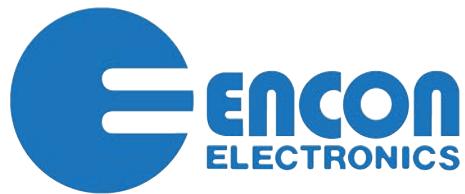


**OPEN & SHUT  
ENTERPRISES**



**Encon Customer Success Stories  
& Unique Installations**

## About Open & Shut Enterprises

In 1993, Ray Oberlies and Les Cofer started Open & Shut Enterprises, a leading installer of gate operators and access control systems based in Kern County. The company specializes in residential, commercial, and industrial applications, and they pride themselves on their ability to service multiple brands so that their customers' security needs are met with the highest standards.

In this interview with Open & Shut President and CEO Ray Oberlies, we examine highlights of their successful journey and uncover their recipe for longevity in the industry.

## ENCON INTERVIEW WITH RAY OBERLIES, OPEN & SHUT ENTERPRISES

### How did the business get started?

I worked for a company that repaired gate operators for five years and then had the opportunity to work with Les and a fencing contractor. We worked together for five years and then, a friend called and asked if they knew someone who could work on a gate operator at the apartment complex he owned. The fencing contractor didn't specialize in this, so I recommended he call his former company. They didn't respond right away, and he needed his gate repaired. So, he asked if Les and I could do it.

We visited the site over the weekend and discovered an old Stanley gate operator with a bad relay. We replaced the relay and adjusted the limits. Eventually, we began regularly repairing gate operators on the weekends for the same friend. Pretty soon it was obvious there was an opportunity to make a business out of it. And the rest is history.

### How has your company grown in 30+ years?

We have been able to establish and grow a successful business serving customers primarily in Kern County. We are consistently busy and have seen amazing growth over the years. Today, we employ 18 people, including sales, office, and tech positions.

### What do you think has changed the most during your tenure?

The biggest thing that has changed with regards to the equipment in the industry is the advent of the microprocessor. When microprocessors were incorporated into gate operators, it was a gamechanger.

### How has the gate operator evolved since you started?

Initially, we worked on many Stanley machines with old relay logic. Then, Larko and Crusader introduced their gate operators to the market. These machines offered solid state circuit boards and new engineering designs.

We quickly concluded that this "solid state" circuit board was the future of gate operators. We replaced many of the relay logic machines currently installed with the Larko and Crusader gate operators and used them for new installations too. We ordered these operators from Encon because they had the most helpful support team. Betty always had a well-trained technical staff to give support to her dealers. She also was willing to take a risk on two knuckleheads from Bakersfield and gave us a small line of credit.

As time went on, the Elite gate operator came out and this machine featured a great design and very solid electronics. So, we started using Elite machines for most of our new installations. This became the foundation for the gate operator equipment we see today.

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**How do you stay current on new technologies?**

Things are changing so much and so fast now that's it's hard to stay on top of new technologies. Mike Bush, our sales and project manager, attends trade shows but we mostly rely on our suppliers, like Encon, to keep us up to date with new technologies. We value Encon's opinion on products and their evaluation of products because we know they value quality and reliability.

Sometimes manufacturers come out with new stuff and then it doesn't pan out or it changes a lot from the beta stage, so we have to follow the development of products over time.

**How do you help your customers adapt to new product advancements?**

We work hard to transition our customers into using new technologies once they prove their advantage. We don't just jump to the latest cutting-edge technology. Instead, we stay with things that we know and monitor advancements. Once the new product or technology has been proven to be an actual improvement to what was available before, we start adopting and promoting it to our customers. We are also here to answer/train when customers have questions about their new equipment.

**How do you successfully balance customer's wants with product limitations and/or installation obstructions?**

It can be challenging, but the key is to create informed expectations and not overpromise. You must be knowledgeable about the products you're installing so you know what the limitations of the products are. Try not to oversell a product's capabilities and this will give you an advantage. This philosophy has worked for us so far.

**Have you seen a significant change in customers' needs over the years?**

The current client wants the option to do everything on their phone. While some equipment is available now to do this there are so many unestablished manufactures offering this. From month to month, it seems like the new latest/greatest comes out and the old one goes away. This makes it hard to offer our client predictable performance and support, so we try to stay with manufacturers who have been around for a while.

There are products on the market that have Smart functionality, but they are not always instinctive or intuitive to use, and support can be difficult to get when companies come and go. We constantly try to vet out what will be long lasting and give our clients reliability.

**Can you describe a large project Open & Shut has been working on?**

We recently wrapped up an Amazon distribution center near our local airport. We also completed a new, gated community in Bakersfield with nine different entry points. We don't build gates, but for this project, we were responsible for installing all the gate operators and access products that accompanied each gate.

**Have you ever considered building gates?**

No. There are already a number of reliable Fence Builders in our area, and so we work with many different ornamental gate companies. Most of them recognize that installing gate operators without an experienced installer/technician just creates a headache for them. We are happy to help save

them from those headache calls. It's a mutually beneficial relationship because we are not competitors. It's great for our business and theirs.

## What has been your most successful marketing strategy to generate new business?

Years ago, we advertised in the Yellow Pages, and we have a good website. But after 30+ years, we don't do too much traditional marketing. We've established ourselves in the Bakersfield area, so most of our business is from word of mouth/referrals. Also, general contractors automatically send us clients because we've established ourselves as a trustworthy company that does quality work.

## Do you think your company trucks also serve as a valuable marketing tool?

Yes, definitely! Folks comment on our brightly decorated trucks around town. We have a dozen trucks that drive through the community regularly and customers often say, "I remember seeing your truck."

## What's the key to your longevity in the industry, even during tough economic times?

We offer a high standard of service. Since day one, we have always offered our customers a maintenance agreement. Many customers sign up for it. Today, we do maintenance on over 500 gate operators every month. We have three technicians dedicated to maintenance work. They test the equipment and then sign a card saying they've been there.

Regular maintenance was a component of our business from the beginning, and it has been key to our success over the years. Not only does it provide consistent work, but it also helps make sure the products we install are clean and working properly. Gate operators are devices that need ongoing maintenance and adjustments, so it makes sense to have maintenance be part of your business model.

## Do you have a company philosophy?

Our goal has always been to help customers get a good product that fits their needs. I'm sure I've lost jobs to someone who's doing the bare minimum or charging less. And yes, there are cheaper ways to do things but sometimes that becomes more of a problem, and it's not worth the cost savings. Providing your customers with reliable products and support is key and helps you establish a quality reputation.

## What do you value most about your relationship with Encon?

We share a common philosophy. We both value quality. I remember when Joe would test (and test!) a product and then bring it to us. If he vouched for the product, I knew it was reliable because I knew what type of rigorous testing he would do before promoting it to his customers.

We also both recognize the importance of safety. When the UL 325 guidelines first came out, Encon was one of the first companies to offer education and testing on the new safety requirements. Plus, we really appreciate all of the technical support we've received from Encon. After so many years in the industry, it's rare we need support, but when we do, we know that Encon is a great resource. Encon's support is top notch.

## What excites you about the future of the industry?

I'm excited to see how technology continues to be incorporated into accessory products. The hardware devices are well fine-tuned, but I'm looking forward to seeing how integration evolves between the control pieces and the gate operators. I predict we are going to see advancements in electronics, safety devices, etc.