

Meet Don Risser

BTA's 2023-24 national president assumes office

by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

On July 1, Don Risser became the 88th national president of the Business Technology Association (BTA). He first stepped forward as a volunteer in 2013, serving as a board member for BTA East.

Today, Risser serves as solutions specialist at DCS Technologies Corp., located in Franklin, Ohio. He was previously co-owner of Advanced Laser Printer Service & Supplies Inc. (ALPS) in Emigsville, Pennsylvania. He has many years of experience in the office technology industry — including five years as a service manager and 19 years as vice president and co-owner at ALPS.

Recently, Office Technology magazine had the opportunity to interview Risser, asking about his career in the industry, the value of BTA membership and his role as a volunteer for the association. Following are his replies.

OT: You proudly served in the U.S. Navy and now serve as a board member for VETech, a BTA service that provides veterans with job opportunities in the office technology industry. Please provide some details regarding your military service and how it helped you enter the industry.

Risser: I spent five years in the Navy, the last year as a systems supervisor over the Aegis mainframe tactical computer system. I was deployed twice; once on the USS Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier. We were in the Persian Gulf, as well as coastal and air support for the U.S. military stationed in Somalia at the time. The second deployment was aboard the USS John S. McCain. My training and education included computer, radar and guided missile systems, as well as all peripheral devices attached to our systems, given that we worked in a secret clearance environment and outside contractors were limited. That means I got an early start in the



print/copy world. Oddly enough, it was my least favorite equipment to work on in our work center.

OT: Least favorite? Why was that the case? How has your view of printers and copier/MFPs changed through the years?

Risser: My training in the Navy was electrical engineering and computers; I enjoyed the computer and programming side. I was like most IT guys. If you talk to them, they hate peripheral devices. At that time, I was the same way. “I have to work on one of these devices?” Electromechanics was probably my worst course in my schooling.

Sometimes in school things just don't click.

After I left the Navy, I got into the print/copy world and I had to retrain myself through all the OEM schools, books, etc. At that time, all of a sudden, it just clicked with me. I had accepted a job as a service manager where the previous manager was leaving. I had one week to learn everything about the industry — the business, managing, parts and machines. So, I had a crash course. I said to myself, “The printers and copiers really aren't that bad. I don't mind them. In fact, they're kind of fun. They have quirky things that go wrong.” I ended up liking them more than I had expected. I honestly went into it with a bad attitude, not thinking I'd like this industry, taking it as a short-term job until I found a “real” computer job. But I ended up liking the electromechanical part of it a lot more. The troubleshooting was just more fascinating to me because it did involve software, but it also involved hardware.

OT: Tell us more about your roles/experience in the industry, starting with the early years.

Risser: I started with a small print/copy/toner remanufacturer in Pennsylvania. I was hired as the service manager

in 1995 when my service in the Navy ended. I built the company's first service and inventory database, moving us away from a paper-based system and providing dashboard metrics for inventory and service. I worked there for five-and-a-half years before moving on to partner with a startup company, ALPS. I helped build the company to 12 employees within the first eight years.

At ALPS, I wore many hats, worked relentless hours and never stopped looking to see what was ahead of the curve for technology. We started MPS in 2004, document management in 2008 and workflow automation in 2012. As noted, I was a partner in the company for 19 years before moving on to DCS Technologies in 2019. At DCS, I am responsible for new product development, pre- and post-sales support, project management and software support. I enjoy identifying growth opportunities in new lines of business for the company. I have always been an adventurous person and enjoy taking on new challenges. Phil Denlinger, president of DCS, has been a longtime friend and business colleague of mine who I met through the industry, and he has always had an open mind to exploring new opportunities. DCS has been a highlight of my career thus far.

The industry is changing. You constantly have to look at what is a good fit to grow in this industry. You don't want to just be a one-trick pony.

OT: You note that you are an adventurous person. Not everyone would be quick to describe themselves that way. Tell us more.

Risser: When somebody says, "That's going to be difficult, tough to do or even impossible," I take that as a challenge. When I signed up for electrical engineering in the Navy, I remember people telling me, "That's too hard; the attrition rate on that is almost 60%." I was like,

"Cool, I'm all for it." I like challenges.

In this industry, when I go to manufacturer events or BTA events, if I see or hear about something new, I'm like, "I think I could sell that." I go back, do the research and try to figure out how to implement it. How can we make it work? How can we sell it? How can we price it? And how can we make a repeatable service out of it? I did that when I had my business, but when the opportunity came along for me to move on and make a change, at DCS they put me in this role and it is a good fit for me because it's right where I love to be; going out and exploring new things, looking at automation, and seeing how far we can take it. The industry is changing. You constantly have to look at what is a good fit to grow in this industry. You don't want to just be a one-trick pony.

