



2007 MARKS THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF RAKON'S FOUNDING. TO HIGHLIGHT THIS MILESTONE WE PAY TRIBUTE TO WARREN ROBINSON - THE FOUNDER OF RAKON.

TRIBUTE TO FOUNDER



Rakon - The Past

Warren's early days were spent out in the country in Pukekohe. An only child, Warren's father was Postmaster at the local post office.

From an early age Warren was interested in the sciences and technology. He was very 'hands on' in electrical engineering. His fascination began in electronics at secondary school, building a radio at the age of 15. He was one of the youngest in New Zealand (with two others) to receive an amateur radio license at 15 years old. After Auckland Grammar, Warren became a Technical Trainee at the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, where he had extensive training

in electronics. To extend his knowledge he completed Auckland University papers in Maths, Physics and Chemistry. After the broadcasting service, Warren went to work for Electronic Navigation as a Technician in marine electronics for two years.

At 20 years of age and with a mere '50 quid' Warren formed his own company 'Marlin Electronics' in partnership with Henri Klok. It was during the Marlin days that Warren developed his marketing skills, driven originally from his technical experience and background. He extended his knowledge of the market at the time, by reading profusely. Warren retained copies of publications on frequency control

from symposium proceedings held internationally, and from as early as 1945 he attended symposiums in the U.S.

In 1955 Marlin manufactured radio telephone equipment including 'type approved' radio telephones for class 3 and 4 marine vessels and depth sounders. Warren and Henri ran Marlin from 1955 until 1965 before deciding to sell out to Autocrat Radio (interestingly Peter Maire later bought the marine navigation business off Autocrat). Warren acted as Consultant and Chief Engineer for Autocrat and after 2 years the contract finished.

But during this time, Warren had been getting itchy feet. Throughout his time at Marlin he had experienced the frustration of crystals taking up to 3 or 4 months to be delivered. He had seen the ongoing demand for radio telephones and servicing the radio industry where the demand for radios in boats, taxis, VHF, and trucks was on the rise. The large gap in the market for locally made crystals was too big to ignore, so at his garage in Bleakhouse Road in Howick, Warren decided to make his own. His initial developments were pressure mounted crystals. He then opened up a small factory on the corner of Balm and Nuffield St in Newmarket (the original building still stands there today).

But Warren wanted to manufacture hermetically sealed crystals which required vacuum equipment. He had faced problems getting a license to import the machinery. The Government at the time ironically viewed his projects as nothing more than a 'pipe dream' and were unwilling to grant the license. It took persistence, but the industry obliged in the end and Rakon Industries (then a staff of twelve) was able to move forward with manufacturing the solder sealed UM-1 crystals.

Demand was heavy so in 1971 the George St premise in Mt Eden was opened and 30-40 staff employed. In 1972 Warren established a further manufacturing plant in Singapore. He had been exporting to South East Asia using Singapore as the trading center. Warren had seen the potential market for communication crystals with a market base of 300 million stemming from Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan.

Back in New Zealand, Rakon Industries was able to supply the market with lead times of as little as 2 or 3 days, whereas previously the lead time offshore had been 3 or 4 months. Customers were prepared to pay a premium for the shorter delivery time. The market was even more appealing as in the 70's there was a custom duty protection of about 30% protecting local New Zealand business so that any competitors

had to pay the duty- making the locally made crystals the preferred choice. In 1976-1977 Warren opened the Melbourne plant to service the Australian market.

From radio communications the commodity consumer market evolved. Computers required at least 2 or 3 crystals each. In the U.S, Citizen band radios (in essence the forerunner to cell phones) were manufactured, which didn't require a license to make, so demand for these crystals flooded into Singapore. In the mid seventies, with the invention of colour TV came demand for television crystals. It was not until the 90's that new markets evolved (GPS, telecommunications infrastructure, satellite communications etc).

The naming of Rakon

Originally Warren developed the name because he didn't want it to mean anything in particular so that it could be used as a trademark worldwide. There were a few similar sounding name choices but it was "Rakon" that was chosen by the registrars at the time and approved as a registered trademark.

Rakon - The Present

Since the 60's and 70's Warren has seen the technology advance at a phenomenal pace, but he believes the culture of Rakon has remained. Back then there was the challenge to try something different to learn an entirely new industry and through perseverance, dedication and commitment to push the envelope and boundaries. Warren says this strive for excellence continues at Rakon today, with quality staff and staff relations being keys to success.

Rakon - The Future

Progressing forward, Warren believes that as a high tech company there is potential for tremendous growth world wide, particularly in China and South East Asia where there is huge opportunity to meet demand in the local markets.

Rakon - The Founder

Warren is extremely modest and it takes some convincing for him to see why people may just be interested to read about the story behind how Rakon began - and the story behind one of New Zealand's most successful businessmen.

Today as a member of the Board, Warren still has an active involvement with Rakon. He is still continuing to push the envelope- developing an olive grove and vineyard on his estate in Waiheke Island, with the intention of making his own wine.