



Ben Barden
Owner
Westech Associates

With so many ERA members, it's 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 Ben Barden of Westech Associates in Mountain View, Cal. Ben is a third-generation rep who has been involved in the industry for more than three decades and has been active in ERA since 1985.

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

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I have been married 35 years to my amazing South African wife Sue. We have two sons, David, 31, and Michael, 26 years old. We enjoy watching college football, especially Notre Dame and Clemson, my sons' alma maters. Golf is my favorite hobby, but I also enjoy weight lifting, playing the guitar, cooking and traveling.

What are some things you enjoy outside of the workplace?

Since becoming empty nesters, Sue and I have had more time to travel. Our favorite way to travel is cruising. We have been on 35 cruises over the past 20 years, and we especially love the Mediterranean.

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

My firm has been an ERA member since 1978. I started in the rep business in 1982 and became active in ERA in 1985. I have served in a number of capacities in the Northern California Chapter, from the newsletter editor to president. I'm presently the chapter's national delegate.

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

I actually come from a long line of manufacturers' reps. My father, grandfather and uncle were all reps. My dad is still an active rep at 88 years old. And now, it's a point of pride that my son David recently joined our firm as a part-time consultant.

In the back of my mind, I was always interested in getting into the business, and when the opportunity to join a rep firm presented itself, I jumped in and never looked back. The rep lifestyle gave me flexibility to do more with my kids growing up, which I think is a big benefit.

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

The best part of the rep business is the friends I've made with both customers and reps. The support network has been invaluable.

Briefly describe your rep firm.

Our rep firm was established by Bill Walsh and Ron Jenkins in 1975. Our products are mainly passive/electromechanical. In the early years, board level components were a big part of our focus, but recently custom engineered

type products have become a major part of our sales. Generic products, as I'm sure everyone knows, are very difficult to track for off-shore credit. Recently we were very fortunate to have joined forces with our newest staff members, Alex Cox and veteran Hugh Shyba.

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

New technology has been a big driver of our changes recently. Every area of our business has been affected - starting with the new Internet phone system, updated website, change from ACT to Salesforce, Google Docs, Google Calendar, Dropbox, Evernote, Tout email system tracker and, last but not least, LinkedIn.

Since our data now reside on the Internet, our team members have access to all data no matter where they are. It's so much easier to keep everything up and running without having to make a special trip back to the office to reboot the server! This has helped us to be more efficient in keeping up with the fast-paced Silicon Valley design cycles.

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?

Our best ideas have come from other reps. Leads on new line opportunities, customer targets, technology, management and personal development are a just a few of the areas where we have benefited from networking. It's invaluable to gain another rep's opinion on challenges we face and reassuring to know we aren't the only ones struggling in problem situations.

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

LinkedIn has been our biggest focus. With engineers moving around Silicon Valley, it's a vital tool for staying in touch. When trying to break into new target accounts, we can identify new contacts which otherwise would be impossible to obtain. I like the LinkedIn ERA groups that discuss various topics vital to our business.

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

I am learning to play the banjo. It is more challenging than I anticipated!