



A Brief Look Back to the NOMDA Era

Since our January 2026 issue, I have enjoyed using this space to write about various aspects of the Business Technology Association's (BTA's) rich history as we celebrate our 100th anniversary. As I am just back from the March 20-21 BTA IGNITE Orlando event, it seems like a good opportunity to reminisce a bit about one of the first association events I attended.



I started working at the association in November 1986 when it was still the National Office Machine Dealers Association (NOMDA). When I arrived, NOMDA was gearing up for its national convention, which was held July 22-25, 1987, at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

If you joined this great industry after the days of the NOMDA conventions, you cannot appreciate the mind-boggling scope of those legendary events. Those of you who did attend our conventions know what I am talking about. Looking at the October 1987 issue of the association's magazine, our coverage of that year's convention reports: "The industry's premier event attracted 15,608 attendees and 299 vendors in 1,745 booth spaces."

I spent nearly a week in Atlanta for that convention. The association's staff members arrived a day or two early for a pre-event meeting where we walked through every detail of the convention — from beginning to end — to ensure we were fully prepared. Then we hit the ground running. What followed were many hours among the sea of vendors in the exhibit hall, 11 educational sessions, plenty of networking opportunities, great meals and top entertainment.

In that October 1987 issue, I see a photo of Vanna White in the exhibit hall standing in front of the word KONICA in large block

letters characteristic of TV's Wheel of Fortune puzzle board. I believe that was the same convention where Jim Fowler of TV's Wild Kingdom was greeting convention-goers at another exhibit booth, posing for photos with them — along with a python [I have not had a snake draped over my shoulders since]. The convention's closing night entertainment: The Oak Ridge Boys.

You get the idea. The NOMDA conventions were a big deal — and for good reason. They were the industry's primary means of vendors connecting with dealers in person. That is, at the time, there were no manufacturer dealer meetings. Instead, if you wanted to see the full product lineup of your vendor (and those of the competition) you headed to a NOMDA convention in Atlanta, New Orleans, Louisiana, or Las Vegas, Nevada — essentially the only cities with the requisite volume of meeting space and hotel rooms.

Those days were an important part of the association's history. Once in a while someone will say to me: "I miss the NOMDA conventions. I wish we could bring them back." My response is always the same: "Yes, they were great, but they won't return." The reason: They were the product of the era in which they existed. There were more than 7,000 independent dealers at the time, and the imaging vendors were aggressively seeking to build their U.S. dealer distribution; they were doing so through NOMDA.

Today, we still have our events, of course. They are smaller, but I would contend they are better in one very important way: BTA's current events are far more conducive to making meaningful connections with others in the industry and providing opportunities for dealers to help one another. Plan to attend our next event, BTA IGNITE Kansas City, Sept. 1-3, and you will experience this firsthand. ■

— Brent Hoskins

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FLASHBACK



The association's magazine cover 47 years ago this month — the NOMDA Spokesman, April 1979.