BTA 2023-24 President-Elect Adam Gregory



Adam Gregory, BTA's 2023-24 president-elect, is president of Advanced Business Solutions (ABS), which has operations in St. Augustine and Lake Mary, Florida. Gregory's career in the industry began in 1999, and in 2004, he started ABS. The company offers Xerox, HP, Epson, Lexmark and Kyocera products, as well as partners with ConnectWise, Lenovo, WatchGuard, Zultys,

Crexendo, Alibi Security and others within its IT, VoIP and security divisions. ABS has been awarded the ENX Magazine Elite Dealer Award multiple times. In addition, it was awarded Small Business of the Year by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and was recognized as among the 50 fastest-growing private companies in the northeast Florida region by the Jacksonville Business Journal.

"BTA has been a huge asset to us here at Advanced Business Solutions through the relationships and suppliers we have met," Gregory says of the impact BTA membership has had on his business, which has been a member since 2014. "The best practices I've discussed [with other dealers] and the networking I have been able to do within the industry have been a huge asset. I would recommend to any dealership to join, get involved and make a difference. Like anything else, you have to be involved to get the most out of it."

Gregory has a future vision for BTA that he hopes to see play out in the coming years. "In the next five to 10 years, I see an association that will do what it does best in connecting dealers and providing

benefits, but with a greater focus on solutions and events of the future," he says. "BTA has to evolve. There is no way around that. It must move more into an association that is focused on dealers' needs in the future.

"BTA has to stay at the forefront, capture dealer concerns, and relay solutions and ideas to its members," Gregory continues, noting that in the coming year he wants to continue to take BTA's events to the next level. "Panels or breakouts on [the changes we're seeing in the economy and our industry] during BTA events would serve the members well."

Gregory also notes some of the association's biggest successes in the last year. "Speakers at events have been much better and the association's BTA 101 webinars have improved communication to dealers about their member benefits," he says. "We can continue to improve by building a bridge to dealers and making it known that BTA's purpose is to be the first contact for dealer needs and questions about our industry. Dealers make the association and we want to provide for their needs and spend time on things that are most relevant going forward."

Gregory's vision for the future of BTA also includes adding new offerings and education for its dealer members. "I'd like to continue to add programs that make dealers want to use BTA, such as our certification discounts, etc.," he says. "BTA should also reach out to large players in the IT and security industry and see how they can offer things for dealers through the association that would make them see and appreciate the need for BTA membership."

— Elizabeth Marvel

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

Risser: I joined BTA around 2010. In 2013, I was approached by [then BTA volunteer] Rob Richardson about serving on the board for BTA East. I accepted the offer and have enjoyed being a volunteer ever since. BTA events have always been beneficial for me. I have made many good friends through the association, mostly as a volunteer. The insights gained from conversations with other members of the BTA Board of Directors, vendors, as well as with [BTA Executive Director] Brent Hoskins, his team and [BTA General Counsel] Bob Goldberg have been invaluable. I would not have gained the knowledge I have today about so much in our industry had it not been for serving as a BTA volunteer.

The number-one thing that prevents people from growing is the lack of a willingness to step out humbly in order to learn. When people stop learning, they stop growing. For me, it has been a tremendous experience learning from and growing with my peers on the BTA board. I have always been a fan of peer groups in our industry. Serving on the board is being part of a very special peer group.

If I could tell anyone one good reason to join BTA it would be "to get ready" ... Our industry has evolved as far as it can. Now is the time of transformation.

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?

Risser: I suppose my first question to others in the industry I have met through the years has always been: "Why?" There is no real good reason not to be a member of BTA. If I could tell anyone one

good reason to join BTA it would be "to get ready." If you were not part of BTA in the early 2000s, for example, you would have been very late to new technology and services, such as managed print services.

Today, the industry is not making subtle add-on service changes to what we are all already familiar with as dealers. It's not simply evolving. It's transforming. When BTA started, it was all about typewriters. Over the years, typewriters evolved and the industry changed. The dealers who didn't network with others fell by the wayside. Our industry has evolved as far as it can. Now is the time of transformation. Now is the time to be part of a group that is transforming together; staying on top of the technology our customers need.

BTA 2023-24 Vice President Debra Dennis



BTA's 2023-24 vice president, Debra Dennis, is vice president of support services at CopyPro Inc., located in Greenville, North Carolina. A BTA member since 1973, CopyPro is a Savin and Konica Minolta dealership. Dennis started her career in the industry in 1986 at CopyPro and, today, has extensive experience in all aspects of the office technology industry. She has served

on the BTA Southeast board since 2008 and currently serves on the national BTA Board of Directors. Dennis has also served on the national board for IBPI.

She decided to get involved in BTA after a BTA Southeast-hosted event in Waynesville, North Carolina. "About 16 years ago, I was sent an invitation to attend a BTA event at the Waynesville Country Club Inn," she says. "The BTA Southeast board members at that time made me feel so welcome and shared their passion for the industry. It was at that point I knew I wanted to be a part of the BTA team as a volunteer and give back as much as possible."

