

A commercial door installation looks simple from the sidewalk. Pull the old door, set the new frame, hang the slab, mount the hardware, and move on. In practice, the front entry of a business is where accessibility, security, traffic flow, and code obligations all collide. A door that looks fine can still be too narrow, too heavy to use comfortably, hard to operate, or locked in a way that turns an accessible route into a dead end.

That is why good commercial door services start long before anyone unloads tools. The best work happens in the planning stage, when the installer, owner, and sometimes the property manager slow down and ask a few basic questions. Who uses this entrance? Is it the primary public entry? Is there enough clear width when the door is actually open? Will the hardware work for someone who cannot grip and twist a knob? If the old opening is tight, can it be improved without a full rebuild?

Those questions matter because the ADA does not treat a public entrance as a decorative feature. For businesses open to the public, at least one entrance door or doorway must comply with accessibility requirements. One of the key benchmarks is a minimum clear width of 32 inches when the door is open 90 degrees. That sounds straightforward until you stand in front of an older opening with thick stops, bulky hinges, a narrow frame, and hardware that steals usable space.

The opening is more than the door leaf

People often focus on the door itself, but installers usually start with the whole opening. The frame, hinges, hardware, surrounding wall, and available maneuvering space all affect whether the finished entry works in the real world.

That 32-inch minimum clear width is a good example. It is not simply the nominal door size written on an order sheet. The ADA standard looks at the clear opening when the door is open 90 degrees. In older buildings, the opening can lose usable width because of the frame profile or the way the door sits in the opening. A 36-inch door may still be the practical choice in many cases, but what matters is the clear width achieved after installation, not the label on the product.

Then there is maneuvering clearance. A person using a wheelchair, walker, or other mobility aid needs enough space to approach, operate, and pass through the door. The same is true for someone carrying packages, pushing a stroller, or moving slowly after an injury. The door can technically meet width requirements and still feel frustrating if the approach is cramped or the swing interferes with movement. That is one reason experienced installers do not measure in isolation. They look at how the entry functions as a route, not just as a product.

Hardware can make or break accessibility

I have seen plenty of entry doors that were solidly built and professionally hung, yet still failed the most basic usability test because of the hardware choice. If the handle requires tight grasping, pinching, or twisting, it creates a barrier. The ADA addresses that directly by requiring accessible hardware that does not rely on those motions.

This is where seemingly small decisions have outsized effects. A business owner may prefer a certain look, or want hardware that matches the rest of the property, but appearance cannot be the only filter. If the front door serves the public, usability comes first. A heavy decorative pull paired with awkward latching can turn a compliant opening into a frustrating one. On paper, the door is present. In practice, the person standing outside still cannot get in independently.

Good commercial door services usually treat hardware selection as part of the installation, not an afterthought. The best installers ask who will use the door, how often, and under what conditions. A quiet office with low traffic has different wear patterns than a busy storefront. The accessibility obligation remains, but the hardware package still needs to suit the use.

Replacing a door is not just maintenance

One misunderstanding comes up again and again with older properties. Owners sometimes assume they can replace an outdated entry door with a newer version that matches the original condition and call it routine upkeep. ADA guidance takes a more serious view when the work affects usability. Replacing an entry door is treated as an alteration, which means the new door must comply with current accessibility standards when the work affects the way people use the entrance.

That changes the conversation. Once replacement is on the table, the job is no longer only about durability, cost, or curb appeal. It becomes an opportunity, and a legal obligation, to bring the entrance into compliance where the work touches accessibility. In some [A-24 Hour Door National Inc](#) buildings that is relatively easy. In others, especially older storefronts and renovated spaces, the opening may need creative adjustment to meet the standard without tearing apart the entire facade.



This is one reason experienced contractors get cautious when a client asks for a simple swap. Sometimes it really is simple. Other times the existing conditions reveal deeper issues. The old frame may limit clear width. The hardware may be wrong. The accessible entrance may exist on paper but remain locked during business hours, which creates a different kind of barrier altogether.

