



Scots Away



Name:
Ron Leckie

Location:
Saratoga, California, USA

Background:

Ron Leckie earned his Bachelor of Science Degree with Honours in Electrical & Electronic Engineering in 1970 from Heriot Watt University, Scotland.

Ron began his experience in the semiconductor manufacturing industry with 14 years of test engineering and manufacturing at Signetics / Philips in both the UK and US.

This was followed by 11 years in the capital equipment industry at Megatest, where he led both the development and marketing of state-of-the-art semiconductor test systems. Since 1995, he has been an independent analyst and consultant to the chip manufacturing industry.



Hi-Tech Scotland (HTS):

Describe your current role.

RL: For the past thirteen years, I have enjoyed the role of independent analyst and consultant, working from my home here in Saratoga, California. It builds upon my experience of 14 years of making semiconductor chips and 11 years of making capital equipment to test chips. I describe my consultancy simply as "helping clients connect technology with money".

In this role, I've worked for clients ranging in size from small start-ups to the largest chipmaker, Intel, providing services such as business development, strategic marketing, diligence studies, expert witness and market analysis. I made the transition from engineer to business management and soon realised that simply developing cool technology is not sufficient. It's essential to understand customers and what they need in the different global markets, then deliver it in a way that satisfies them while being profitable.

I am also currently on the Board of Directors of two small private companies in the semiconductor supply chain, with one being based locally here in California and the other 3,000 miles away in Connecticut. These are both active roles where I can mentor the company CEOs and help them periodically with projects.

HTS: When did you first become interested in technology as a career?

RL: As a youngster growing up in Edinburgh, I was always fascinated by photography and electronics. As a result, I decided in sixth form at John Watson's School that I was going to sign up for a BBC sandwich course to become a television cameraman. Fortunately, my family persuaded me that I should get a university degree first, so I went to Heriot Watt and graduated in 1970 with a BSc in Electronics. By then, I had gained part-time experience doing wedding photography and working in the university TV unit, so the "cameraman" experience was satisfied and I looked to the electronics sector for a job.

I was hired by US-based firm, Signetics Corporation, as a product engineer at their UK plant in Linlithgow, where I gained a broad experience in all aspects of semiconductor manufacturing and applications. The rest, as they say, is history.

HTS: Broadly speaking, from your own perspective, what technologies are likely to prove most important over the next 10 years?

RL: It is difficult to pick a single technology, but I see two technology themes that will gain in importance over the next decade or two. One is clearly alternative energy, which is essential to preserve the world's natural resources while the population grows in numbers and living standards. The other important technologies will be those that can make our lives more productive and satisfying for a longer time. This would include traditional areas such as communications, networking and personal computing, as well as medical electronics and biotech.

HTS: Was it always your ambition to work overseas?

RL: Not really - I had always imagined I'd be living and working in the UK. However, I soon realised that the Scottish electronics industry was based exclusively upon inward investment strategies to generate jobs, and not upon building an indigenous industry which could creatively develop its own future. The results of this are evident today. I could see then that "Silicon Valley" was where all the action was in semiconductors, so in 1976 we moved there "for two years" to get the career experience. Well, thirty-two years later we are still in Silicon Valley where we enjoy both life and work. Our hearts are still in Scotland where we maintain strong relationships with family and friends and we get back to visit as often as we can. The nickname "Silicon Valley" refers to the Santa Clara Valley, and is pretty much a misnomer today since there is no silicon produced here. However, the name persists as the

Valley transforms itself periodically through high levels of creative spirit and entrepreneurialism to develop different technology-based industries. This, in addition to a very pleasant climate, is what makes it vibrant and fun to live and work here.

HTS: Has being Scottish ever been an advantage (or disadvantage) to you elsewhere in the world?

RL: Absolutely! It's amazing how many Americans claim Scottish descent, which shows the affinity they generally have towards Scotland. They tend to quickly tune in to a Scottish accent, as long as it's not too heavy, and listen well to what you have to say. Of course, you then have to deliver content to keep their attention. The Scots' sense of humour can also be a big advantage when used appropriately.

In general, you find that the Scots diaspora have been very successful in their endeavours, so the respect for our wee nation is disproportionately greater than its size. I've found the key is to use the asset of being Scottish in a subtle way. By way of a negative example, I have seen Scots come over to exhibit at industry trade shows wearing the kilt. This is an inappropriate time and place to do so, and usually gathers the wrong type of attention. It's best to simply start talking and notice people "tune in".

HTS: Do you have any remaining ambitions?

RL: Ambition is what gets me up and going every day. I am driven to maintaining my family's lifestyle in these very trying economic times while leveraging my experience to help my clients and companies in which I have a board seat. I would still like to find a couple of Scottish companies where I can add value through mentoring based on my global technology experience. Although I realise that, with them, my remaining Scottish accent will not be as much of an asset!