

THE GUIDE: YOUR RESOURCE FOR THE SUMMER NAMM SHOW [PAGE 64](#)

FOR PROGRESSIVE MUSIC RETAILERS

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JULY 2011 | MUSICINCMAG.COM

VIRAL VISIONARY

Aaron Miller of ProGuitarShop conquers YouTube and builds the world's hippest guitar store

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RPMDA Looks at Post-Recession Opportunities

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Rising Guitar Brands

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NAMM Takes Counterfeit
Battle to Capitol Hill

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Aaron Miller

Photo by Jeff Cagle

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ProGuitarShop averages 60,000–70,000 YouTube views per day. Learn the secret to owner Aaron Miller's online video success.



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unfaithful
to your old faithful

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PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

NICHE 2.0

How do small brick-and-mortar retailers make waves on the Web? Same way they make waves locally: by thinking big, then focusing like crazy.

For evidence, look no further than this issue of *Music Inc.* The following pages feature one case study after another of music retailers embracing niche Internet opportunities. Some, namely our cover subject,

ProGuitarShop, have built all-out e-commerce powerhouses. But even more featured dealers have found online success with small victories that yield big results.

Reno's Music in Fishers, Ind., for example, found its victory with ukulelehotline.com. This uke specialty shop, which the company recently relaunched, feeds off of Reno's main website, guitarhotline.com. And according to Scott Maxwell, store manager, ukulelehotline.com has not only spurred local traffic but also served as a steady revenue producer during slow times.

"That's the beauty of Internet sales: It stays consistent," Maxwell said. "[Our business] has ups and downs, but I think the ups and downs have more to do with what's going on in the community — local traffic. And it seems the Internet balances that out."

He also pointed out that customers usually can't tell the difference between a small online boutique and an e-commerce giant. "So it levels the playing field a little bit." (Maxwell's one of many retailers who contributed to our trend story on rising guitar brands, "Unsung Heroes," starting on page 70.)

Speaking of a level playing field, Facebook's an online resource where large pocketbooks don't mean squat. Instead, creativity is your greatest capital. In "Social Media Coup," guest columnist Cris Behrens of Summerhays Music Center reveals how he got 615 Facebook fans (i.e. "likes") with less than 5 minutes of work. (See page 44.) How long would it take you to gather 615 new customer e-mail addresses?

Don't discount the opportunity in paid advertising, though. In their contributions this month, retailers Leslie Faltin and Myrna Sislen look at the power of Google AdWords and Groupon, respectively, in expanding their local brick-and-mortar business. They're not alone. Joe Caruso, co-owner of The Music Emporium in Lexington, Mass., (profiled on page 15) said he's constantly surprised by how much traffic his company gets from small banner ads at mandolincafe.com and acousticguitar.com. "It's a pretty strong response."

The bottom line? Our cover subject, ProGuitarShop, got off the ground with a basic idea: Produce short, feature-rich product demo videos. It sounds painfully simple now, but it wasn't seven years ago. (The story begins on page 56.) So what niche Internet opportunities are right in front of your face? They can be as grand as launching a specialty site or as simple as writing up a more focused Google ad. I'll bet there are many that your business is in a unique position to seize. **MI**



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A close-up, high-angle portrait of a young woman with dark hair, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The lighting is warm and soft, highlighting her features. The background is dark and out of focus.

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LETTERS

You Outdid Yourself

Thank you so much for the great article “Selling Personality” that you ran on our store, Lacefield Music, in the June 2011 issue of *Music Inc.*

It was so well-written you could feel the energy of our company leap off the page. This will be great for our business, and we are grateful for the opportunity.

Cathy Krubsack
Owner
Lacefield Music
St. Louis

We Were Pinching Ourselves

On the day the article “Community Partner” came out in the May 2011 issue of *Music Inc.*, I thought, “This isn’t happening. Our store, located in the small town of Muskogee, Okla., is being included in this international publication.” I did want to pass on two bits of information.

First off, without our amazing and dedicated staff, our store would not be able to have these events and promotions. A store’s employees have to be fully committed to the vision and the pursuit of growing the business.

Secondly, in the winter of 2007, we started attending NAMM University sessions at The NAMM Show. It has changed every aspect of our business for the better. We love stealing ideas from the big guys.

Raegan Medeiros
John Michael’s Music and Sound
Muskogee, Okla.

Counterfeit Battle

IP infringement is a multifaceted issue. In the case of D’Addario, the counterfeiting of our strings poses a serious long-term threat to our brand equity.

Based primarily in China, the counterfeiters have gotten very good at duplicating packaging for



products like ours. Unfortunately, they have paid more attention to the “cover of the book” and not the “contents.”

The quality of the strings they put in packages with our brand name and a made-in-the-U.S.A. marking is grossly inferior — in fact, defective.

As these products make their way into markets around the world, they could erode our brand equity. We have already had consumers who have purchased counterfeit strings contact us regarding quality issues. This is not an isolated issue with our strings. This is global, and it touches every industry.

IP theft, in general, is costing our country millions of jobs.

Recently, the International Trade Commission published a

report on the effects of Chinese IP infringement on the U.S. economy and estimated that 2.1 million U.S. jobs are at stake.

A key reason the counterfeit industry has proliferated recently is because the Internet has made it easy for trademark thieves to fence their illegal goods to consumers.

While NAMM members are interested in a multifaceted solution to this problem, this year our advocacy effort focused on garnering support for new legislation, Protect IP, recently introduced in the Senate. This new bill will let prosecutors and judges collect evidence, as they would in any other criminal case, present that evidence in U.S. courts and get a warrant to shut a rogue website’s URL down. The bill

ensures that due process is followed and will speed and simplify the shutting down of counterfeit merchandise websites.

During the more than 30 visits with congressmen and senators we had on May 11, there was strong bipartisan support for our efforts.

Jim D’Addario
President
D’Addario & Co.

Fly-in Feedback

Since Summer NAMM is coming up and I have just spent a week with about 40 NAMM members as part of this year’s Advocacy Fly-In, I thought this might be a good time to say thanks for a job well done to NAMM and its members.

For the past four years, I have had the honor of being a participant in NAMM’s annual Advocacy Fly-In, and this year, the energy was special and electric. NAMM has opened this opportunity to any and all members, and the benefits to both the music communities we support and the individual members that participate is almost unquantifiable.

It’s a good day when you spend quality time with industry leaders alongside national lawmakers, discussing the importance of supporting music education programs and working beside Jim D’Addario as he helps NAMM bring attention to intellectual property protection issues.

Menzie Pittman
Owner
Contemporary Music Center
Haymarket, Va.

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Arthur Griggs of Griggs Music
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RETAIL

THE MUSIC EMPORIUM | BY HILARY BROWN

TAKING THE HIGH-END ROAD

Ask the owners of The Music Emporium how they dealt with the economic downturn, and you'll probably hear the same response: What downturn?

In the wake of the dismal retail climate, things are sunny for the Lexington, Mass., dealer. In fact, owners Stu Cohen and Joe Caruso have been reaping the benefits of what Caruso called the "best year ever."

"This year, this quarter in particular, is record-breaking," said Caruso, who noted sales have been up 15 percent since the holidays. "Business is like I've never seen it before."

HIGH-END EXPLOSION

Minimally affected by the 2008–2009 recession, The Music Emporium is somewhat of an anomaly. It has no giveaways or sales — Caruso said he believes they cheapen his brands. So, what gives?

Cohen and Caruso attribute their sales uptick to a recent resurgence in high-end business, a market that tends to attract a more mature, non-big-box customer. "We thrive because we're just the opposite of what that experience is," Caruso said.

The 3,600-square-foot Music Emporium resembles a neighbor's living room more than a sales



Joe Caruso (left) and Stu Cohen

environment. Laden with oriental rugs and easy chairs, the large, open space respectfully displays nearly 300 guitars — mostly acoustics, with a smattering of solid bodies and archtops. The store also houses five private downstairs studios and several ambient rehearsal nooks.

"We want someone to feel comfortable when they come in," Cohen said. "We don't throw people out of the store because they're looking for a beginner guitar."

In an industry with high turnover, the store's modest staff of seven has been around for years. Caruso said the key to maintaining knowledgeable salespeople is "fostering an environment

that encourages people to stick around," a non-commissioned workplace that offers such incentives as profit sharing.

High-end may be a niche business, but Caruso and Cohen aren't blind to retail trends. Facing a decline in amp sales, they recently pursued the Carr brand. They've also realized the longevity of the ukulele trend and maintain a deep selection.

MULTICHANNEL MARKETING

Online fan forums at Mandolin Café and *Acoustic Guitar* magazine — not Facebook — drive most of the company's online traffic, along with forums for Collings, Martin and Taylor products. But over the course

of nearly 44 years, The Music Emporium has also developed a national reputation, making word-of-mouth its biggest promotional vehicle.

"We have a running ad with [Mandolin Café] every month," Caruso said. "Definitely not the most prominent ad on the page, but it's a pretty strong response. A lot of our customers have us bookmarked. They go to our website on a daily basis to see what's new."

But the Internet is also the company's most formidable competitor, particularly when it comes to consumers selling high-end merchandise directly. And Cohen said he combats these sales by taking purchasing risks.

"The attraction is that we have a big inventory," he said. "We found over the years that if you have the instruments, people are going to come to you when they're looking for them. People want to buy something, and they want to be able to buy it now."

Caruso added that high-end guitars never lose their value and that the best buying approach is "cautious optimism."

"Guitars aren't something that have to turn within a six-month period," he said. "You need to grow and put the money into something that's going to generate profits." What downturn could stifle that? **MI**

OKLAHOMA VINTAGE GUITAR | BY KATIE KAILUS

VINTAGE-FIED GUITARS

Bobby Boyles doesn't just sell vintage guitars. He makes them.

Through a top-secret process, Boyles, owner of Oklahoma Vintage Guitar in El Reno, Okla., can take a new 1960 Les Paul reissue and make it look like an original that's been broken in over 50 years.

"My goal is to take a guitar from my vintage collection, which spans from the 1840s to the 1970s, and make the customer's reissue look like what I have in my collection," Boyles said. "The [vintage customizing] is one of the most fulfilling things we do because not everyone can do it."

Since 1998, Boyles and two other employees have been vintage-fying guitars in the store's custom shop. Boyles said he got started after receiving a bad refinish job on one of his own vintage axes.

"I learned how to take it, put a new finish on it and make a 1957 Strat look like it was made in 1957 and not refinished in 1987," he said. "People started seeing what I was doing to my own collection and started asking me to do that to their guitars."

Roughly 25 percent of the store's business is generated by or because of the custom shop. In fact, Boyles said that a good portion of business is created while the custom shop clients wait for their instruments. He believes a professional repair shop keeps customers in the store, boosting retail traffic.

Plus, Boyles' location, about 25 miles outside of the center of Oklahoma City, encourages browsing.