When a full replacement is not the only path

Not every access problem demands a brand-new storefront system. In older buildings, smaller changes can sometimes improve usability meaningfully. One practical example from ADA guidance is the use of swing-clear hinges. These can gain about 1.5 inches of clearance in some situations.

That number <https://pub-3fb81553dec8447e9f78cc13238c2c70.r2.dev/storefront-door/what-downtown-atlanta-businesses-need-from-a-door-contractor.html> matters more than it sounds. In a borderline opening, an inch and a half can be the difference between a frustrating squeeze and a workable passage. It is not a magic fix for every site, and it does not override other requirements, but it shows how experienced judgment comes into play. Sometimes the smartest installation plan is not the most dramatic one. It is the one that improves access within the limits of the existing structure.

This is where owners benefit from working with commercial door services that understand both installation and retrofit strategy. A team that only sells full replacements may miss opportunities for efficient improvements. A team that only patches old hardware may overlook when the entrance has crossed into alteration territory and must be brought up to current standards.

The accessible entrance has to be usable during business hours

Accessibility does not stop at physical dimensions. Policy matters too. ADA guidance is clear that if an accessible entrance is kept locked during business hours, the business should change that policy and keep it unlocked. If security is a concern, a call box or buzzer can be installed.

That point is easy to overlook because it sits at the intersection of operations and construction. Owners often think security procedures are separate from compliance, but from the customer's perspective the distinction means nothing. If the only accessible entrance is locked, access has failed. It does not matter that the door is the right width and has proper hardware if the person who needs it cannot actually use it.

This comes up often in multi-tenant buildings and older commercial properties where side doors or alternate entrances were designated as accessible at some point in the past. Over time, habits change. Staff start locking that entrance to control traffic, or using it only for deliveries. Then the officially accessible route becomes inaccessible in practice. A solid installation can support accessibility, but the building has to operate in a way that preserves it.

Life safety does not take a back seat

Entry requirements are not just about ADA access. Egress and life safety can shape the hardware and door type as well. The International Building Code requires panic hardware or fire exit hardware in certain high-occupancy or equipment-room egress situations.

This is where commercial door installation gets technical fast. A business owner may be focused on front-door appearance or accessibility, while the installer also has to consider whether the opening is part of an egress path subject to additional hardware rules. A hardware package that feels secure and polished may still be wrong if the occupancy or room use calls for panic or fire exit hardware.

The practical lesson is simple. Doors serve more than one code purpose at the same time. Accessibility, operation, and emergency egress are not separate lanes. They overlap. Changing one piece of the system can affect the others. That is why a front entry should never be treated like a commodity item pulled from a catalog without a site-specific review.

What a careful installer checks before ordering the door

The planning stage usually decides whether the project goes smoothly or turns into a string of field fixes. Before the order is finalized, a careful installer generally checks a short list of fundamentals:

1. Whether the entrance serves the public and must function as the accessible entry
2. The actual clear width when the door will be open 90 degrees
3. Whether the approach and maneuvering space support real use
4. Whether the hardware can be operated without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting
5. Whether the job is a replacement that triggers compliance as an alteration

None of those checks is glamorous. They do not show up in a marketing photo. But they are the difference between a door that merely fills an opening and a door that works for customers, staff, inspectors, and emergency conditions.

Older buildings demand judgment, not guesswork

Older commercial properties are where experience really shows. Newer construction usually gives you more room to work, cleaner dimensions, and clearer documentation. Older spaces are another story. Openings may have shifted over time. Previous repairs may have altered the frame. Security upgrades may have been layered onto the original hardware without regard for accessibility.

An owner in that situation often wants a clean answer right away. Can this be fixed with hardware, or does the whole entrance need replacement? The honest answer is that it depends on the existing conditions and on how the work affects usability. ADA guidance allows some practical improvements, such as swing-clear hinges, but once you move into actual replacement work, compliance with current accessibility standards becomes a central issue.

That is why the best field visits involve more measuring and less promising. A seasoned installer would rather spend extra time understanding the opening than give a fast estimate that unravels once the old frame comes out. It is better to flag a narrow condition, a hardware conflict, or an operating policy issue early than to discover after installation that the business still does not have a compliant public entrance.

