

DIGITAL & TV SOUND

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO AUDIO • VIDEO • HDTV • PLASMA • PROJECTION

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Featuring:
Screen Goo by Goo Systems
"Great Product at a Bargain Price"



FRONT-PROJECTION FLIP

GOO SYSTEMS' PAINT-ON SCREEN > BY DAVID BIRCH-JONES



Screen Goo is a two-step paint process for front projectors that can turn many wall surfaces into a high-quality screen comparable to some of the premium prefabricated screens.

MIT's resident digital guru Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* describes a number of paradigm shifts as society moves from the analog world to a digital one. These include the "Negroponte Flip," whereby phones once connected only by wire and TVs receiving their signals via antenna have reversed roles. Why tether mo-

bile humans to wired phones or feed wireless broadcasts to immobile television sets? These days, cordless cellular phones are the norm, and the majority of TVs receive their signals via cable.

With front-projection setups, it was always the projector that cost more than the screen—substantially more, with a typical premium screen and frame costing around \$2,000, and the pro-

jector coming in at five times that or more. Yet in our last issue, we covered a range of affordable HD front projectors and unearthed two stellar performers that come in at the same price (or less) than a name-brand screen-and-frame combo. Is that a case of the "Negroponte Flip"? Is it really necessary to drop as much or more dough into the screen as the projector?

The folks at Goo Sys-

tems do not think so and offer do-it-yourself screen kits intended to match the optical characteristics of the premier pre-fabricated front-screen offerings. A visit to the company's Kingston, Ontario, factory dispelled any notion that Goo Systems is a garage operation. Instead, it is an offshoot of Tri-Art, whose high-viscosity acrylic paints are sold to artists worldwide. Goo's screen kits also are acrylic-based and feature a two-step system comprising a pigment-loaded base coat that is primarily reflective and a semi-translucent top coat that provides diffusion.

The Screen Goo range consists of four products. CRT White, as its name suggests, is a pure white finish that gives the highest reflectivity. Digital Grey Lite and Digital Grey are less bright, giving some attenuation. Ultra Grey provides the most attenuation. All four are roughly analogous to the screen offerings from pre-fab screen makers. Goo's website has a very useful tool that recommends the appropriate Goo formulation and quantity based on screen size, ambient room light, and projector make and model.

For screen sizes up to 92 inches diagonal (16:9 aspect ratio), the \$100 half-liter kit will suffice. There is also a \$199 kit, which consists of a liter each of base coat and top coat; a paint roller handle with two premium rollers; a 2-inch foam-trim brush; perhaps the best paint tray I've ever seen; and a quarter-liter of Ultra Black trim paint to provide a light-absorbing screen edge that mimics the flocked frame of a conventional screen. Goo

Systems also offers rolls of 2- and 3-inch adhesive-backed flock that can provide light absorption and extra dimensionality to the screen edges. It also could be applied to a traditional wood frame.

Creating your own screen with or without a raised frame is a relatively quick and painless procedure. Each coat takes about 20 minutes to apply (for screens up to around 130 inches diagonal), with only 60 minutes of drying time required between the two coats. The paint can be applied directly to most reasonably flat and smooth walls. The trend in drywall fashion these days, however, is a textured "orange peel" coating, which can be sanded before applying Goo. But that's a tedious process that is probably unnecessary if the orange peel texture isn't visible from the viewing area.

Do heed Goo Systems' application instructions, which include a website video advising that "quick and a bit sloppy" is the way to go as opposed to slow and methodical. Even if you note some evidence of lines or strokes right after application, fight the urge to have another pass at it, letting the coating settle on its own. While drying, the surface homogenizes rather remarkably, leaving a very fine and slightly mottled texture that is the desired result, visible only upon extremely close examination.

Some Goo customers opt to simply paint an entire wall. One reason is to mollify a spouse who might otherwise object to a framed-off surface on the wall. Another is the ability to vary the projected image size: larger for theater-

like nighttime viewing, and smaller, brighter and more intense for daytime viewing. Goo Systems' 1-gallon kit, at \$550, is enough to cover an entire wall up to around 23 feet wide.

Side-by-side comparisons in Goo's lab theater seemed to validate the company's claims of matching the performance of high-priced, pre-fab screens. In addition, Goo Systems provided a trio of sample sheets that enabled me to compare the finishes in my own home theater, which is currently outfitted with a Stewart GrayHawk Reference screen. Goo's Ultra Grey virtually matched what I saw with the GrayHawk, giving the same amount of attenuation (which gives me the blackest blacks) and excellent off-axis reproduction. My screen isn't huge (78 inches diagonal), my theater is fairly well light-controlled, and I prefer to give up some brightness for contrast, so the darker Ultra Grey would be my go-to choice. With the typical LCD or DLP projector's 250-watt bulb, the Ultra Grey gives me a quite bright 18 footlamberts at the higher lamp setting, and lets me enjoy blacker blacks.

Assuming you use the \$199, 1-liter Goo kit, a first-class front-projection screen can be had for a bit of elbow grease, a couple of hours time, and one-tenth the price of one of our favorite budget projectors. That makes Screen Goo a great product at a bargain price; the real deal that enables you to easily create your own premium front-projection screen. **DTV**



Like house paint, Screen Goo is applied with a roller, but unlike painting a house, a bit of sloppiness is actually encouraged when applying the front-projector screen paint.

> RATING EXCELLENT

> DESCRIPTION: Goo Systems Screen Goo DIY front-projector screen paint

> HIGH POINTS: Four screen types to choose from; nifty website calculator does all the brainwork (but not the elbow-work)

> LOW POINTS: Doing a whole wall is a bit pricey, but it's only a one-time hit (unlike, say, alimony)

> CONTACT: Goo Systems, 888.541.0299, goosystems.com

> PRICE: \$100 half-liter kit (covers up to 92 inches diagonal); \$199 one-liter kit (up to 130 inches) with tools and black-trim paint