"If it's going to take an hour



**Roughly
25 percent of
Oklahoma
Vintage Guitar's
business is
generated by,
or because of,
its custom
vintage shop**

or two, the customers are going to stay here in the city and wait," he said. "We sell a ton of guitars to people who are sitting and waiting for their old guitars to get fixed. It helps tremendously."

WORD OF MOUTH TRAVELS FAST

Boyles hasn't advertised his custom shop outside of the store. But word of mouth alone has kept Oklahoma Vintage Guitar busy with about 100 models coming in to be vintage-fied each year.

"That comes out to be about a couple a week, and that keeps us extremely busy," he said.

One way Boyles advertises within the store is by merchandising guitars for sale that have already been vintage-fied.

"I've taken a few new Martins and made them look like they are mid-'50s guitars, and they sell like crazy," Boyles said.

He added that the store sells many new guitars to vintage guitar owners who want their

instruments replicated.

"If someone wants their 1953 Telecaster copied and they don't have the 1953 reissue, we will sell them the relic to copy their other one," Boyles said. "That is also heavy business for us."

Working on legendary artists' guitars is an example of how word-of-mouth can spread, according to Boyles. While he won't name names, he did reveal that many top country artists' instruments have passed through his custom shop.

"We have had some big names," he said. "A lot of them have us work on their guitars for security purposes. They might not want to parade their real 1960 Les Paul around, so they play our customized one."

SUPER-SECRET PROCESS

So what goes into making a brand-new Martin look 50 years old? Boyles won't explain his secret process, which can cost guitarists anywhere from \$400–\$1,000, for fear someone might copy it. But he will reveal how he knows when a guitar is finished.

"When I lay their guitar out and it looks just like the one in my collection, and I have trouble telling which is which, then I know I am ready to give it back to the customer," he said.

And for the truly curious, Boyles jokingly offered a less high-tech method for "seasoning" a guitar.

"I've got three boys," he said. "My youngest is 15 years old, and the best way to make a new guitar look nasty like this is to tell him not to touch it. Turn around, and in a couple hours, it will look like this." **MI**



Joplin, Mo., after the May 22 tornado

DISASTER RELIEF | BY HILARY BROWN

TORNADO RAVAGES JOPLIN, MO., MUSIC COMMUNITY

Music retailers in Joplin, Mo., were devastated by a deadly tornado that blew through on May 22.

Palen Music Center was one of the few fortunate enough to not sustain any structural damage. Its Joplin location reopened a week later — and garnered far more business than expected.

“I thought it would be much slower coming back,” said Eric Matzat, president of Palen Music, which is headquartered in Springfield, Mo. “It certainly takes its toll whenever you miss a week of business. We’ve been surprised at the resilience of the Joplin community.”

Due to main road closures by the National Guard, customers had limited access to the store. Palen’s staff used the closure period to assist with cleanup and reconstruction. The store also partnered with Convoy of Hope, which provides food to disaster-ravaged areas, to help customers in need and will be matching in-store donations toward the relief effort.

“We felt it was in the best interest of the company and the community to be helping those that really needed the help,” said Greg Rosander, manager of Palen’s Joplin location. “Me and my crew, we were out with chain saws helping people remove trees and debris

from their properties and just helping out wherever we could.”

Other members of the music community were quick to assist in what Matzat called an “ongoing effort” to aid needy citizens. Area band directors have helped repair and replace damaged equipment, and local music students participated in cleanup and clothing drives.

“Our staff and all of our students and teachers were saints,” Matzat said. “It’s going to take a long time for that community to get back to normal, but for them as a community to still see not only everybody rally together to rebuild better than before, there’s a lot of examples of music helping the community.”

While Palen Music and nearby Ernie Williamson Music avoided severe damage, other dealers weren’t as lucky. Cool Guitars and Glory Days Music, two dealers located in Joplin’s older downtown area, were completely destroyed by the storm. Neither establishment could be reached for comment. Big Don’s Music City incurred partial damage, including a week of power loss.

“Hundreds of people lost their lives and jobs,” Matzat said. “That’s certainly going to take a toll on the community.”



The “How-To” church sound workshop in Full Compass’ studio

FULL COMPASS | EVENT

Full Compass Workshops Churches

Full Compass Systems of Madison, Wis., hosted a “How-To” church sound workshop on April 30.

Conducted by Fits & Starts Productions, the sold-out event brought a house of worship sound volunteers and technicians to Full Compass’ 4,200-square-foot studio for eight hours of training. Led by professional sound engineer Mike Sokol, attendees received hands-on instruction using dedicated workstations. Attendees also saw the latest AV equipment in the Full Compass showroom.

“We were extremely pleased with the quality of the instruction that Fits & Starts provided for the ‘How-To’ Workshop,” said Roxanne Wenzel, vice president of sales and marketing for Full Compass. “Our attendees learned everything they need to handle their church sound in a professional manner. We’re looking forward to hosting more workshops in the future.”

Fits & Starts Productions travels more than 40,000 miles each year training house of worship AV volunteers in 36 U.S. cities.

“I was enormously pleased to be able to work with such a stellar operation as Full Compass,” said Hector La Torre, managing partner at Fits & Starts Productions. “While we usually work with host churches, when the opportunity to work with Full Compass’ professional staff arose, we jumped at it.”

FC schools house of worship sound volunteers

CLOSING

Marysville Institution Plans to Close

After 27 years in business, Matthews Music in Marysville, Calif. will be closing up shop. The final date has yet to be determined, but at press time, Lane David, manager since 1999 and son-in-law of founder Joe Matthews, said the store will be closing its doors in a matter of weeks. Matthews, who died in 2008, had been a popular area music teacher and go-to person for musical advice. David attributed the store's declining profits to the growth of e-commerce, as well as the dwindling economy and shrinking education budgets, according to an article in the *Appeal-Democrat*.

The store recently held a going-out-of-business sale of its remaining inventory, which included guitars, amplifiers, sheet music and collectibles.



EVENT

Big Beat Returns

The Big Beat, an annual multic-city drumming event, will be held Nov. 6. It will take place at 16 Five-Star Drum Shops throughout North America. Along with guest appearances, contests and gear giveaways, one national grand-prize winner will receive a bass drum head signed by The Rolling Stones' drummer Charlie Watts. The Big Beat's highlight will occur at 5:45 p.m. EST, when drummers in all 16 cities will play the same groove in unison. This feat will be achieved through a video Internet connection, as each city's director follows a conductor in Seattle. Proceeds will benefit the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation, which donates instruments to underserved schools and community music programs.

EXPANSION

Tucson Store Grows

In May, Michael and Leslie Faltin, co-owners of Instrumental Music Center in Tucson, Ariz., announced plans to open a second store. The new location will be located next to the Tucson Mall and is scheduled to open in August.

"This expansion will allow Instrumental Music to better serve the Tucson market," Leslie said.



CASCIO INTERSTATE MUSIC | WORKSHOP

Cascio's All-star Drum Day

On May 7, Cascio Interstate Music of New Berlin, Wis., held a clinic and performance event featuring drummers Todd Sucherman of Styx, Hannah Ford of Bellevue Suite and Pearl clinician Raymond Massey. Co-sponsored by Pearl and Sabian, the event drew roughly 500 attendees throughout the day.

Sucherman played along with prerecorded Styx tracks and also explained various parts of his best-selling DVD, *Methods & Mechanics*.

Ford, who was recently cast in the Chicago production of Whoopi Goldberg's "White Noise," played solos and parts from her band's songs. During her question-and-answer session, she

stressed the importance of learning multiple genres of music to get more gigs.

Massey presented Pearl's new flagship Reference Pure drum series using a PowerPoint presentation. As Pearl's marketing events manager, he currently manages the Drum Set Clinic Program and coordinates more than 30 shows a year, along with handling product development and education initiatives.

"We had a strong crowd for this event, covering a wide age range spectrum," said Michael Houser, CEO of Cascio Interstate Music. "Youth, talent, product knowledge and experience from our artists were keys to making this a success."

MUSICAL INNOVATIONS | EVENT

Innovative Ryerson Workshop

Flutist Ali Ryerson's Greenville County, S.C., school tour culminated with a May 17 concert and clinic at Musical Innovations in Greenville.

The event featured a short jazz recital, instruction in jazz basics and improvisation opportunities. Attendees learned various exercises from Ryerson's book, *Jazz Flute Practice Method*. A brand-new Brio! student flute was also donated as a prize by Gemeinhardt, which co-sponsored the event with Carolina Flutes.

"Gemeinhardt was genuinely pleased to be able to support Musical Innovations and our Brio! artist Ali Ryerson in their efforts to excite young people about music and continue to support the local music educators," said Jennifer Crowell, director of marketing for Gemeinhardt.

"Jazz opens up another possibility of musical expression that many young people don't always get the opportunity to experience on the level Ali can provide. She is an amazing musician and true mentor of her craft. I saw many pleasantly surprised students with a 'wow' in their eyes as they improvised for the first time. And that is what we strive for when introducing youth to the world of music, that 'wow' factor."

Tracy Leenman, owner of Musical Innovations and co-host of the event, also said that Ryerson was "very well-received by the students."

"She did a remarkable job of engaging and motivating the young people — not only flutists but band students on all instruments," Leenman said.

QUICK TIP | BY MYRNA SISLEN | MIDDLE C MUSIC; WASHINGTON, D.C.

MUSIC LESSONS GROUPON

"It's summertime. People are going on vacations, and there are a lot fewer students in our music lessons program. So, I did a Groupon with a time frame.

"It's for either two guitar or two piano lessons. It covers the registration fee and the book — in this case, I used a Hal Leonard book.

"The Groupon went out on May 29 and will expire on Sept. 1. People pay \$59. And if somebody calls and says they would rather take a voice lesson instead of piano or guitar, I say, 'Of course.'

"I limited it to 200 people since we have to accommodate

all those new lessons, and we got 155 to participate, which is good. I did not put 'new customers only' on the Groupon, so about five people who are already taking lessons here used it, too. But I got about 150 new customers. And a lot of people have told me they've seen the Groupon.

"I receive 25 percent of the asking price on the Groupon, so no matter how you slice it, you don't make money on the actual promotion.


"But this way, my teachers are still making money. I'm helping support them during the summertime. And the first




person who came in to have her two lessons didn't need the method book, so she put that amount toward a \$99 guitar case. Also, one of the other Groupon people has already signed up for a full schedule of lessons, and it's only been a week since the promotion.

"We would be too busy to do this promotion during the school year. But during the summertime, people's schedules are more relaxed, and we can space the new students out throughout the whole summer.


"I'm sure I'll at least break even on this, if not do better. It's a win, win, win."




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GUITAR CENTER | OPENING

GC DEBUTS FOURTH NEW LOCATION OF 2011

Guitar Center has opened a new retail location in Stevenson Ranch, Calif., making it the company's fourth new store to open this year and its 218th in operation.