Security concerns are real, but they need the right solution

Owners are not wrong to worry about security. Front doors see heavy use, and some businesses have real exposure to theft or unauthorized entry. The problem is not the concern itself. The problem is using the concern to justify blocking access.

ADA guidance offers a practical middle ground. If security is an issue, a call box or buzzer can be installed rather than keeping the accessible entrance locked during business hours. That approach respects both access and control. It recognizes that businesses have legitimate operational needs while still preserving an accessible route for the public.

This is a good example of how commercial door services extend beyond carpentry or hardware installation. Sometimes the fix is physical. Sometimes it is procedural. Often it is both. A secure, accessible entrance is usually the result of coordinated decisions, not a single product choice.

Emergency work is part of the picture

Not every commercial door installation begins as a planned upgrade. In many markets, including the Atlanta area, emergency repair and after-hours service are common. Local providers advertise commercial door repair, break-in response, and entry-door installation or repair, which reflects the kinds of failures businesses actually face. Storm damage, forced entry, and sudden door failure are standard reasons an owner makes that call.

Emergency conditions create pressure, and pressure tends to produce shortcuts. A storefront is damaged overnight, the business needs to open in the morning, and everyone wants the fastest possible fix. That is understandable. It is also when mistakes happen. Temporary repairs can linger for months. Replacement hardware gets chosen for speed alone. A public entrance that should comply ends up patched in a way that restores security but leaves accessibility unresolved.

The better emergency providers understand that stabilization and compliance are not the same thing. First you secure the site and restore operation. Then you assess whether the final repair or replacement must bring the entry into line with current accessibility requirements. In a break-in response, nobody expects a full code analysis at 2 a.m. But once the immediate crisis passes, the permanent work still has to be handled properly.

Where projects often go off track

Most troubled installations do not fail because the crew cannot hang a door. They fail because the early assumptions were wrong, or too narrow. A few patterns show up repeatedly:

1. Treating the nominal door size as proof of compliant clear width
2. Choosing hardware for appearance without checking accessibility requirements
3. Assuming a replacement is simple maintenance rather than an alteration
4. Locking the accessible entrance during business hours for convenience or security
5. Ignoring life-safety hardware needs where egress rules apply

Each of those issues is avoidable. None requires exotic products or dramatic redesign. What they require is attention, especially at the point where ownership decisions meet field conditions.

A good installation feels ordinary to the customer

The irony of great commercial door work is that nobody notices it. Customers do not stop and praise a compliant clear opening or correctly selected hardware. They simply enter the building without friction. The handle works. The route makes sense. The door is available during business hours. The opening feels natural instead of like a puzzle.

That ordinary ease is the real goal. Accessibility done well rarely announces itself. It just removes obstacles. From the owner's side, that means fewer complaints, fewer awkward workarounds, and a lower risk that a routine door replacement turns into a much bigger problem later.

It also means understanding that a commercial entry is not a one-variable purchase. It is part of a building system. ADA access, hardware operation, egress requirements, and security procedures all affect what belongs in that opening. If even one piece is ignored, the finished result can fall short.

Why expertise matters on something this visible

A front door is one of the few building elements every customer uses and remembers. If it sticks, pinches, narrows the passage, or stays locked when it should not, people notice right away. That is why this category of work rewards expertise more than speed.

Experienced commercial door services tend to ask better questions because they have seen where projects fail. They know that a narrow opening may need more than a slab swap. They know hardware choice is not cosmetic when accessibility is involved. They know that emergency repairs after a storm or break-in should not become

permanent barriers. And they know that at least one public entrance must comply, which means the owner cannot solve the problem by pointing to a door nobody can actually use.

When a commercial door installation is handled properly, the result is not just a better-looking entrance. It is an entry that welcomes the public, supports safer egress where required, and stands up to day-to-day use without creating unnecessary barriers. That is the standard worth aiming for, whether the project begins as a planned upgrade or a middle-of-the-night emergency call.

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