

Meet David Polimeni

BTA's 2022-23 national president assumes office

by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

On July 1, David Polimeni, owner and CEO of RITE Technology, based in Sarasota, Florida, became the national president of the Business Technology Association (BTA). He serves as the association's 87th president. He first stepped forward to give back to the association in 2015, serving as vice president for BTA Southeast.

A Sharp dealership, RITE also focuses heavily on professional audiovisual (pro AV) design and integration. Polimeni is positioning RITE for continued exponential growth through a passionate focus on exceeding customer expectations and caring for his dealership's employees.

Recently, Office Technology magazine had the opportunity to visit with Polimeni, asking about his dealership, the current challenging times and his role as a volunteer. Following are his responses.

OT: How did you get started in the industry? What led to your ownership of RITE Technology?

Polimeni: My start in the industry came as a customer. I was in full-time ministry and a large part of my responsibility as a pastor was the business administration of the church that I worked for, and I became acquainted with RITE Technology as a customer. So, when I decided to transition my career from ministry in pursuit of business ownership, my intent at that time was to be in the technology sector in some fashion; I had no preplanned or predisposed desire to be in the office technology industry.

Because of my relationship as a customer, I encountered a job post for RITE Technology, known as Laser RITE at the time, so it was an easy transition for me because, having been a customer, I knew the value that they brought to my organization, and I felt I could represent that well. Very shortly, within the first year of working at RITE — I started in 2007 — I felt inspired that I would somehow,



some way, own this company. I can't really tell you what that inspiration was, but I approached the founding owner that year and asked if he would ever consider allowing a partner scenario or buy-in. I encountered some openness to that and it took about seven years. It was 2014 when I ultimately approached [the owner] to purchase what was the first half, and then in 2020, I purchased the second half.

We presently cover north of Tampa Bay to Naples and over to Winter Haven, Florida. It's about a three-hour, tip-to-tip geography. We have, on average, 30 employees at present. We are a Sharp-only dealership.

OT: What led you to first step forward as a BTA volunteer? How has serving as a volunteer benefited you?

Polimeni: Most of my adult life I've endeavored to hold fast to the motto of contributing more than I consume. I've found that through that motto, I genuinely receive more than I contribute. So, it's a perpetuating life cycle. In most environments where I receive value, I find I'm compelled to give back to a degree that I hope dwarfs that which I receive, which again, becomes this perpetuating cycle of giving and receiving. So, for me, volunteerism was not difficult to embrace within BTA as a result of the fact that in the first initial introductions to BTA, I began to recognize the value that I was receiving and could receive even greater value by having greater involvement. So, I think involvement and engagement in and of itself have made my experience as a BTA member that much richer.

OT: What is your message to those dealers who, for whatever reason, are not currently members of BTA? What do you say to those dealers when you encounter them?

Polimeni: I believe there are three categories of owners of independent office technology dealerships that are not members — the first being those dealers who have a dealership that is the size or caliber that they don't feel BTA has anything to benefit them. To those dealers, I would go back to the last question. That is, maybe it's more about what they could do for the industry with their involvement and what they could impart.

So, no matter the size or scale of our dealerships, I think all of us have an opportunity to improve the industry through participating in BTA.

I think the second group are those dealership owners who simply would say their companies are either too small or financially impaired in a way that they can't participate. The thought that comes to my mind — there is a derivative of a Bible verse, Ecclesiastes 10:10, that says: "If your ax is dull, then more strength is required." So, for me, I would say that no one within the industry can afford to not be engaged and involved with an organization that is defined by and has designed its existence on helping us to be better. So, to me, every event and every conversation that I have within BTA is an opportunity for me to sharpen my ax. As a result, that

So, no matter the size or scale of our dealerships, I think all of us have an opportunity to improve the industry through participating in BTA.

improves my ability and my efficiencies, whether that be financial, whether that be time management or whether that be just enriching my resources through the friends and relationships that I've developed through the organization.

The third group is comprised of those dealership owners who simply don't know the value. They just are unaware. They have not taken the time to engage and see the tremendous riches

that they could gain from being engaged with BTA. So, I think, for all three categories, my mantra is largely the same: We should all be contributing to the success of the industry through the great organization that BTA has become through these almost 100 years now. [The association was established in 1926].

OT: Looking to the year ahead, what will be your primary focus areas as BTA's national president?

Polimeni: As I look at BTA as an organization, I think that we are at a pivotal time, as the industry is being imposed upon to change. I think BTA as an organization is as well, in a dynamic way, requiring the ability to do more with less. I think all of us, as business owners and as individuals

BTA 2022-23 President-Elect Don Risser



BTA's 2022-23 president-elect, Don Risser, is the automation specialist at DCS Technologies Corp., located in Franklin, Ohio, where he previously served as the company's document management specialist. Risser has been in the office technology industry for 26 years. Before his time at DCS Technologies, he was a service manager for five years and spent 19 years as vice president and co-owner of Advanced Laser Printer Service & Supplies Inc. (ALPS) in Emigsville, Pennsylvania.

