



Steve Warren

For years, Steve Warren has been the public face of the console and dimming manufacturer Avolites. Now he expands his portfolio, developing international sales and distribution channels for Chroma-Q. He talks to *LSA* about his new duties and out-of-the-box marketing ideas.

Lighting&Sound America: How did you get started at Avolites?

Steve Warren: I started out in a very dull job designing electrical layouts for hospitals, police stations, and public buildings. A friend was working on an automated PAR can fixture; I found it so interesting that I ended up working for him, for free! It was a small company, and struggling, so he went on to Avolites, and recommended me there. I joined Avolites in 1984, working my way up into a technical sales role. The opportunity came, in 1991, to purchase Avolites from the original owners. We bought the assets of the company and carried on as new management ever since!

LSA: How did you made the move to set up your company, Lighting Distribution Consulting, Ltd. (LDC)?

SW: More recently, the shareholder directors of Avolites wanted to take a step back, pulling back to two days a week, to allow the current management team more autonomy. I stepped back to four days a week, and set up LDC, Ltd with my partner, Carolina Fajardo-Linares. It's a new step for myself—having worked for 33 years for Avolites, and spending 22 years setting up Avolites' international distribution network—to create an international distribution network for Chroma-Q, which has already been successful in North America, the UK, and Ireland. It's a new challenge and I'm very excited about it

LSA: How do you divide your time between Avolites and LDC?

SW: Currently, I'm with Avolites four days a week. On the one available day, I spend time promoting Chroma-Q. Going forward, I expect that to become a more balanced situation. But I'm still there for Avolites, and the customers all have my cell phone number; the channels are never closed. We'll see how Lighting Distribution Consulting grows.

LSA: What do you seek to promote about Chroma-Q?

SW: Chroma-Q operates in two tiers, the first being the supply of film and studio lighting. The Studio Force fixture is doing very well in the large film studios here, so we'd like to promote that to film studios around the world. The Chroma-

Q Color Force is used in opera houses, national theatres, and demanding theatre and concert touring applications. Users appreciate not just the brightness of the fixtures but the flatness of the field and homogenous output. So, one thread is promoting those two products to specifiers, and the other is appointing distributors who are able to support, explain, promote, and supply them in the Far East, Eastern Europe, South America, and all the territories that currently don't have access to it.

LSA: Can you talk about your unusual marketing ideas, especially for trade shows like the PLASA Show?

SW: We have had quite a reputation for making exhibitions lively and enjoyable! One time, at PLASA, I had DMX-controlled flames run from my console. I was told I would never get away with it [laughs], but I got all the safety sign-offs and we did! In the past, we had an Avolites after-show party on the booth, with cocktails, magicians, silk aerialist performers, acrobats, and even a belly dancer! What really got us that reputation was the PLASA networking party, which became quite well-known. We'd have anyone involved in lighting, video, or entertainment production in one big club space. What was very visible was the unusual entertainment that I had found at concerts and festivals during the previous year. Less visible, but something I am immensely proud of, is the way so many professionals made new contacts and developed their careers at these events. In this business, people want to work with people they feel they know personally. I've always put my cell phone and picture on my business cards, saying to customers, "If you need to, just call me: I'll find a technician or operator for you, or I'll help to find you a smoke machine in Germany on a Saturday!"

LSA: How would you sum up your career thus far?

SW: I sort of feel like I'm still in the middle of it. If you'd asked me 10 years ago, I'd say by now I'd be pulling back, but I feel more excited than ever. The convergence of lighting and video with Avolites, and also taking on this new opportunity with Chroma-Q, it's hugely exciting. So I surprise myself that I'm more enthusiastic than ever! 📞