The retailer kicked off the April 28 grand opening with weekend-long deals on guitar and drum essentials. The store also conducted free events, such as an Avid workshop and a chance to test-drive GC Garage, the store's on-site repair service.

The Stevenson Ranch location features Guitar Center Studios, the retailer's embedded music lessons facility. Guitar Center Studios provides music lessons for all skill levels and features certified instructors.

Customers will also be able to participate in GC's nationwide programs designed to spearhead creativity and highlight undiscovered talent, such as "Your Next Record" and "Guitar Center On-Stage," as well as GC's annual Drum-Off and King of the Blues competitions.



Attendees fill Guitar Center's new Stevenson Ranch, Calif., store during the grand-opening weekend

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BRICKHOUSE MUSIC | CONTEST

Burleigh-Bentz Wins Bigsby

Jen Burleigh-Bentz from Brickhouse Music in River Falls, Wis., recently became the lucky winner of a limited-edition Bigsby BYSW Double Florentine Cutaway guitar, valued at a list price of \$3,000. The instrument was the prize in a giveaway sponsored by Hal Leonard and Bigsby at this past NAMM show.



Jen Burleigh-Bentz shows off her Bigsby prize guitar

The giveaway was part of a promotion for Hal Leonard's new book and CD pack *The Story Of Paul A. Bigsby: Father Of The Modern Electric Solidbody Guitar*. The coffee-table book illustrates the builder's influence on Fender and Gibson, along with numerous other guitar makers, in the design and construction of electric guitars. It also comes with an audio CD of Paul Bigsby, recorded in the late 1950s, telling stories about his business.

TRIBUTE

Thank you for your contributions to the music industry. You will be missed.

Arthur Griggs

Arthur Griggs of Griggs Music in Davenport, Iowa, passed away on May 29, a few months shy of what would have been his 100th birthday on Sept. 26.

Griggs was a pioneer of the post-World War II music products industry. His father established Griggs Piano in 1903, where Arthur would later spend every Saturday and summer sweeping the store until he was old enough to run it.

In 2003, he took part in the centennial anniversary of the store, which is now called Griggs Music.

"Arthur was truly one of the most interesting people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing, and I could and should write a book [about him]," said Steve Judge, the current president and owner of Griggs Music. "I don't think I ever have met anyone in the industry who stayed on top of every product category as he did."

"He was very consistent in his philosophies, and I always was impressed with his honesty and integrity and his desire to learn new things."

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Note from Joe

We'll also hold our inaugural Top 100 Dealer Awards, celebrating the very best industry retailers and sharing their strategies for success. No one works harder than the local community music store, and it's an honor to pay tribute to those who go out every day and help customers realize their musical dreams.

NAMM Members from around the United States, Canada and overseas are joining us at Summer NAMM for three days of industry networking, vendor meetings and educational sessions. Whenever you get a group of music folks together, they also manage to have a bit of fun too, which—after the past few years—is not a bad thing either! We believe the industry is changing so quickly that a mid-year gathering is important to ensure good communication and industry growth.

It's a tough decision to make for many companies, and the cost in time and money has led some Members to stay home. I know I'm beginning to sound like a broken record, but Summer NAMM is really a decision to invest in yourself—arguably your company's most important asset! It takes a lot of effort, for sure, but we believe that the upside of you coming together with your friends and peers to prepare for success in the fall- and holiday-selling season is worth the investment.

Thank you for your Membership in NAMM. We appreciate your support.

Joe Lamond • NAMM President/CEO

Focus on the Community Music Store

Summer NAMM will once again celebrate the importance of the local community music store.

The retail landscape continues to challenge us all, so we've created a NAMM U lineup to provide attendees with real take-home value that can be put to use right away. Starting with the opening Breakfast Session, "*The NAMM Retail Summit*," dealers will get the inside track on the rapid changes currently taking place in retail from the author of the *New Rules of Retail*, Robin Lewis. In addition, we've scheduled a mix of industry leaders and outside professionals to cover a wide range of important topics at the Idea Center, including sessions on developing an effective web strategy, using Facebook to market your store, starting or improving your lesson program, increasing buying and inventory control, and identifying the top 10 marketing and promotional ideas being used today.

Summer
NAMM

POWERFUL SESSIONS

Summer NAMM is the perfect time to sit in on sessions to sharpen your sales techniques, learn the newest marketing trends and understand how best to manage your inventory. We can all profit from some new information! Here's a few sessions you won't want to miss in Music City USA:

Cloud Computing—Bringing Google Docs Down to Earth

How to Use Facebook to Market Your Business:
The Do's & Don'ts

Hook Them with Your Home Page!

I Love to Buy! Now, I May Need Some Help to Sell Thru!

The Top 10 Web Marketing Trends and How to Use Them

How to Capitalize on Your Greatest Source of New Business!

CELEBRATE THE TOP 100

Join us for the inaugural "**Top 100 Dealer Awards**" recognizing outstanding NAMM retailers during a gala event on **Friday, July 22**, at Summer NAMM. All event attendees will be able to view a presentation showing many of the submissions and demonstrating the elements that have propelled these honorees to the top of the industry. Network with these influential retailers and listen in on their proven tricks of the trade.

NAME

NAMM News

July

No 2011

NAMM News is published by NAMM. To keep up-to-date on the latest breaking industry news, sign up for our **PLAYback Digital** e-newsletter at playbackdigital@namm.org.

NAMM[®] Top 100 Dealer awards

Congratulations to the Top 100 Dealers of 2011!

Alamo Music Center Inc	Hot Licks Guitar Shop	Robb's Music
All Country Music	I DJ Now	Robert M. Sides Family Music Center
Alto Music Inc	Instrumental Savings	Rockford's Place
Amro Music Stores, Inc.	J.W. Pepper & Son Inc.	Royalton Music Center
Andy's Music	Johnny Guitar's	Saied Music Co
Artisan Guitars	Ken Stanton Music Inc.	Sam Ash Music Corp
Beacock Music Co., Inc.	Kenny's Music	Samuel Music Co.
Bellevue American Music	Kretzer Piano Co	Sarasota Guitar Company
Bert Murdock Music	Lane Music	Senseney Music Inc.
Best Musical Instruments	Mantova's Two Street Music Corp.	Shuffield Music Company
Blues Angel Music	Marshall Music Co	Simon Ripley's Music & Art
Brass Bell Music, Inc.	Matt's Music Center	Skip's Music
Buddy Ringo Drums	McCabe's Guitar Shop	Sound House Music
Buffalo Brothers	Meyer Music	South Jersey Music, LLC
Candyman Strings & Things	Milano Music Center	Springfield Music Inc
Caruso Music	Mississippi Music Inc.	Strait Music Co
Chafin Music Center Inc	Mom's Music Inc	Sweetwater Sound, Inc.
Contemporary Music Center	Monster Music	Tarpley Music Co., Inc.
Cream City Music	Monstervision Music LLC	Ted Brown Music Co
Creative Music & Arts LLC	Mozingo Music	The Guitar Sanctuary
Dave's Guitar Shop	Music Go Round	The Music Loft
Daynes Music	Music Villa	The Music Store
Discount Music of Jacksonville LLC	N Tune Music & Sound Inc.	The Music Zoo Inc
Drum World	Nick Rail Music Inc	Tobias Music
Easy Music Center	Owensboro Music Center	Uncle Ike's Music
Elderly Instruments	Palen Music Center Inc	Unga Bunga Music
Ellis Drum Specialties Inc.	Piano Gallery, LLC	W.H. Paige & Co., Inc.
Fat Tone Guitars LLC	Piano Planet	Washington Music Center
Findeison Enterprises	Pick 'n' Grin Inc	West Music
Gand Music & Sound	Portmans Music Superstore Inc	West LA Music Inc
Gist Piano Center	Quinlan & Fabish Music Co.	Wert Music Co., Inc.
Grandma's Music & Sound	Ray Fransen's Drum Center	Willcutt Guitar Shoppe
Greene Music Co	Ray's Midbell Music	Willis Music Company
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SUPPLY

ST. LOUIS MUSIC | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

BOLD MOVES

Mark Ragin got more than he bargained for when he bought St. Louis Music (SLM) — and that was a good thing.

“In the first 30 days, we had 100 new customers,” said Ragin, who purchased assets of the distribution giant from Loud Technologies in November 2008. “[Retailers] were already dialing the 800 number, which we acquired with the business.”

There was one small problem: With Loud moving its remaining assets back to its Woodinville, Wash., headquarters, SLM’s employees had already left. Ragin, who owned U.S. Band & Orchestra Supplies, had a lean staff of only 12 — and specialized in band products. (SLM had a large offering of combo gear.) Not to mention they were stuck in U.S. Band’s building three miles up the road. He had to make a tough decision: grow slowly and risk not being able to serve his new clientele or grow quickly and risk losing control of his new business. Ragin chose the latter.

“[U.S. Band & Orchestra] was a much smaller company,” he said. “So, bringing on business is not always a blessing because it takes a lot of money.”



Mark Ragin

RECESSION-ERA BUYOUT

unding growth meant scoring a loan at the onset of the Great Recession — late 2008 — right as banks were crying foul. Luckily, Ragin had a good relationship with a bank he’d been working with for seven years. The only caveat? “You pretty much have to put your life on the line,” he said with a laugh.

The first order of business was getting into SLM’s building, which former SLM owner Gene Kornblum had been renting to Loud. After some negotiating, Ragin took on the lease. Step two was getting more bodies in-house. Ragin immediately brought back most of SLM’s inside sales personnel. Within two months, he also rehired SLM’s former operations

manager, who “knew the building backwards and forwards,” as well as the Knilling employees. This was followed by bringing on two vice presidents and rehiring some of SLM’s former warehouse staff.

There were other kinks, too. Ragin realized the new SLM was severely understocked on several top-selling items. “I would look and see that I sold 1,000 of these guitar string sets in a year, and now I find that we’re selling that in a week. I was only purchasing 100 sets at a time.” And with new customers came a deluge of paperwork in the form of credit applications. “You don’t even think about that.”

Within 90 days, the company had 300 new customers. By the end of the first year, Ragin esti-

ated it had 1,200.

“It’s been 80-hour work-weeks,” he said.

CONTROLLING GROWTH

Still, Ragin called his first year leading SLM “phenomenal.” He saw a 40-percent rise in business, followed by a 21-percent boost in 2010. In that time, he took on Martin Guitar Strings and D’Addario’s full line — previously, he’d only sold D’Addario’s Rico line — along with the distribution of Alvarez Guitars. But it wasn’t until August 2010 that he felt the new SLM had truly arrived. That was when he finalized the purchase of SLM’s building.

“That was a real key thing because the suppliers knew that we were here to stay,” he said. “That was our final big move.”

