



Review: Elite Home Series Electronic Screen

A couple of weeks ago, I was given an Elite, Home90IWH screen to evaluate. First, what is it? This screen is from Elite's "Home Series" although the screen should be every bit as viable in the conference room as in your home.

What makes this Elite screen "worthy", is the combination of cost, modest size, and practicality, and physical attractiveness, - not necessarily in that order. These screens are available in 16:9 for home theater, 4:3 for most business applications, and even square format. I'm going to focus on the 16:9 screens, which are available in these diagonal 66", 81", 94", 108", 121", 133", and 160". (Note, 4:3 screens start at 72" diagonal and go up to 175".)

Cost

Put simply, the Elite screens are priced significantly below better known brands like Dalite and Draper and way below premium brands like Stewart. To give you a rough idea. The 94" diagonal should be discounted to below \$600, and the 108" only a few dollars more. By comparison, a Dalite would cost a couple to a few hundred more, and a Stewart screen, probably well over twice the price



A "Style'n Screen"

In my home, for evaluating projectors, I have a huge 140" diagonal 16:9 Dalite Cosmopolitan motorized screen. As you can imagine, it is physically dominating, not just the screen size, but the housing too (over 9"x9" box to house the motors and screen and it is unadorned (black painted wood).

By comparison, the Elite is an attractive, compact screen, even for its size. (as noted, the Home series screens go up to 160" diagonal).

The physical appearance is a white metal box (enamel coated aluminum), less than 4" x 4" (talk about small, that's smaller than the housing of most pull-down screens, let alone electric ones. The "end caps on each end of the box are black, creating a small (about 1.5" wide) contrast that gives the screen mount some style.



I mounted the screen in my home office, which has sort of a medium caramel color with white trim and ceiling. It looks so good, the white of the housing complementing the trim and doors.

Power and Control

As I mentioned, the screens are motorized, so let's start there. Two cables come off the screen housing, on the right hand side (if you are facing the screen.) One is a standard 3 prong power cord, and the other a slim white cable that attaches to a wall mountable control switch. The switch has 3 buttons. Up, Down, and Stop. In addition, it has an infra-red sensor. This is notable, since the screen also comes with a small, white and black IR remote control. The remote also allows Up, Down, and Stop.

Quicktip: The nice thing about having an Infra-red remote like the one provided, is that if you have a learning remote for your HT system, you can program the screen controls in as well.)

This brings you to your first big decision – what to do with the wires. If your screen is standing alone on a wall, you have these two wires to deal with. The screen control can be mounted right next to the screen box, since it doesn't need to be reachable (thanks to the remote), which solves the problem of its wiring.

{Editor's note: Elite advises me, that the customer can, if they prefer not to mount the wall switch, disconnect the cable from the wall switch, at the screen casing end, and replace it with the infra-red sensor also provided. This will allow the remote to work fine, and saves the trouble of dealing with a second cable to hide.}

The power is a different story. You either need to get that to an outlet (which means hanging down along side the screen, or you will want to get an electrician to wire it to power, inside the wall (obviously the way to go). If power is nearby, this should be relatively inexpensive. If your screen is going into or next to shelving, etc., you probably have the ability to "hide" the power cable, and find it an outlet somewhere nearby.

The Mechanics

The screens are relatively lightweight, and exceptionally easy to mount. The two provided mounting pieces slide on to the housing, and can be placed anywhere, so all you have to do is find the wall studs, and know that you can safely mount the screen. Note: **The provided mounts also support ceiling mounting, if that is your preference.**

Once you have your screen mounted, and power provided, simply hit the down button, and the screen comes down smoothly. The noise it creates is very moderate, in both noise and pitch, and also sounds smooth. If you don't hit the stop button. it will come down until it is fully open. which leaves you with several



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inches of black above the screen surface.

The great news – if you need to stop it with less black showing, (effectively having your screen surface higher up the wall), you can accomplish this two ways:

- Simply hit the stop button
- You can Pre-Set the screen to stop at the determined point (this is done by lowering the screen to where you want it and setting the vertical stop position, inside the housing. Once you have done that, the screen will automatically come to a stop at that same spot.

The remote works very nicely – (why not, there's not much to it).

The Warranty is 1 years parts and labor, which is typical for the screen industry.

The Screen Surface and Performance

The screen surface is your basic matte white. That's right, it's not gray, it's not "high contrast", just your basic normal material. (Few manufacturers have managed to package a "high contrast" surface in a motorized package – and when they do, it tends to be expensive.)

I have used the Elite screen recently with my BenQ 8700 HT projector, as well as Panasonic's L500U HT projector. For standard computer presentation type work, I also hit the screen with an Epson 735c and Panasonic LB10NTU. (Both recently reviewed).

The white surface does the job nicely. I cannot detect any shift in colors that would indicate that the surface is not neutral white. (a minor issue for business use, but a major one for Home Theater).

Given, the screen I am using is only 81" diagonal, the surface is extremely flat when deployed – no sign of any need for tension to keep it flat. (Generally screens over 110" will require tensioning if you want them completely flat as to avoid any minor distortions.)

As a result of my using this screen, I have decided to make this Elite 81" 16:9 screen a permanent part of my home office, and plan to use it to test less powerful HT projectors, and portable business projectors. (I managed to negotiate a very good deal with Elite.) And now all that is left is to have my electrician come in and run the electrical, so I don't have the power cord hanging down, and plugged into the usual wall outlet, as it is doing as of this writing.

The bottom line, then, is that the Elite Home Series will work beautifully for either home or business, unless you feel a compelling need for a gray surface, or a high contrast surface. When viewing 2000:1 contrast ratio HT projectors, I didn't feel the need for either gray or hi-contrast. I found the screen worked well with the Pansonic L500U HT projector (LCD), which might better like a gray surface screen, if you can survive the lower brightness that gray screens provide.

From a pricing standpoint, though, the Elite will save you big bucks you can put toward a more expensive projector, better cables, or other items to enhance your viewing experience.

I expect we will see other companies entering this market to compete with Elite in the future (Vutec showed a low cost line at CES in January, but last I heard, still not pricing or shipping dates – also, at the time they were talking 4:3 only, not 16:9). Fair warning to Da-Lite and other "big names" – if they want to compete for the low and middle of the home theater market, they better take a new look at their lineup and pricing.

Chalk up the Elite Home Series screens as an excellent value, a well thought out solution, and an attractive, motorized alternative that costs less than most companies' fixed wall screens, and definitely well below the competition's motorized offerings.

Well done.

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