John Adams Interview With Roger Pearce

JA: I am having lunch with Roger Pearce who has been an independent security consultant for over 20 years. At times during that period he has held the ASIS CPP qualification, been SCEC endorsed and last year was awarded the OSPA Outstanding Security Consultant of the Year. However today I am interviewing him as one of the longest serving members of our security industry.

RP: Hi John great to catch up. I think I have known you from almost when you started SE&NM. I was thinking as I walked around your recent SecTech show that some of the young guys were not even born when I started in the industry. Today they are reaping the rewards of how we pioneered the industry so I thought it might be of interest to cover a little of the early days.

JA: How did you get started in the Security Industry?

RP: In 1974 my wife and I had just returned from a two year working holiday in the UK (who hadn't) and I needed a job. (all money gone as you would expect). I saw a position as a Sales Engineer with Voca Communications. Voca and 3M were the first companies to develop and sell fax machines in Australia. The first units were about the size of a IBM Selectric typewriter (some of you will know what that is) and you had to talk to the person on the other end before transmitting the fax. No one really understood what you were talking about most of the time. "We have a telex machine. Why would we want a fax?"

Those of you who have sold or are selling new technology will empathize with our salesman below.

It was a hard slog. However our National Sales Manager did have a win. He (was drowning his sorrows) in a pub in Canberra and got chatting to a journalist who asked if he would like Gough Whitlam's direct line. After an explanation on the phone his staff came to a demo. The sales manager faxed an example of a closely typed page to me in Sydney & I signed it and faxed it back. Bingo! Gough had to have one. Next thing I was delivering the newly released auto receive model to Kirribilli House so Gough could send faxes back from anywhere in the world even if there were no staff up to receive it. It was about the size of a large photocopier and only just fitted into the back of my station wagon.
It was a success. The only problem was Doug McClelland the Minister for Media, (if anyone needs a fax it would be the Minister for Media, surely), had bought a 3M machine. 3M and Voca were not compatible (ring a bell anyone?). He was told to switch to Voca as 3M did not have an auto answer machine (how important is R&D folks).

Despite this little win it was too early to disrupt (modern term slipped in here. Disruption way before Uber & Airbnb were even thought of) the telex machine. It was another ten years before the telex machine was pushed back into the corner behind our fax machine at the DKS office. (This theme of having to convince clients that new technology sometimes had many advantages over doing things the old way continued throughout my career. Faxes over telex and then in my next role electronic access control over metal keys. See cartoon of salesman/warrior below).

Needless to say I was asked to catch the 2 o'clock taxi and was now looking for something new.
JA: What did you do then?

Luckily CHUBB had just picked up the sole agency for Rusco Electronic System (RES) (now Casi-Rusco, GE Interlogix). When I arrived for my interview at CHUBB Lock & Safe the receptionist asked me to wait in the showroom. Luckily they had a Rusco R40 system set up there and I was able to figure out what on earth electronic access control was! The Manager David McLaren who had been recruited for his experience in office machines sales had no technical knowledge (phew!). This made me look like an expert and I got the job.

I was issued with a car (no mobile phone of course not even a beeper) and a machine gun as per the cartoon and told to go and sell access control. No one in Chubb knew much about it so I was on my own. Metropolitan Alarms, CHUBB's alarm company were a separate division and did not want to get involved in case it bombed. The CHUBB Managing Director at the time Stanley Masters was of the view that the only real security was a strongroom door or a safe. He was quoted as saying that "electronic security is a flash in the pan, it won't last".

However, I ignored the lot of them and pressed on.

The Rusco range included the R10 standalone single code card reader. We sold an installation of reader, lock, electric strike and power supply for $1,600 including supply, install and commission. It did have "door ajar" local to the door if you wired it up. The reader had no time zones and changing the code meant all cards had to be re issued. (According to Google that is) *

*$10,940 in 2017 dollars, even Honeywell don't charge that now. The online reader was a lot more about $1,800 to $2,000. Try getting $12,370 + GST for one reader nowadays. Compare that to today where an intelligent reader with encryption and all alarm functions, programmable reader attributes installed with a lock and strike for between $2,000 & $3,000.

Five years later I had introduced electronic access control to heaps of clients including probably one of the largest access control systems around at the time about 1978/1979 (about 40 readers) and the largest Rusco system at the time at Channel 7 Epping studios. The Rusco R40 had a reader capacity of 40 so this became a problem at the time. The site was later taken over by SNP (now, Telstra SNP) and expanded further with CASI-Rusco.