The remaining challenge? Balancing continued growth. “We’re very profitable, but when you’re in growth mode, there’s no money that necessarily goes into your pocket,” Ragin said. “So if you’re a real entrepreneur, you make a decision: Do you invest in the business or in yourself? We’re investing in the business. The day-to-day satisfaction comes from seeing the 35 additional former SLM employees we hired now having a job again.” **MI**



MUSIC ADVOCACY | BY GREG & GRANT BILLINGS

NAMM, INDUSTRY VOLUNTEERS BATTLE COUNTERFEITERS

Forty music retailers and suppliers joined NAMM in Washington, D.C., in mid-May to fight counterfeiting and promote music education.

During the annual NAMM Advocacy Fly-In event, industry personnel had more than 80 meetings with members of Congress and Department of Education officials. There, NAMM and its volunteers sought legislation to protect manufacturers and consumers from counterfeit products and made the case for stronger support of music programs in the pending Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) legislation.

"NAMM could not have chosen a better time to be in Washington, D.C., this year to advocate for both music education and IP [intellectual property] issues," said Rick Young, senior vice president of Yamaha Corp. of

America. "These topics are on the minds of our elected representatives right now, and we may see some good movement on ESEA reauthorization and IP legislation in 2011 and 2012."

FIGHTING FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Jim D'Addario, chairman and CEO of D'Addario, spearheaded the Fly-In's IP advocacy efforts and said counterfeiters pose "a serious long-term threat" to his company's brand equity.

"Based primarily in China, the counterfeiters have gotten very good at duplicating packaging for products like ours," he said. "Unfortunately, they have paid more attention to the 'cover of the book' and not the contents. The quality of strings they put in packages with our brand name and a made-in-the-U.S.A. marking is grossly inferior — in fact, defective. As these products make their way into markets around

the world, they will erode our brand equity."

He added that this is a global issue that affects all music product companies, not just string manufacturers.

"NAMM has always been focused on making sure that Congress recognizes the importance and value of music education to our industry and society as a whole," said Barbara Wight, chief financial officer of Taylor Guitars. "This year, we added a second message about the importance of intellectual property protection and the role that IP plays in jobs and economic security for our industry. Both of these messages were heard loud and clear by our lawmakers."

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

NAMM also got help from some big names, including former New York Yankee Bernie Williams, who joined in the

advocacy process. Tony Bennett and Gavin DeGraw spoke about the importance of music and arts education at a reception co-hosted by NAMM and the VH1 Save the Music Foundation.

"We had tremendous visits and speeches with Gavin DeGraw and Tony Bennett, who movingly lent their weight to our advocacy goals," said Brian Reardon, owner of Monster Music in Levittown, N.Y. "But then Bernie [Williams] took to the podium — no bat, no guitar this time — just his words, and they will never leave me. As he stood before this room of NAMM delegates, congressional staffers and members of Congress, Bernie was reflecting on the day we had just completed. He adjusted the microphone and said, 'Today, I have just spent one of the coolest days of my entire life.' This four-time World Series champ and Grammy nominee expressing

with complete sincerity that this experience of advocating on behalf of music education might very well have been his most meaningful life experience of all."

RETURN ADVOCATES

Menzie Pittman, founder of Contemporary Music Center in Haymarket, Va., was one of many music industry members who returned after previous NAMM lobbying trips. (It was his fifth Fly-In.) "The Fly-In this year had a newly charged energy," Pittman said. "Piracy issues brought an expanded NAMM team. Federal education policy and piracy affect everyone in the music industry, and the NAMM members addressed both issues head on. You have to feel good when 40 music industry leaders dedicate time and energy to protecting our industry and its heartbeat: music education."

This expanded team included Rick Carlson, Kala's director of sales and marketing. "Being a first-timer, it was not only educational, but it was a pleasure to be part of a merging of retailers and manufacturers in



From left: Writer Greg Billings and his wife, Sara, with jazz legend Tony Bennett

a team effort for causes that are critical to our industry," he said.

"After engaging in the process of lobbying individual House and Senate representatives, it is clear that these trips can have a significant impact on actual legislation that affects us all," said David Slan, owner of Steinway Piano Gallery in Washington, D.C., and St. Louis. "Our NAMM staff and legal representation in Washington are very effective."

"It is really encouraging to realize that our elected officials are on the same page as NAMM," said Judy Drengwitz, school and government contract administrator for Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center in Wheaton, Md. "They are very much aware

of the funding issues in education, obviously, but they also know how important music is for the student and for their complete educational experience. One of the congressmen brought his family to the reception. His son, a graduating senior, will be continuing his jazz trumpet studies in college. They just had the jazz studies program cut from the

class schedule at his high school for next year. The family is very upset by the cut but grateful that their son was able to complete his studies." **MI**

Greg and Grant Billings run Steinway Piano Gallery in Naples, Fla., and Madison, Wis., respectively. They are regular contributors to *Music Inc.* magazine and participated in the NAMM Advocacy Fly-In event.

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SAMICK | BY KATIE KAILUS

REBRANDING SAMICK

Samick has built a name for itself making guitars for other companies. Now, it aims to draw more attention to its own brands.

This summer, Samick is rolling out a marketing campaign that includes new point-of-purchase materials, a customer testimonial campaign, more signature artist clinics and a dealer rewards program. The idea is to give its independent retail base a little shot in the arm.

"We have about 800 independents that buy the [Samick] Greg Bennett and JTR lines from us on a regular basis," said John Hawkins, vice president of the company's MI division. "For us, our new marketing initiatives are to reward our retailers that are selling those lines in independent music stores."

DEALER PERKS

The dealer rewards program is designed to not only boost dealers' profitability but also to get them amped up about more recent changes to the Samick brand. Tony De La Rosa, the company's regional sales manager, likened the initiative to an airline or bank rewards program with tiered membership, where each level yields certain perks. Eligible dealers can then use their points to qualify for new freight, terms and discount packages.

"We wish to keep it simple and make it something each dealer can feasibly obtain and use at any time during the selling year," De La Rosa said. "The choice of options and timing is what makes the program exciting and interesting for the dealer. The

more they sell, the more perks can be used."

And De La Rosa said he believes this will put some fun in the business. "It gives our reps a new and ongoing story to keep in front of our dealer base," he added. "We, as a manufacturer, can tailor the program to focus on any specific area of our business at any time."

EYE-POPPING POPS

Samick's new POP materials aim to take advantage of empty real estate on a retailer's



Samick launches a new persona with its summer marketing campaign

product.

While in a music store, they can take a photo of themselves with a Samick guitar and upload it to the company's Facebook page. Participants then receive a free T-shirt and are entered into a drawing to win a free guitar. Customer testimonials are also being used in Samick's print ads and social media posts.

"In essence, we are asking real people to tell us their story about how they went into a dealer and purchased their Samick guitar," De La Rosa said.

And the company's rounding out its promotional efforts by bolstering its clinic schedule during the coming months. Two Samick signature artists, Greg Bennett and Steve Rutledge, will host retail clinics by August.

NEW PERSONA

The marketing campaign is part of a larger effort to rebrand Samick. Long known for its Greg Bennett line, the company's working on getting the word out about its JTR and USA series — newer lines that have emerged within the past two years.

"It has become not just about the Greg Bennett brand, but we now have the JTR series and we also have a USA series that we want to build on," said Glenn Derringer, president of Samick's MI division.

"We may not be able to go out and advertise that we make guitars for other companies, but the fact is that we are good enough to manufacture for all these companies that are the top brands in the world."

And now, it's Samick's turn to show its face to the world. **MI**



Blackstar Amplification recently received the 2011 Queen's Award For Enterprise in the International Trade category. The awards are the United Kingdom's most prestigious honor for business success and are presented in three categories.

"In 2007, four friends launched Blackstar Amplification," said Paul Hayhoe, Blackstar U.K.'s sales and

marketing director. "Having worked together for years at the highest levels of the amp-designing industry, their dream was to create new and innovative guitar amplifiers and pedals that would be the ultimate tools for self-expression."

Blackstar received the award after only being a business for four years. blackstaramps.com



BAG END | REAL WORLD

Bag End Creates a Storm

Bag End Loudspeaker is helping bring storms to life at the "Science Storms" exhibit at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry.

The new 26,000-square-foot, two-story exhibit lets visitors experience a 40-foot tornado, high-voltage lightning and a tsunami in a 30-foot wave tank.

Bag End D10E-I subwoofers are mounted under grills in the exhibit floor, as well as in the ceiling.

"The main audio for the large screen includes Bag End D10E-I's mounted below a grill at each of the listening stations," said Maris Ensing, president of AV designer Mad Systems, which designed both the AV system and the safety controls for the exhibits. "Two other exhibits feature rear-projection screens with D10E-I's mounted in the ceiling above them." bagend.com

UNIVERSAL PERCUSSION, YAMAHA | PARTNERSHIP

UNIVERSAL & YAMAHA TEAM UP



Universal Percussion has announced it will distribute Yamaha drums and hardware to dealers across the United States.

"Yamaha drums have always been known for quality, craftsmanship and attention to detail," said David Jewell, marketing manager for Yamaha Drums. "Through this new partnership, Tom [Shelley, president of Universal Percussion,] and his team will be able to better serve the markets we couldn't reach before."

Shelley said he's thrilled by the opportunity to enter the partnership with Yamaha.

"Yamaha makes great drums, and we'll be supporting them with Universal's equally great sales and

service," he said. "That means maintaining a solid inventory of drum kits, add-on drums and spare parts. At Universal, we work hard to earn and maintain the confidence of our retail customers with all of our product lines. And that's how we'll be handling Yamaha products."

To start, Universal will carry the GigMaker and Stage Custom Birch drum kit lines in all standard sizes, configurations and finishes. These will be accompanied by an assortment of stands, pedals and parts. Yamaha's 700 and 800 series hardware packs will also be available. universalpercussion.com; yamaha.com

TRIBUTE

Thank you for your contributions to the music industry. You will be missed.

Don Broman

Don Broman, former vice president of Baldwin Piano, passed away on May 12 in Kenosha, Wis. He was 96. Broman joined Lyon & Healy in 1937 during the Great Depression, where he worked with the staff to keep the company above water. He stayed 38 years until he became the vice president of Baldwin Piano in 1975. Broman remained at Baldwin until his retirement in 1984.

EXPANSION

Stravari Orchestral Expands Business

Stravari Orchestral Instruments has expanded its business in the United States and Canada. Since the early 1990s, the Colorado-based Stravari line of instruments was only sold through a small dealer base in the western United States until roughly five years ago, when the instruments began selling through schools and colleges. With this success, Stravari is now expanding and offering its product to independent music retailers throughout the United States and Canada.

"Stravari instruments are a cornerstone in today's music industry," said Robin Rockley, president of Stravari. "The Stravari line provides high-quality instruments and highly profitable margins for the independent music retailers."

