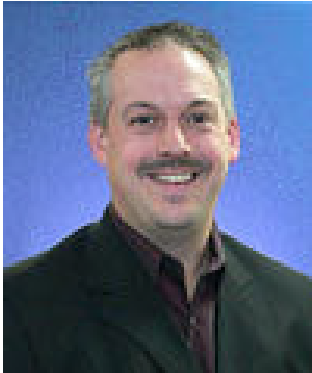


## Bruce W. Allen



***On his interest in lasers: "From a very young age I was intrigued by photonics, lasers, and optics. It all stemmed from the Star Wars movies. I thought, 'Wow! Those guns are cool!' I wanted to figure out how lasers worked and what they did. At that age, I didn't realize the Star Wars applications weren't real! But I still love the mystery of light itself and what you can do with it."***

***—Bruce W. Allen, August 11, 2009***

Bruce W. Allen has his dream job. It is obvious from the way he talks about his company, Newport Corporation, that he would be hard pressed to find a job he enjoys more. Bruce is the Midwest regional sales manager for Newport, in charge of ten states' worth of sales accounts from Indiana to the Dakotas. But he started out as a photonics student.

"When I graduated from high school a half-year early, I started college at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC) as a 17-year-old student," he recalls. "I graduated from IHCC when I was 19 and embarked on my career in photonics, lasers, and optics, a career I've enjoyed for over 20 years." Bruce quickly explains that it wasn't as easy as he just made it sound. "The first year of classes was called 'core,' and we did all the fundamentals: algebra, physics, AC/DC, and analog circuits. I was overwhelmed with information." Students who weren't serious or persistent were weeded out; they wouldn't become dedicated employees. "But after the first year, classes were a breeze—a lot of fun. Once we were taking courses in our majors, it was of great interest to us. We were studying what we were going to do in future jobs. If you can stick out the first year of a technical program, then you've got it whipped and you're going to make it through the program."

Bruce had secured a job before he graduated. Upon receiving his degree, he began work as a laser technician for Hutchison Technology. After three years, he moved to Spectralytics, where he became chief laser technician, in charge of maintaining 21 different laser systems. As he worked with technicians who were installing new LASAG industrial lasers for Spectralytics, they were so impressed with his work that LASAG's vice president called Bruce and offered him a sales position. "Ultimately, I had always wanted a sales job. So I took the job with LASAG," he says. "They made lasers for precision cutting, welding, and drilling. I was there for two years and Newport came to recruit me. They offered

me a home office, a company car, a bigger salary, and commission. Newport has treated me very well. I've been there 12 years now."

Bruce loves being able to work from home. But it has its drawbacks. He loves the freedom a home office offers him. "But as long as you're home," he says, "you're never away from work. I find myself sitting in my office at 1:00 or 2:00 A.M. sometimes. But I don't think I could give it up to go back into a corporate office. I consider it the golden handcuffs. Where else am I going to do what I do, make the money I make, and live in Iowa?"

Bruce sells lasers and laser components to universities, aerospace labs, and other companies throughout the Midwest. "I sell all the optics that are used with lasers—motion control components, power meters, detectors, fiber optics, and cables," he explains. "I'm responsible for over 15,000 products. But the best part is seeing all the systems and components being developed before anyone else sees them. It's very interesting to see what new technology is coming—what's going to be on the horizon next."

Today's lean economy means that, at the moment, Bruce isn't selling as much as he was. But he has a philosophy for survival, and it is simply loyalty. "Being in sales is a cyclical market. It has its ups and downs. But I still stay close to my customers," he says. "When sales are down, it's time to plant more seeds and make customers aware that I'm still there for them. When sales do recover, customers will say, 'When we were broke, that sales guy at Newport was still interested in us.'"

Bruce has dreams of someday becoming a director of sales. But if that doesn't happen, he's content doing his current job for another 12 years. As Bruce puts it, "This is the perfect job for someone who is interested in the next thing they're going to use this crazy beam of light for."

*Bruce W. Allen earned an associate in applied science degree in laser electro-optic technology from Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, Iowa, in 1991. He lives in Ottumwa and has two daughters, Brea and Kiah. Bruce coaches his daughters' fast-pitch softball team and, on weekends, umpires state softball tournaments.*