

Librascope, Ramtec, and Pong  
or  
**Filling Up Waste Paper Cans with Quarters**

A Librascope “Sea Story”

In the early 1970's Librascope was trying to expand from Navy torpedo fire control design and manufacturing into sonar products. We won a secret applied research contract to investigate how to best design the newest sonar displays required by the US Navy.

By the way, the research work led to Librascope consulting on the sonar set design for the movie “The Hunt for Red October” for which we received an on screen credit.

But I digress. At some point in the research, we were asked to determine if sonar operators would perform their new tasks better if they had color rather than black and white displays.

We learned that a company called Ramtec in San Jose was manufacturing computer controlled color displays for displaying color coded oil refinery piping diagrams. We visited their plant, were convinced that their product would meet our research needs, and placed an order. As we were about to leave, our host asked if we wanted to see how they really made their money.

We said, “Yes” and he took us to a corner of the manufacturing floor where a technician was assembling “Pong” games. We were told he assembled one Pong console per day. The game competed with other arcade like games and customers could play Pong for a quarter a game. When a quarter was inserted into the console, it fell into a blue waste paper can inside the console. Since sales were good, Ramtec placed an order for 1000 blue waste paper cans. The vendor called and questioned why a small company would need 1000 waste paper cans. Ramtec said, **“We are going to fill them up with quarters.”**

Ray Hand

P.S. Walter Isaacson in his book “the Innovators” says that Atari invented Pong but did not try to patent it right away. This led to Ramtec and others developing and selling competing products.