"Stravari also does not allow sales over the Internet, as this would lessen the product line and not serve the purpose of offering a profitable line to the local dealer." stravari.com

EVENT

Yamaha Drums Gets Jazzy

Since 1985, Yamaha and staff from Kenner, La.-based Ray Fransen's Drum Center have provided the drum

sets and tech support for every stage of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. This year, a dozen stages received Yamaha drums, including the new Club Custom drum

set on the Gentilly Stage, along with multiple other kits.

"Every morning, we got up early and ran from stage to stage checking drums," said David Jewell, marketing manager for Yamaha Drums. "The Club Custom kit was a big hit. The performers loved them."

Yamaha also partnered with Acura, which displayed its new TSX Sport Wagon during the festival. The companies' display featured the new car and used a specially constructed glass box that contained a Yamaha Club Custom drum (pictured), demonstrating the TSX Sport Wagon's utility and relevance to the musical setting. yamaha.com



KMC Music's new Dealer Profit Center

KMC MUSIC | VENUES

KMC OPENS DEALER PROFIT CENTER

On April 13, KMC Music celebrated the grand opening of its new Dealer Profit Center (DPC), located in Fender's Ontario, Calif., distribution center. More than 100 guests were in attendance for the festivities, which included tours of the 880,000-square-foot distribution center, exclusive sales specials and entertainment provided by Latin Percussion artist Richie "Gajate" Garcia.

The DPC will be home to a regular

series of events for dealers and the KMC sales team. The events will focus on education and training tactics for selling through KMC products. Upcoming events include product launches, merchandising and clinics.

"The DPC gives us the chance to present our own mini NAMM show and provide dealer training events 365 days a year," said Robert Lee, KMC's vice president of sales.

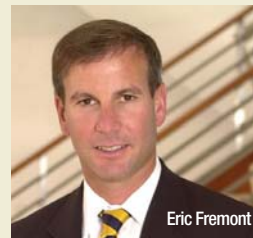
kamanmusic.com

APPOINTMENTS**D'Addario Adds Fremont**

D'Addario has appointed Eric Fremont to its board of directors. Fremont will provide strategic guidance in regards to D'Addario's technology, IT and e-business development needs.

He has more than 25 years of experience in telecommunications and technology. Fremont served as the senior vice president, IT strategy and planning at Verizon Communications from 2007–2011.

"I am very pleased to welcome Eric Fremont to our board of directors," said D'Addario CEO Jim D'Addario. "He brings specialized knowledge and know-how to our board, and his participation will ensure the execution of the company's initiatives and growth as an organization."



Eric Fremont

Gon Bops recently named Randy Chaisson U.S. sales manager.

Joe Mazza has been promoted to product specialist for **Gretsch Drums**.

Michael Edwards has been appointed as vice president of professional markets for **Audio-Technica**.

Music Group has tapped Arie Korpel as its new senior man-

ager for worldwide sales.

Los Cabos Drumsticks has promoted two employees, including Matt Carter from marketing and communications coordinator to director of marketing and artist relations. Stephanie Guay, former artist relations representative, now joins the production team as operations manager.

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS | REORGANIZATION

Native Becomes Self-owned

Native Instruments recently completed a major share reorganization that makes the company entirely self-owned. The reorganization was facilitated by CEO and founding shareholder Daniel Haver. It includes a general shareholder consolidation and the reacquisition of close to 30 percent of Native Instruments' shares from a long-standing venture capital investor.

The consolidation affects complete ownership of the company by its original founders and its executive management team and makes it independent from external investors.

"While this reorganization may sound like an abstract, behind-the-scenes process, the implications for our users and our industry are actually quite profound," Haver said. "As a completely self-owned enterprise, we will now be able to pursue our vision for the most forward-thinking music production and DJ technology in an even more energetic and uncompromising fashion." **{native-instruments.com}**

Harman's Mexico team accepts its award



HARMAN | AWARD

Harman Named Top Place to Work

Harman's manufacturing facility in Tijuana, Mexico, was recently certified one of Mexico's Top 100 Great Places to Work. Harman representatives were on hand in Mexico City to accept the certificate during a celebration honoring each of the top 100 companies.

"Our Harman Tijuana team has worked intensely to be certified by

the Great Place to Work Institute of Mexico," said Rafael Villalobos, Harman's director of manufacturing, loudspeakers. "We are proud of being selected as one of the best 100 companies to work for in Mexico."

The Great Place to Work Institute scores applicants on hiring practices, compensation, benefits, time off and work-family issues. **{harman.com}**

MODERN INSTRUMENTS OLD-FASHIONED QUALITY



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UNIVERSAL AUDIO | CHARITY

UNIVERSAL AUDIO DONATES TO JAPAN

Universal Audio, along with its UAD Powered Plug-In customers, recently donated \$50,000 to the American Red Cross relief efforts in Japan to aid victims of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

"Although they may have slipped from the headlines over the past few weeks, the people of Japan are still suffering in large numbers from the largest catastrophe in that nation's history," said Bill Putnam, founder of Universal Audio.

"In April, we worked jointly with the American Red Cross and our customers to raise a \$50,000 donation, which will directly support the relief efforts in Japan. Our customers were extremely generous, and we thank them for their outpouring of support."

"The American Red Cross is grateful for Universal Audio's compassion following what has been declared one of the most devastating earthquakes in history," said Rita Chick, CEO of the Santa Cruz County Chapter of the American Red Cross.

"Universal Audio's incredible donation will help the American Red Cross channel support to our partner in Japan that is playing a critical humanitarian role and comforting the survivors." **{uaudio.com}**



Vinny Appice

EVANS | ARTIST APPROVED

Evans Family Grows

Evans has signed drummer Vinny Appice of Heaven & Hell, Black Sabbath and Dio. Appice has also anchored the rhythm and power both live and in-studio for such artists as Black Sabbath, Rick Derringer and John Lennon.

"These heads make my drums sound great," Appice said. "And they can take a beating."

Marco Soccoli, D'Addario's director of artist relations, said it was exciting to sign Appice. "We are extremely proud to welcome him to the family." **{evansdrumheads.com}**

WEBNEWS

American DJ Offers PhD-J

American DJ and American Audio have created ADJ University, a free online learning program that offers in-depth, user-friendly video instruction for any DJ. ADJ University, located at adjuniversity.com, blends subtle humor with clear, easy-to-follow lesson plans and videos, which cover a range of topics from DMX programming and audio mixing to gear maintenance and marketing DJ services.



"We've always viewed our role as not just selling products but as partnering with DJs to help them elevate their performance and achieve their goals," said Scott Davies, general manager of American DJ. "As lighting and audio gear has become more technologically advanced, DJs need more knowledge, so they can take full advantage of these powerful tools. This is why we created ADJ University. We owe it to our customers not only to provide them with great products but to help acquire the knowledge to get the most out of those products."

Davies said that ADJ University video courses don't promote specific American DJ and American Audio merchandise but cover product types in a generic sense, giving pointers on gear in general.

"This is not about selling," he said. "It's about supporting the DJ community."

Available now, ADJ University features eight learning video courses that have tests at the end. When someone completes the courses and the tests, they earn a PhD-J degree and receive a diploma and free ADJ University T-shirt. **{americandj.com}**

GON BOPS SITE MAKEOVER

Gon Bops has launched a new website, gonbops.com, that features a clean, new look that's easy-to-navigate. The home page has a slide show that includes photos of products and La Ropa, Gon Bops' new clothing line. The site boasts a vintage-inspired look and feel to celebrate the company's past.

"Since 1954, this brand has never stopped handcrafting and building premium quality drums in the United States," said Luis Cardoso, marketing manager for Gon Bops. "It was important to us for our new design to make this very clear."

The website corresponds with Gon Bops' new social media pages, with the addition of Facebook "Like" buttons to product pages. **{gonbops.com}**

YAMAHA ROLLS OUT PARAGON

Yamaha recently launched Paragon, a dealer tool designed to increase efficiency, accessibility and measurement of online and social content. Paragon (Product and Resource Asset Galleries Online) provides user-friendly resources that make it easy for dealers to add Yamaha content to their websites, including content that integrates with mobile devices, and measure the impact of marketing efforts on Facebook and Twitter — all free of charge. **{yamaha.com}**



JARRELL GUITARS | AWARD

JARRELL NAMED MANUFACTURER OF YEAR BY MIAC

Jarrell Guitars has been named Manufacturer of the Year by the Music Industries Association of Canada (MIAC). The award recognizes extraordinary accomplishments and contributions of member institutions and individuals through a peer-nomination and selection process.

"I can't begin to say how excited and thankful I am to be recognized by my peers," said Phillip Jarrell, founder of Jarrell Guitars. "I've listened at great length to what musicians want and need, and my dream is that my experience translates to great instruments in every detail, loved by musicians in every way. This award is proof that I have succeeded and there is nothing you can dream that can't be done."

This marks the first year of the MIAC Excellence Awards. The awards celebrate institutional excellence, individual achievements and contributions to the Canadian music products market and music making. jarrellguitars.com



Zildjian's new artist facility at Cato Music in London

ZILDJIAN | VENUES

ZILDJIAN OPENS U.K. ARTIST FACILITY

On April 1, Zildjian hosted a U.K. Artist Session to celebrate the official opening of its new artist facility at Cato Music in London.

Approximately 130 Zildjian artists from all over the United Kingdom were treated to demonstrations of about 100 new Sound Lab Prototypes, cymbals that are not yet in production.

"It was great to welcome so many of our artists to the new facility," said Tina Clarke, Zildjian's international

artist relations manager. "This year, artists were treated to one of the biggest selections of Sound Lab Prototypes ever presented. The goal of the artist session is to bring together artists in a social setting where they can discuss new cymbal and drumstick ideas."

This year, the session also included Zildjian's new digital division, Gen16. Artists got a firsthand look at Zildjian's new electronic sound technology. zildjian.com

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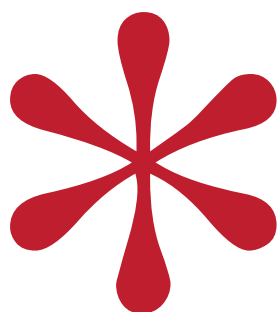
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RETAIL PRINT MUSIC DEALERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION | BY ZACH PHILLIPS



Print in the Post-Recession Era

The clouds of the recession have lifted from the print music industry.

Case in point: the 2011 Retail Print Music Dealers Association (RPMDA) convention, where upbeat news filled the Hyatt Regency Tampa's exhibit hall from April 27–30.

"I've spoken with dealers at this show who are flat or even a little up in print sales — 10, 15 and upwards of 20 percent," said Kevin Hackinson, vice president of publisher FJH Music. "That's a great sign."

Anna Letiec, general manager of Alphonse Leduc, even said this year's RPMDA set a record for her publishing company. "In three years, this is the highest number of orders we've received."

