



Brook Merchant
President
R.C. Merchant & Co., Inc.

With so many ERA members, it is not easy to get to know every rep and manufacturer in the business. "Someone You Should Know" is The Representor department that gives readers the chance to learn about fellow ERA members, including how their time is spent both in and out of the office.

Meet Brook Merchant, president of R.C. Merchant & Co., Inc., located in Farmington Hills, Mich. He is a third generation sales rep in the electronics industry.

The Representor asked Brook a few questions about his time in the rep business and his experiences with ERA. Here is what he had to say.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

My name is Brook Merchant, and I am a rep. My real name is Jonathan Merchant, but on my first day of work at R.C. Merchant Co. (RCM), I knew that was going to be a problem. You see, my father's name was John Merchant. He was a very aggressive, Type A, old school rep. On my first day, I received five phone calls from angry people, yelling at me, mistaking me for my father. I knew then a name change was in order. I am a third generation sales rep in the electronics industry. I was born a rep and will always be a rep. Mollie, my beautiful wife of 34 years, is also an owner of our firm. I have two children, Jeffrey and Mallerie.

What are some things you enjoy outside of the workplace?

"Outside of work" is a term I hold precious in today's 24/7 business climate. I love the outdoors — hiking, fishing, hunting and walking in the forest. I am a "fit-bitter" who strives to get 80-100K steps per week to unwind and relax. I love to cook, and I periodically take cooking classes at a local community college. I, of course, love to eat really good food. My top three restaurants right now are Mon Ami Gabi in Chicago, Hugo's Cellar at the Four Queens Hotel in Las Vegas and Lima in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

How long have you been an ERA member and how long in the rep business?

RCM has been an ERA member since 1937. We are one of the oldest members of the association. Our firm is the oldest electronic representative in the U.S. solely run by one family. It was started by my grandfather in 1924, selling tubes and tube sockets. As a third generation sales representative, I began my full-time career at RCM in January 1981. I am very proud of our history and heritage. My daughter, Mallerie Merchant, has spent the past five years with TTI in Schaumburg, Ill., as an outside salesperson. Mallerie will be joining our firm in October 2016 as a fourth generation leader. We are less than eight years away from my largest goal in life — to make it successfully to our 100th anniversary. People often tell me that only 17 percent of firms make it through the third generation. I think we will make it. We will be throwing a party at EDS 2024.

How did you become interested in being a rep in the electronics industry?

I really never thought of anything else. I worked at the firm ever since I can remember and always considered myself a rep. Several years

after graduating from college (NMU, 1981), my father was diagnosed with cancer. The diagnosis sped up my transition to a leadership role, and I have never looked back.

What have you found to be most rewarding about the rep business?

By far, the people. My customers, my principles and the relationships I have formed with other reps in ERA and lesser-known groups have brought fulfillment in my personal and professional life.

Briefly describe your rep firm.

We are a two-division rep firm: Electronics, IPE and an Electrical Power Quality Group, servicing the data center market.

What recent innovations, best practices and/or changes has your firm made?

Our primary changes and innovations over the next two years include focusing on developing alliances with Ohio and Indiana reps for coverage of the Great Lakes region in our electronics group. We also are developing our own Analytical Sales Engine for growing business with our long-tail customers.

What have you learned and/or what contacts have you made through ERA that have had the greatest positive impacts on you and/or your business?

My mentors in this industry include Bruce Anderson and many greats who have passed away, such as James Cartwright, Jack Berman, Bob Trinkle, Gene Foster and Tim Coakley. Many of their notable quotes and lessons guide me through my daily decision making and long-term planning. Bruce Anderson said, "Cash is king." James Cartwright taught me about leveraging business and locking up good people. Jack Berman encouraged a rep owner to be an educator. Bob Trinkle stated, "The buck stops here!" Gene Foster and Tim Coakley encouraged us all to "share shamelessly."

Are you active on social media? Do you follow ERA? Have ERA updates via social media been helpful to you?

Yes, I use LinkedIn and Facebook. I follow ERA on Facebook.

What is one interesting fact that people may not know about you?

I am very interested and fascinated by the study of pines. Pine forests are a meditative place for me, and I feel most at peace while in the pine forests of northern Michigan.