Dennis says BTA has had a positive impact on her business and professional life over the years. "Through BTA, I have attended seminars that provided me with information to take back to our dealership to increase revenues, cut costs and enhance each customer's experience," she says. "I have been blessed through my time on the board to be surrounded by great leaders in our industry. These wonderful leaders have shared their pathways to success with me,

as well as opened up the lines of communication so I can reach out to them should I need assistance. This was so important during the supply and equipment shortage of 2021-22; we all worked together to share ideas to keep our customers running. These friendships have not only been invaluable to me personally, but also to CopyPro."

In her role as vice president, Dennis hopes to help improve the association's events. "I want to work with Don Risser and Adam Gregory to continue the vision that [2022-23 BTA President] David Polimeni and [2020-22 BTA President] Tim Renegar worked so hard to put together," she says. "We are working to enhance BTA's events through breakout sessions and additional technology offerings. I am very excited to see this taking shape."

Dennis sees additional offerings pertaining to products and solutions outside of printers and MFPs as the future of BTA. "I see a focus on growth in our industry through added offerings like VoIP, mailing, managed IT services and document management," she says. "BTA is positioning itself to help dealers understand how to grow through these offerings versus staying at status quo. I like to say, 'It is not your parents' BTA.'"

"Always try to be one step ahead," Dennis says, sharing some advice for her fellow dealers. "This can be done through BTA and the relationships you make by attending the association's events. Also, if you haven't signed up for one of the BTA Dealers Helping Dealers Discussion Groups, reach out to [BTA Executive Director] Brent Hoskins and sign up. The calls with these groups are so good."

— Elizabeth Marvel

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

Risser: The “reinventing” of BTA. To be part of something I am already very passionate about is exciting to me. We have a new generation of business executives who are looking way ahead with the use of new technology. They are hungry for something new. BTA needs to be the catalyst that can help them grow into those new areas of business. Together, the BTA staff members and members of the BTA board comprise one of the best teams I have been a part of; I am confident we can be that bridge to new and exciting things for the dealer channel. I am very honored and privileged to be part of such a great team. And, personally, I am very excited about the future of BTA and its events. The 2000s were exciting with new add-on technology. This, in my opinion, is even greater.

OT: What are your thoughts on how today's office technology dealerships can best thrive and grow?

Risser: Always be in a state of learning. Today, technology is moving far more quickly than people can keep up with as compared to past technologies. We all need to approach our businesses as youthful adolescents who are hungry for new information, excited about change and ready to take on the world. Growth today is all about change. Big change. As we reinvent BTA, all business owners in our industry need to be thinking about their businesses as well, reinventing themselves to be ready to lead their customers in keeping up with explosive change in our industry.

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

Risser: Dealers must stay three steps ahead of the changes coming. That is possible by attending BTA events, where they can benefit from the educational sessions, vendor access and networking that provides them with the tools they need to connect vision with implementation.

You have to grow from what you learn from others. That only happens through networking. BTA is one of the greatest resources for networking. Dealers like to network at manufacturer meetings, but they are only focused on a single source of product. BTA is where you can really diversify and branch out. In fact, BTA is now working to regularly offer breakout educational sessions at its events

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focused on specific product and services opportunities that could be new additions for many dealers. For example, at our June [Capture the Magic] event in Denver, Colorado, we had breakouts on mailing equipment. At our upcoming event in Boston, Massachusetts [the 2023 BTA National Conference, Aug. 30-31], we will have breakouts focused on unified communications.

OT: Many in the industry are focused on product and services diversification. What are your thoughts in terms of the importance of a dealer's diversification?

Risser: It is of the utmost importance. Printers and copiers aren't dying, but they have matured. If dealers aren't finding new ways to talk to clients, they are fighting a losing battle. Diversification isn't an option, it's a necessity. We are in a service industry that is mature, experienced and on top of its game. However, unless the products and services we provide for our customers reach a greater level in terms of their need to keep up with technology, our sales reps are not going to be very successful at getting a listening ear.

At DCS, we have embraced diversification. For example, we've expanded into offering VoIP. Plus, we've started selling kiosks that work to automate reception and front-desk tasks. We have also worked to keep up with technology internally, using automation to facilitate electronic contracts. Our internal sales process is 100% digital; there is no paperwork.

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

Risser: I see BTA as continuing to be described as the industry resource for helping dealers succeed with leading technology. BTA has been here before, many times. I am privileged to be part of this moment in its history. From typewriters to calculators to copiers, MPS to MNS, BTA has always been able to adapt for its dealers. And it will continue to be the leading resource for dealers for decades to come. What will be interesting to see is what those future dealerships will look like in terms of products and services, and how dealers will contribute to BTA. ■

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