That doesn't mean business is easy.

Letiec, for one, drove traffic to her booth with a generous dealer coupon. At print retailers across

At RPMDA, the print industry prepared for life after the downturn

North America, it's much of the same. The post-recession world yields a tougher climate for independent print dealers, with challenges ranging from the digital revolution to ramped-up online competition. And yet many are finding opportunity. The following pages are filled with a treasure trove of proven ideas for driving business — promotional strategies, sales tactics and booming product categories. (The review of RPMDA's "Best Ideas" session alone delivers seven winners.)

In terms of new product, publishers were especially excited about children's guitar methods. Antonio Ferranti, Alfred's director of sales, national accounts,

said that his company's Kid's Guitar Course ranks among the top five books Alfred has ever published, in terms of overall sales. Alfred has since launched a full range of methods for children.

"The response has been unbelievable," Ferranti said. "It surprised even us."

Fellow mega print publisher Hal Leonard has also found a best-seller in its *Guitar For Kids* book. Like Alfred, it's expanding the line into all instrument categories. (See page 39 to learn more about how Hal Leonard is capitalizing on this market.)

Doug Lady, the company's senior vice president, also mentioned that, a year after its inception, Hal Leonard's Full-Line Internet Partners program passed along more than \$9.5 million in sales to retailers. The program sends a customer's order from the Hal website to the online shopping cart at a participating dealer, who fulfills the order.

And maybe RPMDA's overall attendance signaled improvement in the market. This year's convention brought in 215 print professionals, a 7-percent increase from last year. This included more than 30 first-time attendees.

"I thought that this RPMDA was especially good," said Rick Valentine, general manager of Dowling Music in Houston. He added that he especially loved the seminar "Ownership Thinking," presented by Brad Hams. "I have turned that session into a series of staff meetings."

The 2012 RPMDA convention will be held May 2–5 in Los Angeles.

1. Alphonse Leduc's Kimberly Frattasio (left) and Anna Letiec
2. Beacock Music's Gayle Beacock, who also serves as RPMDA's current president, lends her musical talents to the convention's awards banquet. The event featured a choir made up of RPMDA members.
3. From left: Dowling Music's Rick Valentine, Carl Fischer's Diana Macedonio, Dowling Music's James Li and Carl Fischer's Chris Scialfa



1. Bookmark Music's Marcia Stearns (left) and Mel Bay's Debbie Mooney
2. Hal Leonard's Bruce Bush (left) receives the first Don Eubanks Publisher Representative Award. Eubanks, who retires this year from Hutchins & Rea Music after 40 years in the print music industry, is pictured with him.
3. The Alfred Music Publishing team gets stoked about its new ukulele package, which comes out later this year.
4. From left: Lorenz Music's Geoff and Reiff Lorenz with Kris Kropff and Ward-Brodt Music's Mick Faulhaber
5. Financial guru Alan Friedman speaks about how to value a music retail business in his session, "Exit Strategies, Entrance Opportunities"
6. From left: Hal Leonard's Doug Lady, Willis Music's Kevin Cranley and Hal Leonard's Larry Morton
7. From left: Hal Leonard's David Jahnke, Rockley Music's Liane Rockley and Bandland's Evan Jones indulge in the convention's island theme
8. Consultant Danny Rocks (left) receives the Dorothy Award, the print music industry's highest honor, from last year's winner, Richard Gore of Pender's Music
9. Tri-Technical Systems' Julie and Dave Cox
10. FJH Music's Kevin (left) and Kyle Hackinson
11. Lorenz Music's Reiff Lorenz discusses how to hire and retain great employees in his session, "Building a Great Team"
12. The Jeffers Handbell Supply team. Back row, from left: Andrew Jeffers, Jeff Curran and Thomas Jeffers; front row, from left: Krista Wilhelmsen, Jill Jeffers and Ginny Hurst
13. From left: Senseney Music's Krista Hart and Lori Supinie with Pender's Music's Karen Gore

* FORGE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

With a tough economic climate comes a rise in sponsorship requests. Christie Smith, Long & McQuade's events, sponsorship and advertising coordinator, looked at how to choose strategic partnerships — without alienating organizations you reject — in "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

First, she stressed creating a mandate or mission statement for your company. "This way, you can say 'no.' You can give them a reason [why you're turning them down]."

Next up, create a set of regula-

tions. Smith recommended the following: The organization seeking sponsorship must be hosting a local, established event; only make one request per year; have a reasonable Web presence, including a presence on social media sites; make its proposal at least three to four weeks before the event; and be willing to fill out an application form.

"Mandates and regulations give applicants a clear idea of what your mission is," she said.

Smith also suggested creating a wish list and assigning a point value to the most important items. These could include: Will the sponsorship opportunity reach your target



Christie Smith

What to look for when choosing sponsorship opportunities

market; offer opportunities to your employees, such as recognition; generate media attention; reach a wide enough group; be exclusive; match your company's core values; offer a unique, impactful position; and give you an opportunity to display?

"Remember: This is a negotiation," she said.

Smith added that forming a sponsorship committee helps avoid emotional decision-making. And she pointed out that if you can't give money, consider donating shop-worn giftware and books, publisher giveaways, staff time, discounts on rental gear, and promotional space on your website.

* BEST IDEAS

What do you get when you challenge a roomful of print industry professionals to share their best ideas? Enough golden nuggets to last all year. Here are a few highlights from the annual "Best Ideas" session, hosted by Willis Music President Kevin Cranley.

- **Combine a Christmas party with a clinic.** Long & McQuade's Christie Smith (pictured above) won the "Best Ideas" session by discussing her unique approach to workshops. She held a Christmas luncheon that doubled as a piano teacher reading session and sold roughly \$7,000 in print music that day.
- **Improve interstore communications.** Dowling Music's James Li improved communications between his two retail locations by simply using iChat's free video program.
- **Improve service online.** Beacock Music's Gayle Beacock, who's the current RPMDA president, improved customer service online by adding instant messaging to her dealership's website. This

has helped direct the right question to the right person — and quickly.

- **Challenge your staff.** Middle C Music's Myrna Sisen held a contest for her employees to see who had the best idea for getting new customers in-store. The winner was to receive \$25, but all the ideas were so good that she ended up giving each contestant \$100.
- **Automate social media.** Pender's Music's Becky Lightfoot has kept her social media consistently updated by scheduling posts and automating updates using a social media dashboard.
- **Offer a fixed purchase order.** Ward-Brodt Music's Mick Faulhaber simultaneously liquidated old inventory and helped a teacher with a limited budget by letting her fill her trunk with print music for a fixed amount — \$300.
- **Give away swag.** Brass Bell's Tristann Rieck gave away cell phone cling decals with her company's logo. Every time customers use their phones, they now think of her store.

Larry Morton



FREAKY MISCONCEPTIONS

Conventional wisdom is usually wrong. Larry Morton, president of Hal Leonard, made that point during “Freakonomics for the Music Business,” a session based off the book *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner.

Morton shared a few examples from the book to illustrate his point. One involved a day care center with a late-pickup problem. The center began charging parents \$3 when they showed up after 5 p.m. The result? Late pickups doubled during the following six weeks, and parents who used to be 5 minutes late started arriving 10 minutes late. “When people thought you were letting them pick up late, they thought it was a service,” Morton said.

A second example involved a man who always brought bagels to his office. He finally began asking people to start chipping in money. It raised the question: Do honor systems work? “Eighty-seven percent of the time, people paid,” Morton said.

Larry Morton on ‘Freakonomics’ and common misconceptions within the music products industry

He then addressed some common misconceptions within the music industry:

- Attendees at the Piano Retailers Conference in 1922 said the bicycle would put the piano industry out of business.
- Print music actually represents 8.5 percent of the music products industry, making it the fourth largest segment.
- E-books only make up 8.3 percent of total book sales.
- Wal-Mart, not Amazon.com, is by far the biggest book seller in the world.



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*WHAT'S WORKING? A LOT

Prior to the convention, industry consultant Danny Rocks surveyed a range of print music dealers to find out what's working in their stores. He revealed his findings during "This Works for Me and My Print Department, Today," offering up a range of useful, in-the-trenches advice.

Rocks also received this year's Dorothy Award, the print music industry's highest honor.

Here are highlights from his session:

WHAT TO STOCK

- + **Pender's Music's Richard Gore:** "We eliminated carrying guitar tab folios and sheets and went to print on-demand for the most requested titles. If a customer wants a book, we special-order it."
- + **Ward-Brodt Music's Dave Karbler:** "It's more important than ever to have



Danny Rocks

the right merchandise in stock to compete against Internet competition. You can do that by having experienced buyers and knowing your customers — their interests and buying habits."

HOW TO DISPLAY

- + **West Music's Valerie Johnson:** "In our solo and ensemble section, there was old material that sat there, and customers

didn't look through it after a while because it looked tattered.

"We cleaned up the area, we put the old [music] into clearance, ordered selected solo and ensemble music. We are now having more sales in this area."

- + **Bookmark Music's Marcia Stearns:** "We have been very diligent about changing out our window displays every two to three weeks. Tie-ins to holidays, local events, employee whims of the week — they are making people stop and look and enter the store."
- + **Beacock Music's Gayle Beacock:** "We are trying to talk to our customers more like in the old days — homemade signage telling customers why they need to buy these books. Also, the old idea of drawing attention to the new items is really working. Product tends to get lost in the bins."

HOW TO MARKET

- + **Stearns:** "Off-site sales are our best income producers right now. We bring our stock to potential and existing customers by attending their [music teacher association] meetings to show and tell — and sell."
- + **George's Music's George Hines:** "We can't wait for the customer to come to us. We have to give them a good reason to come into our stores. We need to invite them to be our special guest."
- + **Johnson:** "Having specialized people in specific areas to e-mail, market and educate our sales staff has been extremely helpful in improving our customer service."

HOW TO SERVICE

- + **Johnson:** "Processing special orders in 24–48 hours has been extremely beneficial. We three-day [ship] anything from slower-moving publishers."

