

Gary Forkum of
Fork's Drum Closet



BY JEFF CAGLE, PHOTO BY RICK MALKIN

GOING BOUTIQUE

Looking for a product with limited distribution to distinguish your store? If you're a drum retailer, Rob Birenbaum, co-founder of the Five-Star Drum Shops network, said look no further than the high-end, boutique kit market.

"[Boutique drum manufacturers] just don't have the capacity, so there are some built-in values to the dealer," he said. "Exclusivity can have an impact on a consumer and, hopefully, lead to sales of other unrelated items, but it brings them into the store and makes them feel good about the dealer because they're perceived as

High-end, boutique drum kits are one weapon in weathering the harsh economy

being on the cutting-edge."

Birenbaum added that, unlike smaller manufacturers in other instrument sectors, boutique drum makers are more concentrated at the highest ends of the quality spectrum.

"For the stores that have

access to the major drum lines, there's really no need to get into smaller drum brands at an entry or middle price point because the major drum manufacturers have really done a great job of hitting every price point," he said. "There are six or eight major drum manufacturers, and it's hard to represent all of them, so if you represent half or three-quarters, you really don't need to carry a smaller brand at a middle price point on top of that."

SUPPLIER SUPPORT

Gary Forkum, owner of Fork's Drum Closet in Nashville, Tenn., carries kits

from smaller companies, such as Canopus, Joyful Noise and Pork Pie. He said Australia-based Brady Drums has performed especially well at his dealership and cited the company's use of woods indigenous to the continent as a major selling point.

"I've always tried to focus on things that you're not going to find in every single store in America, and Brady has a real mystique about it," Forkum said. "Not only because they're made in Australia [from native woods] — it's not your typical maple or birch or what most of the other drum companies have — but also because of the many great players who've

played them over the years.”

Forkum said that while many players have heard of Brady, few have likely seen its instruments in person or had a chance to play them. So last year, he hosted a Brady night, where Kelly Brady flew in and talked about the company her father built and the manufacturing process that shapes its signature drums.

“We had probably 30 snares and a kit in stock,” Forkum said. “She had done a lot of promoting on the [Brady] Web site and on Facebook and got a lot of drummers to come in. They’ve been real supportive as far as networking and helping me promote the inventory that we have.

“Kelly spoke about how her dad makes the stuff with the different woods and the sounds it produces. It was informative, but it wasn’t a clinic in the traditional sense where somebody comes and plays. It was just a night to showcase all of the drums and let guys come in and play all of the different models with the different woods. We had great attendance and sold several drums in the ensuing weeks because of the seeds that were planted that night.”

ONLINE ANGLE

Dana Bentley, owner of Bentley’s Drum Shop in Fresno, Calif., echoed the sentiments about high-end, boutique brands giving customers a reason to walk into the store. But he also mentioned another route dealers can take with their boutique products: e-commerce.

“We probably sell just as much of our small, boutique brands online [in our eBay store] as we do out of the brick-and-mortar store,” Bentley said. “Some of these smaller, boutique companies aren’t in many countries, so someone from Sweden could easily see a Canopus or a Shine drum in our e-store, and we’ll ship it to them internationally without a problem.”

Bentley suggested that the best way to move high-end products in-store or online is to carry a range of them.

“If someone is looking for a high-end product, they are probably the most discriminating shopper — they want to come in and touch or view multiple, different, high-end products in your online store,” he said. “The more high-end you have, the more high-end you’re going to sell.

“If a consumer only sees a couple of

options, he’s likely going to choose from what you have in a larger selection. The key is selecting the right boutique product for your store based on your customers and what you’re already carrying.”

NEW BRAND LOYALTY

Dave Levine, a drum industry consultant and former executive director of the Percussion Marketing Council, said he sees an opportunity for boutique brands to attract a younger generation, which may want to distance itself from its parents’ brands.

“One good aspect of the economy right now is that people are more willing than ever to accept value as opposed to just blindly buying a brand,” he said. “There’s more opportunity and openness now in the marketplace.

“There’s also a young generation of musicians who aren’t necessarily tied to older brands and are looking for their own. Dealers have to look at the big pic-

ture and see where they can get the best of each end of the spectrum. Obviously, dealers need to keep their core business, but they also need to look at what’s happened that has gotten us to this point and what can happen in the next five to 10 years that can expand our business.”

On top of the exclusivity and cool factor that many of these brands bring to the table, Jeffrey Lee of Resurrection Drums in Hollywood, Fla., said boutique drum companies simply provide an opportunity to connect with customers.

“I need to create a new experience every day for our clientele,” he said. “I need them to know that we have gone to great lengths to find the most unique and handmade instruments obtainable, [whether] from the actual country of origin, made by a monk on top of a mountain [or] prayed over as it was created. The integrity aspect of being serious about what you are offering adds serious value to creating a customer for life.” **MI**

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