During his year as president-elect, Risser hopes to help BTA evolve. "I would love to be part of helping BTA 'reinvent' itself in a way that helps dealers to adapt in an environment where things are changing at a rapid pace," he says. "BTA had to change drastically when the copier was invented, again when the laser printer became more popular and, more recently, with MPS. [Today's changes] are just another adaptation in this ever-evolving industry.

"This past year was very unique," he continues. "BTA responded quickly and accurately on addressing topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic, M&As and the Paycheck Protection Program. I'm honored to be serving with a group of like-minded principals who have nothing but a growth mentality in mind for their dealerships and BTA."

When looking to the future of the industry, he anticipates dealers will be even more focused on managing all aspects of their customers' businesses. "The industry is moving more and more toward

managed services as a whole," Risser says. "The focus is not on hardware, prints, copies or paper. It's much more involved than that now. Dealers need to start focusing on how they can positively affect how companies operate and make them more efficient in this digital age, especially with more companies turning to hybrid workplaces."

Risser's vision for the future of BTA is one that continues to strengthen its "Dealers Helping Dealers" motto. "Anticipating the future of BTA, I think the association will adapt to offer dealers what they will need over the next 10 years," he says, laying out his vision specifically for BTA events. "Dealers need a way to communicate with each other, and it would be beneficial to have breakouts during events for best practices without overlap of dealers in the same territories, as well as breakouts for specific dealership personnel, like sales, service, marketing, EA, etc. I also think getting speakers from new industries that are relevant to dealers will be important — people who offer ideas that compliment what dealers do best without completely changing the core of their businesses."

Risser has advice for dealers in today's business environment. "Never stop looking ahead," he says. "It's never about where you are or where you have been. It's always about where you need to go. The business owner sees the future of his (or her) business. No dealer principal started his business on luck — it's vision, overcoming challenges, planning and charting new paths to success. When the vision dies, so does the company. Use BTA to the fullest to help you continue to keep that vision."

— Elizabeth Marvel

employed within this industry, have succumbed to the matters that the pandemic has made real.

As an organization, my hope is that we can increase engagement with members as well as vendors. That, I think, lays the foundation for some of the significant initiatives that I hope to accomplish. In the end, if we can look back and see an increase in engagement across the board, then I believe my tenure as president will have been successful.

OT: What are your thoughts on how office technology dealerships can best thrive and grow in today's challenging times, given inflation, difficulty in finding employees, supply-chain issues, etc.?

Polimeni: From my perspective, I think the most important responsibility that I have as a business owner is protecting the culture of my company. For me, as a driven leader, when I am under extreme stress, I can be less engaged with my team and more task-oriented as opposed to relationship-oriented. As leaders within this industry, I believe it is imperative for all of us, now more than ever, to be relationally engaged within our organizations because

As leaders within this industry, I believe it is imperative for all of us, now more than ever, to be relationally engaged within our organizations because culture is king ...

culture is king and our employees are genuinely our greatest assets. I cannot deliver the promises that we've made to our customers without having a vibrant team to deliver them. So, again, as an office technology dealership, I think the ability to thrive during these times absolutely hinges on the quality and level of employee engagement.

OT: What are you doing in your dealership to enhance employee engagement?

Polimeni: As a leader, becoming more task-oriented under stress can produce an environment of overmanaging or micromanaging. So, I think it's incumbent on me in particular (and other leaders like me) to ensure that we are providing autonomy to our employees. We should expect someone to carry a responsibility, giving him (or her) the authority to accomplish that responsibility in his own way.

OT: Your response brings to mind the awareness that you recently hired a full-time marketing person for the first time. Please speak to that in terms of the importance of marketing your company and the initiatives related to that.

BTA 2022-23 Vice President Adam Gregory



BTA's 2022-23 vice president, Adam Gregory, is president of Advanced Business Solutions (ABS), which has operations in St. Augustine and Lake Mary, Florida. The company is a technology partner that represents Epson, HP, Kyocera and Xerox. In addition, ABS represents ConnectWise, Lenovo, WatchGuard, Zultys and others within its IT and VoIP divisions. Gregory's office technology career began in 1999 and he opened ABS in 2004. Before entering the industry, he played college basketball and received his degree, then served in the U.S. Navy, where he was recognized with commendations of leadership and exceeding organizational standards.

ABS joined BTA in 2014, and Gregory says he's received great benefits from his company's membership in the association. "We have seen year-over-year growth since joining BTA," he says. "The valuable relationships that we have built with fellow dealers, the legal advice provided by BTA General Counsel Bob Goldberg, the vendor relationships we built through the organization and its events — as well as many other things — have been vital to our success."