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* Not Your Dad's Guitar Method

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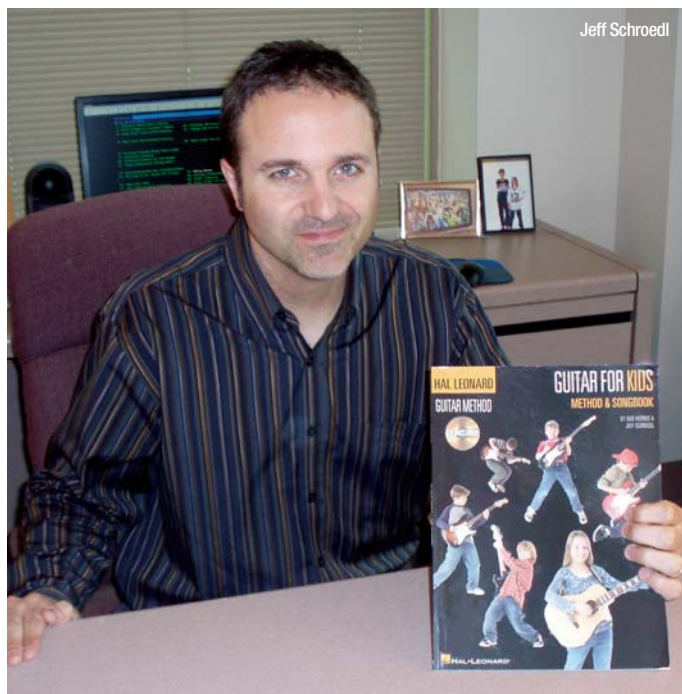
"When you watch your own kids trying to play an instrument at that age, you learn a lot yourself," said Schroedl, Hal Leonard's vice president of pop and standard publications. "It showed me that creating a good method for kids isn't as simple as adapting an existing method. It really requires a fresh start and an all-new approach."

That approach spawned Hal Leonard's *Guitar For Kids*, written by Schroedl and Bob Morris, former director of education for Fender. Since its launch two years ago, the book has become one of Hal Leonard's top-selling guitar methods and was followed up with *Bass For Kids*, *Guitar For Kids Songbook*, and a pack that combines the guitar method and songbook. This summer, Hal Leonard's taking the lineup to the next level, launching children's ukulele and drum methods. And according to Schroedl, there are more titles in the works.

"We haven't done clinics or workshops for this method at all, which is an important point, considering that it's taken off," he said. "Piano students have always started at an earlier age, but with guitar, it's typically been 9 or 10 years old. I think that's been [decreasing], and this is one of the first methods to really address that. You can effectively start your son or daughter on the guitar at age 6."

SIMPLIFIED LEARNING

Open *Guitar For Kids*, and you'll immediately notice several differences from a typi-



'Creating a good method for kids isn't as simple as adapting an existing method. It really requires a fresh start and an all-new approach.'
— Jeff Schroedl

cal method — larger chord symbols, simpler page designs and a slower-paced approach to learning. "For kids that young, the pages can't look intimidating," Schroedl said. "They have to be easy on the eyes."

The book starts by teaching one-finger chords, a C and a G7,

that only use the top three guitar strings. From there, kids learn a song, Harry Nilsson's "Coconut," strumming G7 in quarter notes. Next up is "Yellow Submarine," "The Hokey Pokey," and with the introduction of the Em chord, "Get Up, Stand Up" and "Eleanor Rigby." (Hal Leonard's generous copyright library fleshed out the method with a wealth of popular tunes.) An accompanying CD also features more than 30 play-along tracks.

"We've identified a number of one-chord songs and two-chord songs, and there aren't many," Schroedl said with a laugh.

By the end of the book, kids are introduced to G, D and A chords, as well as notes on the first three strings.

"A traditional method is much faster-paced and starts with typically playing three notes on the first string and three notes on the second string," Schroedl said. "And it often introduces two or three chords at a time —

full, open chords. This guitar method begins with one-finger chords."

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL

The method's simplicity isn't only designed to appeal to kids. Schroedl pointed out that, given the economic climate, a lot of parents are forgoing paid music lessons and teaching their kids at home. *Guitar For Kids'* back cover copy even encourages such home-schooling.

"Obviously, it's better to have a professional guitar teacher — don't get me wrong — but it's very possible for a parent, especially a parent with some musical background, to teach their own kids," Schroedl said. To aid parents, the methods include melody cues at the bottom of each page.

Not that Hal's cutting music retailers out of the mix. Schroedl said he sees opportunity in cross-merchandising the books next to three-quarter-size axes and adding them onto entry-level guitar sales. And several dealers have already incorporated the books into their lesson programs, including Eric Lacovara, buyer at Berwyn, Pa.-based George's Music, which uses the titles in its group and private teaching.

"These books are laid out very well, and many of our teachers use the method book plus songbook with CD as supplemental material during their lessons," he said.

"The nice thing is, if they can get students started at a younger age and teach them, obviously, once they can play, they're going to graduate to other books, other instruments and purchase other [items]," Schroedl said. "It gets them hooked at an early age." **MI**

IDEAS

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THE CUSTOMER WHISPERER | BY GREG BILLINGS

SHATTERED!

Recently, my wife, Sara, and I traveled to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., to hear Diana Krall in concert. On the way home, we stopped at Everglades National Park to hike the trail at Shark Valley. There were egrets, turtles and, of course, alligators lurking a few feet off the path. (Alligators don't bother hikers if hikers don't bother alligators.) On our way back, a park ranger informed us that each female alligator hatches up to 50 eggs per year but only about 10 percent survive. This fact got me thinking about my advertising budget.

In a career that has been otherwise richly rewarding, I'd be surprised if 10 percent of my advertising dollars worked at all. I don't think I'm alone. Many dealers who relied mostly on paid advertising to drive their business have failed. I remember visiting the notorious Biasco brothers during their prime and the pride they took in their multipage color circulars in the *Chicago Tribune*. Instrument manufacturers haven't fared much better, leaving a legacy of failed one-time efforts, ranging



The old advertising model is broken. What you should ask yourself before blowing your ad budget

from product placements on "The Price Is Right" to full-page ads in *Life* magazine. Has there ever been a successful retail advertising campaign created by a piano manufacturer?

There was a time when a deli-

cate mix of *Yellow Pages*, classified ads, direct mail and a quarterly sale advertised in the newspaper or on TV made for a reasonable advertising plan. Throw in a few in-store concerts and a booth at the state fair, and it became a marketing plan. Sadly, that system is broken. And when it broke, like a crystal vase, it shattered into a thousand pieces. Now, there are more vehicles, on and offline, to reach customers than ever before, and many are very efficient and inexpensive. But when everyone can talk to everyone else all the time, often for free, rising above the noise becomes a challenge.

The world has changed and we have to make a choice: Devise new strategies to cope and prosper, or stick with the old ways and linger on until we die. But fundamental change is tough. Last year, at a meeting hosted by a manufacturer, the vice president of marketing stood before the dealers and said, "Everything that worked in the past doesn't work anymore," as he unveiled the company's new Internet strategy. Ten minutes later, he introduced new product sheets. When was the last time anyone

used a product sheet? Isn't product information an aspect of an Internet strategy? In all fairness, everyone is having a hard time figuring out what to do in this new environment.

WHY WE FAIL

Music dealers have used traditional channels to drive customers to big events, such as grand openings and college sales. But once the total advertising expense exceeds 10 percent — and it usually does — their profit is sucked down the drain. Yet automobile dealers and grocers and department stores fill the airwaves and newspaper pages with ads week after week. Why does it seem to work for them but not for us?

There are several, mostly technical, reasons why we fail. For any advertising promotion to be successful, the right offer must be directed at the right target, in the right medium, at the right time. It must be focused, measured, refined and repeated. Music dealers usually skip items one, two and three but are really good at four.

First, an ad has to present

a compelling offer. “We’ve got guitars” is not an offer. “Twenty-five years in business” is not an offer. “Quarter Pounders for 99 cents” is an offer. “Free drinks for ladies” is an offer. “Zero-percent financing for five years” is an offer. Many of our ads fail to present an irresistible offer.

The ad also has to be graphically appealing and emotionally engaging. Our competition isn’t other music dealers — it’s other advertisers. A Costco store generating \$200K per day or a car dealer selling \$1 million a month can spend \$50,000 to produce great ads, commercials and even websites that are visually stimulating and emotionally memorable. Think about the tearful Native American who didn’t want you to litter. In our little industry, we’ve seen a few impressive display ads that probably would’ve been successful if they could’ve been repeated often enough to make a sufficient impression, but they were rare. Usually, our production values suck. And poorly produced ads probably do more harm than good, especially on TV.

Most important — and this is where we typically crash and burn — an ad needs to create a sufficient number of impressions before it will move customers to action. Our small ad budgets just aren’t sufficient to reach an impression threshold necessary for success. And those impressions need to be delivered to people who fit our target demographic — provided, of course, that we *know* who our target demographic is and where to find them.

Ironically, if we could spend enough to reach the impression threshold, most of us couldn’t handle the resulting traffic. A *critical mass* must be achieved, and half-measures won’t work.

Fifty percent of the necessary expenditure might get you 10 percent of the desired return, but 110 percent might double your return. Because of the impression-threshold barrier, it’s unlikely small and medium-sized businesses will ever have ad budgets large enough to make newspaper, radio, broadcast TV or magazine advertising pay.

Timing is also crucial. There are times when ads will work and times when they won’t. (See sidebar below, right.) Advertising because business is slow is a pretty poor way to time ads, but it’s a great way to waste money. Bad timing kills more advertising efforts than any other cause, and it’s completely preventable.

The Internet has affected timing more than any other aspect of advertising. People shop and seek online every hour of the day and night, and every day of the year. They buy plane tickets at 3 a.m., and they buy underwear sitting at their desks at work. All the traditional rules used to predict weekly and seasonal shopping trends are obsolete. Thirty years ago, November and December accounted for 25 percent of our annual volume, as they had for generations. May and June were the slump. Today, the Christmas season is a blip, and May can be as good as any other month if a dealer promotes over the Memorial Day holiday and it rains.

One vehicle that has evolved to our benefit is direct mail (to our own mailing lists). With many advertisers switching to electronic media, there’s less junk in our mailboxes and less competition for our customers’ attention. E-mail boxes, though, are stuffed with junk.

And finally, we can’t control what we don’t measure. When’s the last time any of us attempted to measure the effect

of our advertising accurately and honestly? Probably never — because we lack the expertise and the tools. Ad expense as a percentage of sales is not a measurement. It’s a result. It doesn’t tell us the effectiveness of a particular activity. It just tells us how much we spent relative to sales that might have occurred anyway.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Buying advertising boils down to big guys versus small guys. Depending on the size of the market, your local newspaper or TV station may have annual sales greater than all but the 10 biggest music retailers and a few suppliers. These vendors are not your friends. They slice and dice their products, so the big advertisers get the cream and the little guys get the chaff. The big guys know how to buy, leaving the leftovers for us. The big guys know how to produce effective ads, when

to run them and how to measure their effectiveness. We don’t.

Every small advertiser should ask the following question before buying an ad: **Will this expenditure generate enough revenue to justify the expense?** Answers along the lines of, “We are raising awareness, generating goodwill, creating an image or planting seeds,” aren’t reasons — they’re excuses. Big corporations may be able to afford feel-good luxury ads, but small advertisers like us could never reach the threshold of impressions and frequency necessary to accomplish any of those lofty goals.

A follow-up question could be, “What would happen if we did nothing?” Even if you don’t spend a dime on advertising, a certain number of customers will find you.

