good use, and, worldwide, benefit from the use of an AIRSCREEN. Some of the world's biggest film festivals do so too, including New York's Tribeca, also Dubai, Hong Kong, Venice and Cannes, and so prove the glamour and durability of the inflatable screen. So, if they are this popular, what are the issues concerning their use?


INFLATABLE SCREEN ISSUES?

Although the screen frame is full of air, the main issue associated with inflatable screens is actually stability, brought about by wind. However, the screens are built

to withstand great forces, including gusts of up to 40 km/h, or Beaufort Scale 6. Either way, inflatable screens remain safer and more secure, and may be dismantled much faster than a fixed screen – a big consideration in turbulent weather. This means that both audiences and screens are more easily kept out of harm's way. It should be remembered that the screens also use heavy-duty PVC for their screen-frame, thus guaranteeing stability, and that there are also sets of fixing straps and belts attached to the screen which are then anchored locally.

Another concern people cite about inflatable screens is noise from the blower. However, this is even quieter than typical conversation levels and would never be heard over the speakers. The AIRSCREEN Company also uses noise-encapsulating blowers to reduce noise even further. The screens are also very simple to set up, taking, on the average, an hour by just two trained staff, and the inflation itself can take just five minutes, making it ideal for exhibitors needing flexibility when moving on to subsequent events or for storing screens nightly after each one. This translates into less time and reduced staff costs e.g. only needing to pay for an hour's work instead of, say, five. Such flexibility is what makes the inflatable screen a winner for those in the screen industry,

with many also agreeing that once they've worked with inflatable screens, they would actually never go back to a fixed one.

Of course, while inflatable screens won't suit all applications, the fact that they are inflatable benefits users on the move, perhaps staging events in multiple locations requiring tight turnarounds. However, for event companies, and cinema and open-air event organisers, inflatable screens remain a logical choice, able to be used on grass, on the beach, on local rivers, or, as above, even on snow. The inflatable screen reaches places other screens can't, while offering a wonderful cinematic experience. In the meantime, AIRSCREEN continues to push the boundaries, while anticipating the imminent milestone of 65 countries in which its product helps bring Cinema to life. 

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Did you know?

AIRSCREEN:

- operates in over 60 countries and on every continent, even in such far-flung territories as Kuwait, Gabon (Africa), Nicaragua and El Salvador
- produces the world's largest inflatable screen and has even subsequently increased this
- was used for the world premiere of *Shark Tale* in St. Mark's Square, Venice
- is used at a variety of international film festivals including, Venice, Dubai and Hong Kong, and is particularly favoured by U.S. film director Michael Moore at his film festival in Traverse City, MI.