JA: Why did you leave CHUBB?

It was at a Security show at the end of 1979 that I went on to the DKS stand and saw for the first time the CCU20 Access Control System they had developed here in Australia. The idea of getting in on the ground floor of an Australian company developing this technology had a lot of appeal. The CCU20 was a 20 reader, 4 time zone, 4000 key capacity system.
Prior to this model DKS had developed the revolutionary 50 code unit. This reader, sold between 1976 - 1979, allowed 50 individual key codes to be validated/invalidated. The unit came with all 50 keys valid and you blocked the one(s) you did not want or any lost keys with a diode plug which was plugged into the corresponding hole for that key number. Thank God I didn't have to sell any of these. Please note the natural background (someone's backyard used to pose this wonderful bit of technology).
By end of January 1980 I started at DKS working out of the factory in Marrickville Rd Marrickville.

JA: Were you glad you made the move?

RP: Well yes, although my wife was not pleased we had to mortgage the house it was still a lot of fun. The DKS culture was fantastic. We had a marvellous team of dedicated staff. We were on a mission to put Australian access control on the map.
JA: How did it progress?

RP: Well our sales in 1980 was $40,000. All three shareholders survived on this that year. By 1991 when we sold to James Hardie Building Automation (JHBA) it was $18 million

JA: What were the systems over that 11 year period?

RP: Well our breakthrough product was probably the ENSENN 2000 and ENSENN ECS (Elevator Control System). Developers in the early 80s were trying to squeeze maximum floor space out of the buildings they were developing, so lobbies and foyers were really a loss of lettable space. We worked closely with the lift companies to come up with a panel that fitted into the lift car and did not need a trailing cable. This was a world first. The lift companies were charging $10,000-$20,000 (Google says that's $25,243 - $50,487 in today's money) for a trailing cable. We managed to save this cost with the ECS. The lift companies were also happy to promote it because the cost of a trailing cable was a negative for them with building owners and developers. So successful was this product during the period when places like North Sydney were booming. We used to call Walker St and Arthur St DKS row.

Every DKS salesman was issued with the ECS demo unit in a brief case. This was the best way to illustrate something that people could not quite believe could work without trailing cable.

JA: Did this put DKS on the map?

RP: Yes it really did. Although we went on to develop other ground breaking products (that's enough for another article) this was the bread and butter product that was the foundation for future growth.

JA: What is the most significant change you have noticed since the early days of the industry?

R.P: Well as I walk around the ASIAL Exhibition I am amazed. The first one I went to was at a small venue in Milsons Point. There was probably no more than 20 stands. Now there are hundreds of stands, thousands of sales people selling millions of dollars worth of access control equipment. I think of the characters that prior to 1985 helped turn what was a cottage industry into the billion dollar business it is today. Guys like Jack Staniforth (Card Key), Brian Wapshot (Schlage), Geoff Pagewood (Kastle), Steve
Mills, & Brian Wakelin (Mil), Roger Whyborn & Phillip Knowland (ASCO) and Steve Mills (second go) and Peter Rodger promoting DKS at North Shore Locksmiths before they sold DKS to us. Then the early members of my team at DKS, John Perram and Brenton Jones. (Apologies to anyone who I have missed out. If you want to be included in my History of Access Control in Australia get in touch).

JA: What are you doing at the moment?

RP: Well I still have Security Consulting to do. Also I have just been asked to serve on the IEC TC79 WG11 Electronic Access Control Systems Standards Australia/IEC committee Scope (as defined in ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2, 6.2.1) This standard shall define a protocol for configuration of an electronic access control system. I will be joining industry icons Vlado Damjanovski, Les Simmons and Will Yeadon for this task.

As Chairman of the membership Committee of ASIS NSW I am also trying to encourage Senior members of our industry to give back to the industry that has grown so much over the last 40 odd years.

And there is still the "History of Electronic Access Control In Australia" to write. This is what they call a "Work in Progress" I think.

JA: Well thank you Roger, great to catch up and for these insights.

* According to the ABS Australian Inflation Calculator

John,

My wife doesn't like the phrases I have left in italics. What do you think? I have tried to make the interview somewhat light hearted.

R.P.