



In-Depth with Mark Olson

RSPA'S CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD



Where were you born and raised?

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

What was your first job? At an early age, I was mowing lawns and delivering morning newspapers.

Where did you go to school and/or what did you do after high school? I attended high school in Edina, Minnesota, and then I received a BS degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Minnesota in 1978.

How did you get involved in the industry? A friend from college, whose father started a number of businesses, including APG, recruited me to be a part of the APG organization. I was selling industrial computer equipment for a distribution company at the time, and he made me an offer to join him that I couldn't refuse.

How did you get involved in the RSPA? APG has been involved with the ICRDA and RSPA for many years. We've believed that the RSPA's role in the industry has been critical to help resellers create demand for POS products and services in our industry, while enhancing the customer's loyalty to the various product and service providers.

What are the biggest issues in our industry right now? The POS world is very dynamic right now, with many things undergoing dramatic change, including the products and services, as well as the business models. This raises many questions, including: How do we help create new futures worth having? How do we stay relevant in today's marketplace?

What have you learned from past RSPA Chairmen? All of the past RSPA Chairs that I've spent time with have been smart, dedicated and passionate about this industry. They each brought a different perspective, and some unique ideas to the association's journey. I've learned a lot from all of them, and it's helped me understand what truly motivates the resellers and what drives the success in our industry.

What committees are you involved in? I have been involved at some point in many of the committees, but have spent the most time with the Vendor Working Group, Marketing Committee, and of course the Board of Directors.

What went through your mind when Les Farrance passed you the gavel at RetailNOW 2012? Les did a terrific job of guiding the association through some complex challenges, and I hope that I can live up to the high bar that Les, and many previous Chairmen of the organization, have set for the association leaders.

What are your initiatives for the next year? We have many exciting, but potentially disruptive technology changes happening right in front of us. The trend towards more

mobile solutions is really gaining momentum, the "as a service" business models are compelling and also gaining momentum, and there clearly is some convergence of a variety of technologies occurring in our industry. The RSPA is working hard at being an inclusive organization, bringing new ideas and technologies to the entire community and helping them see how the changes occurring around us can be opportunities for the future. The RSPA is also providing world class training and certification opportunities so that the members will be better equipped to stay relevant and provide more value to their customers in the future. We're going to continue to work toward helping the individual members become more productive, more effective, and stay relevant for the future.

What has been your career highlight to this point? I've been a very fortunate person, and have had many opportunities to learn and grow. I am certainly humbled by the fact that the association members have accepted me as a vendor chair of the association.

What do you hope to take away from being RSPA Chairman of the Board? I hope that I will be able to make a difference, and contribute in a way that makes the RSPA a stronger organization, and that the industry we're involved in is better equipped to create and deliver superior value to the customers we serve.

In your opinion, how can we better involve members who aren't active? It's important that we understand their needs, and figure out if there is something the association can help provide for them. Yogi Berra said – "if people don't want to come to the ball park, you can't stop them." It is the same with our association members. We need to figure out ways that people will want to be involved with the association, and how we can provide value to our member organizations.

How has RSPA helped your business/career? I've met a tremendous number of very interesting and capable people, and learned a lot from them. It has given us an opportunity to show case our products to this community. More importantly, it has helped us learn what the customers need by being in touch with the members of this highly involved community.

What is your personal life philosophy? Live each day, as if it was your last – and one day, it will be.

Tell us about your family and/or a fun fact about yourself. I have an identical twin brother, and we consider that his 2 kids, and my 3 kids, are "half" brothers & sisters. Kids don't come with instruction manuals, and part of the challenge (and joy) of being a parent is you have to figure out what they are going to be when they grow up – and even when they are from similar gene pools... they are all very different. **C**