Gregory began his volunteer service during the 2017-18 fiscal year as BTA Southeast vice president. He says the benefits his company had received from BTA led him to volunteer. "The organization had done so much for our company that I felt like it was an honor to give time back," he says. "I was also encouraged to volunteer by [former BTA Southeast and national board member] Jerry Jackson.

"My service on the board has given me valuable insight into

the industry and its manufacturers, what challenges our members have and how each dealership is unique," he continues. "In addition, volunteering helps you appreciate how much work and preparation goes into the great events that are held for members and potential members."

In his role as vice president, Gregory has several goals for the coming year: "I'd like to expand membership," he says. "In the next year I see a big push for membership goals and services provided. I'd like to see one-on-ones with dealers who are not members to discuss why they should join. We can explain the benefits and highlight the value of membership. I would also like to see us reach out to Canadian dealers and other [international] areas. We have had visitors to our events from other countries who have expressed interest in our ideas and we should capitalize on those opportunities to show the value of BTA."

Gregory would also like to focus on expanding BTA's IT offerings. "I'd like to continue to build on our IT relationships with vendors and software companies so we can present new ideas to dealers," he says. "I would like to see additional IT certifications and partnerships with leading IT solution providers for IT technicians and C-level executives."

Gregory also has some advice for dealers: "It's your business, run it the way that fits you," he says. "I love BTA's peer groups; they are valuable and I wouldn't trade them for anything, but don't expect your business to be like someone else's. Do what works for you and your staff, and enjoy the ride."

— Elizabeth Marvel

Polimeni: Yes, it's a great additional way to respond to the same question. With the changes in buying cycles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, buyers are often, we're discovering, far more engaged online than they have been historically. So, I, for one, have decided to make a significant investment of resources into our online presence, from revamping our website to our social presence. In addition, we're working to drive initiatives for e-commerce solutions for certain segments of the products and services that we offer.

OT: How do you think BTA can best play a role in helping dealers tackle the various challenges they face in the industry today?

Polimeni: My response to this question is really pretty simple. I believe BTA is already providing. However, I think it goes to the old adage that: "We can set the table, but we can't force them to eat." Going back to the question regarding my primary areas of focus as president, chief among them is engagement. Our task as an organization — for both the volunteers and the staff members — is to improve engagement and the knowledge and access to the benefits that we, as an organization, provide, making absolutely certain that we're delivering that information to multiple levels within member dealerships across the organization. I think that's critical to the success of our member base and, also, our organizational success. We really need to continue to drive utilization of BTA offerings, whether that be web training, attendance at BTA events, participation in BTA's Dealers Helping Dealers Discussion Group calls, etc., while ensuring that awareness and access is delivered beyond just the dealership principal.

OT: Many in the industry have talked about the importance of product and services diversification in recent years and "not putting all of your eggs in one basket," so to speak. What are your thoughts in terms of the importance of diversity for the industry and within your dealership?

Polimeni: The pandemic, I believe, has resulted in an accelerated timeline with regard to diminished page counts. As a result of that, I think it's imperative for all office technology dealers to consider how they are going to replace that revenue.

Much has been discussed for many years in regard to MPS offerings and managed IT offerings. However, the fact remains that there are many other areas to diversify into

So, for me, as I look at our association, what I see is an organization that really, truly cares about its dealer and vendor members.

and some that have fairly low barriers to entry from employee head count to financial investment — things like VoIP or unified communications through a plethora of vendor options, as well as things like physical security; not just internet security or online security, but physical security, like access control and security cameras. These areas fit into the same sales model, frankly, that we have in our industry. Plus, they lead

to engagements with the same buyers within organizations for the products and services that we, as an industry, have sold for decades. There are also BTA member dealerships that have offerings such as water and coffee that could certainly fall in line with the same services we provide now.

"Diversification" can be a scary word when looked at through the lens of significant investments in human capital, like IT requires. However, there are many areas, such as pro AV, for example, that can be added requiring just a small number of augmented staff members. So, I think it is critical for office technology dealers to consider areas such as pro AV that provide a contrast to diversification that would not necessitate significant human capital resources to be added to the team, especially considering the employee shortages that are present.

OT: Looking out five to 10 years from now, what is your vision of how BTA will be best described at that point?

Polimeni: In response to this question, I think about national brands that we've all known, maybe most of our lives. For example, when you see Coca-Cola red, it's easy to have that mind connection to the brand itself by something as simple as a color. I, for one, like slogans or taglines that speak to the real heart of an organization. So, for me, as I look at our association, what I see is an organization that really, truly cares about its dealer and vendor members. That may be a visibility that I have as a volunteer board member; perhaps not everyone has the same perspective. So, my hope, as I think of our organization five to 10 years from now, is that the term or the motto, "BTA Cares," would be synonymous, industrywide, with BTA, whether you are a dealership principal, a dealership employee, a manufacturer or some other vendor within our industry. ■

Brent Hoskins, executive director of the Business Technology Association, is editor of Office Technology magazine. He can be reached at brent@bta.org or (816) 303-4040.

