



Todd Spencer

The president and strategic advisor of Ventana Capital Investments, a consulting firm for entertainment and event services organizations, talks about his career and his current stint as board president of ESTA

Lighting&Sound America: How did you get started in your career?

Todd Spencer: I've been in the industry for 26 years, which sounds like a long time when I say it out loud. I was passionate about theatre in high school and had the good fortune to get connected with folks who had previously worked on Broadway in a technical lighting capacity. My first job was in a local melodrama theatre that's a Tucson icon. It's still in business. As time went on, I had the opportunity to work in a convention center and handle touring shows. From there I formed a lighting and rigging company. That was in the mid-'90s and early 2000s; I handled corporate business, meaning meetings and events in hotels and convention spaces, which are part of entertainment but more their own animal. I wound up competing with [events company] PSAV in a few of their properties, and, ultimately, they acquired my company. I was connected with PSAV for about 18 years. I moved into sales and live production, taking a sort of executive producer role over several properties in the region.

LSA: Where did the name of your company, Ventana Capital Investments, come from?

TS: Ventana is the Spanish word for window. Where I live in Arizona, Spanish is as widely spoken as English. At a point in my life when I thought all the doors were closing, I thought it might be time to build a window. It's a little bit of a play on words but that is the secret behind the scenes!

LSA: And what does Ventana do for organizations it works with?

TS: At PSAV, I originated several of their specialty services programs. That led to my work with Ventana; as a sideline over the years, I've helped other businesses develop their service offerings, their go-to-market strategy, in some cases their divestment planning, and helped to guide them on how best to optimize and scale their businesses. Sometimes that included workforce elements, sometimes it included financial or accounting cleanup and, quite frequently, included operational elements.

LSA: How did you become president of ESTA?

TS: I came to ESTA through the rigging side of the business; the rigging work group in ESTA became a good opportunity to connect with other professionals and understand what challenges they were having and what solutions they were finding. After several years, I was approached by the executive director, who asked if I would be interested in moving into a vice president role for the organization. I enjoyed that tremendously. I served as vice president for about five years and then I was elected president. It's been a very busy year and a half, obviously, with the pandemic and working with so many great organizations that are aligned with ESTA as strategic partners.

LSA: What is ESTA's biggest challenge currently and what do you hope to accomplish?

TS: Relevance. A lot of associations and companies at the end of the pandemic find themselves evaluating how to be most relevant. We see this in the product and services side because that's really where the in-person companies are most concentrated. They're trying to understand how to take their best skills, their best services, their best products, and maximize those for what their customers will need. It's easier said than done because we're in a period of such rapid change. The goal is to answer the question of "How do we provide the best value and highest level of relevance now and in the future?"

LSA: What are your hopes for Ventana in the future?

TS: I hope to help people. I hope to be a positive contributor to our overall entertainment and events ecosystem. That will mean different things for different companies and different organizations. But I want to be able to use my experiences and the opportunities that I've had and assemble them into something that's really helpful for somebody else.

LSA: In your free time, you enjoy sailing?

TS: I do enjoy sailing and I'm also a licensed pilot. I seem to love all of the wind-powered sports apparently. I do really enjoy both of those things. Ironically, my first career idea was that I wanted to be an airline pilot! 🛩️