Every hour of every day, your location and sign tell customers where you are and what you do.

➕ Four Elements of Successful Ads

- 1. The target.** Who’s the intended subject? We use demographics to identify them and a media to deliver to them. It could be a mailing list, viewership of a TV program or channel, subscribers to a magazine or newspaper, Googlers of a particular word or phrase, or a hundred other mediums. It’s not enough to look at gross circulation or viewership metrics. If the medium isn’t reaching your demographic, it will be inefficient at best and ineffective at worst.
- 2. The message.** How good is the ad itself? If you watched the Super Bowl, you saw ads that cost millions. Do you remember them? Many magazines have ads with stunning, memorable visual images and some that don’t. The message matters. A common mistake is to spend too much money on buying time or space and not enough on production. We often make this mistake because the vendor throws in free production if we buy enough time. We get exactly what we pay for.
- 3. The offer.** Will the offer cause customers to take action? The reason going-out-of-business ads work, no matter how poorly executed, is because the offer is irresistible. If your message isn’t compelling, or if it doesn’t demand action, money’s being wasted. Really effective advertisers find a way to make their offer appealing. Research indicates that the word “free” is remarkably effective in ads. There are other effective words you can find with a little research.
- 4. Timing.** Get the first three perfect but miss the timing, and you lose! In our business, there are times that are hopeless — the week before Easter and the week after New Year’s. When I was young and people still cashed paychecks, we knew that when the 15th fell on a Friday everybody would get paid and the mortgage or rent would have already been covered. So, we placed ads on triple paydays, and they worked. A little common sense and research will guide advertisers to the proper ad timing. — G.B.

(That's why Target, Wal-Mart and big banks buy the most expensive real estate in town.) Your happy customers, teachers and friends should be sending referrals. Also, for reasons no one understands, as if by hidden forces, a certain number of customers will decide it's time to buy what you sell, and they will

seek you out. Sometimes, customers seem to appear from thin air. There are times, like the week before Easter, when doing nothing is a perfectly good strategy.

Therefore, advertising expenditures must be justified by the incremental business they generate, not just gross

sales — and then only over the period of time they impact.

THE NEW WORLD

It's too bad paid advertising through conventional channels alone can't sustain a business. If it did, we would have spent ourselves to prosperity long ago. But building a successful music store is more often accomplished by providing great service to thousands of customers over time. By being sincere and developing strong relationships with the circles of influence in your community. By nurturing and developing music makers and employees. And by being a prominent advocate for music in your town and making sure everybody knows about it through unpaid stories in the press. Of course, this is more labor-intensive than writing a check.

The mediums of communication have changed, but the fundamentals have not. We are still going to have to present a compelling offer to the right target, in the right medium, at the right time. It's still going to have to be focused, measured, refined and repeated. Fortunately, the playing field has been leveled a little, and new technology is making all these steps more accessible and efficient. Unfortunately, discipline and creativity are still the main factors that will determine who succeeds and who fails.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Music Inc.*, you can discover how your colleagues have found new ways to rise to the challenge in this new environment using new technology. No one has found the one true answer, but little by little, things that work are being revealed. Maybe you can find a nugget that will push your success rate over the 10 percent of our reptilian friends.

I once worked for Verne Netzow, the pre-eminent piano merchant in Milwaukee for more than 40 years. Verne said big advertising promotions were like holding an alligator by the tail. "It works out fine as long as the alligator doesn't bite your arm off." The new era of advertising and promotion lets us communicate our message without the big risks of the past. But it's a new world, and we're going to have to figure out how to make it work. **MI**

Greg Billings whispers to customers at the Steinway Piano Gallery in Naples, Fla. He welcomes questions and comments at greg@steinwaynaples.com.

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TECHNOLOGY OF TONE

TECHNOLOGY | BY CRIS BEHRENS

Social Media Coup

I've found that Internet advertising and social media sites are practically the only way to motivate potential customers to get off their duffs and visit our store. With this in mind, I recently began searching for more creative, alternative ways to advertise. It started with researching the number of visits to our website and Facebook page. And what I found surprised me.

In the span of a little over a month, there were 39,000 post views and 1,080 "likes" (i.e. fans) on the Summerhays Music Facebook page, compared to roughly 770 visits to our site. Clearly, Facebook had a wealth of untapped opportunities.

So, I set off to get more Facebook "likes" by taking advantage of its latest addition: the Question feature. This lets you poll Facebook friends, family and future customers on any topic you want. Hoping to generate excitement and get feedback from our biggest, most important group — students and school music directors — we created a poll just for them.

We posted a comment on the poll explaining how the contest worked. Simply put, users were to vote for their schools. The school that had the most votes won the grand prize, and any school with more than 100 votes received a \$100 store credit for its band and orchestra program. The poll was open to anyone who'd "liked" Summerhays Music on Facebook, and we sent an e-mail with a link to the poll to every band and orchestra director in the state.

Three weeks later, we tallied 615 new "likes," 104,048 post views, 17,795 votes, 326 comments/followers and 190 schools participating. And the numbers continued to rise.

MORE FRIENDS IN 5 MINUTES

Often times, the value of having Facebook "fans" and followers isn't given the credit it deserves. This one poll led to 104,048 post views on our page, putting our primary website to shame. Numerous hours have been spent making our company website as complete, attractive and helpful as possible. The Facebook poll, on the other hand, took less than 5 minutes to create and generated invaluable comments and feedback that aren't possible to generate with a website. Every

K-12 student made known his or her school would win, and every time a person had a comment, his or her friends saw our company name on their news feeds.

The one disadvantage of Facebook polls is they only allow for 100 maximum options. We were forced to add a second poll to our page. This made keeping track of votes and duplicates tricky, but most polls don't need to be this complicated. You don't even need giveaways to make a poll work. People take polls every day on topics ranging from favorite colors to favorite '80s movies, causing the poll to appear on their friends' news feeds — encouraging them to vote, too.

WEBSITES AREN'T DEAD

This isn't to say company websites and other forms of advertising are obsolete. Our website still contributed 770 customer views in one month — a number not to be ignored. Facebook offers several easy, free ways to advertise to complement everything else you've been doing online.

The information superhighway isn't going anywhere, and social media sites continue growing. As music retailers, we have two options: We can let the Internet take over and be the death of retail as we know it, or we can flip the tables and use it to live in the fast lane. **MI**

Cris Behrens is the manager of Summerhays Music in Murray, Utah.



Getting 104,048 views on Facebook with less than 5 minutes of work



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Willcutt Guitars
Lexington, KY
willcuttguitars.com

Infinity Guitars
Houston, TX
infinityguitars.com

Destroy All Guitars
Fuquay Varina, NC
destroyallguitars.com

The Music Zoo
Little Neck, NY
themusiczoo.com

Humbucker Music
Fort Oglethorpe, GA
humbuckermusic.com

ProGuitarShop
Tigard, OR
proguitarshop.com

Diffusion Audio/Boutique Tone
Montreal, QC, Canada
diffusion-audio.com, boutique-tone.com

Deluxe Guitar Exchange
Greenville, SC
deluxeguitarexchange.com

Dealer Inquiries: Jimmy Lovinggood • jimmy@premierbuildersguild.com • 714-514-0647

MY TURN | BY LESLIE FALTIN

Get Found on Google

Your competitor isn't down the street or on the other side of town. Your competitor is as close as the nearest smartphone or PC. And as a brick-and-mortar store, you have to give your customers a reason to choose you over the low-price, single-click-and-you're-done sellers.

When I need something, I don't go to the *Yellow Pages*. I go to Google, as do many of your customers. Your website is usually the first impression you make, and it can be a place to impress or depress. It can be dynamic, where people check in for news, specials and product, or it can be a stagnant pool of boring, outdated yuck. It's your choice.



For years, I'd discounted our website. It was a placeholder where people could find our hours. We hired local high school kids to maintain it, and invariably, they'd move out of town, or I'd lose their phone numbers. About two years ago, I decided to not only fix our site but make it much better. I resent having to pay people to do something I can do myself, so I decided that I'd learn how to run it. The end result? A cheaper, more focused, more dynamic advertising package than anyone else could produce for me.

ORGANIC SEARCH

One of my first orders of business was getting our site seen. Google has various ways of ranking websites. And if you search for, say, a Yamaha FS720S guitar, two things will usually show up: the search results — ranked by Google's special formula — and the Google ads off to the right side. Here are a few ideas for achieving a better Google ranking organically.

Your site should link to your vendors' sites, and you should request these links from your vendors. I wish vendors did a

better job maintaining lists of local dealers. This is something that takes a fair amount of patience and tenacity, to check your vendors' sites and to ensure that your info is correct — oh, and to call again to ask when it'll be done. Since this helps your ranking and helps your customers find you, it's a good investment of time.

Press releases and news articles about your company

are also a good way to bump up your ranking. Recently, I received a press release about one of my vendors donating a whole acoustic guitar to charity. Wow. I've donated so much stuff to my local music programs for silent auctions, it's not even funny. The difference is my vendor wrote a press release that got picked up on a slow news day, and I didn't. Press releases that get picked up help boost your rank.

There are all sorts of people and companies that want to sell you services to increase your rank. The steps I've taken to increase my rank have helped tremendously, and they were free.

PAID SEARCH

That said, there are some useful paid services, especially Google AdWords. These are the ads on the side of Google search pages. Sometimes, they're found on top. They're also on YouTube sites and smartphones, and they're typically a pay-per-click deal. (My employees like to tell me about all the weird places they've seen my Google ads.)

The great thing about Google AdWords is it's ridiculously easy to set up and can be quite targeted. Google has all sorts of on-line tutorials to help. You can set how much you'd like to pay on a daily basis, too. Spend a dollar, and see what happens.

Google AdWords only costs money if someone clicks on

Search engine optimization made easy for small music retailers with limited budgets

your ad. If you bid 99 cents per click and a customer clicks on it, Google will charge you 99 cents. Pretty easy. Still, if you only bid 25 cents per click, your ranking will be pretty low — you may not even show up on the first page. And if you're willing to spend \$100 per click, you'd better believe that Google will put you on the first page. Experiment with how much you'd like to spend per click to get your desired ranking.

When setting up your Google AdWords, be as targeted as you can be. Select a geographic area that makes sense to your market. You don't want people in Salt Lake City clicking on your ad and costing you money if you're attempting to lure them to Florida. You can include or exclude certain regions around your store. Plus, add a

description that makes people think you're talking to them. "Looking for a guitar that plays great? We've got it in stock."

Make sure your landing page — the page the person goes to if he or she clicks your ad — will talk to the customer, as well. If you have a targeted ad for key-boards, don't have them land on a page with shredder guitars.

The list of words that will trigger you to show up can be ridiculously long — one of my ads has more than 600 keywords. After a period of time, Google will suggest new keywords for your ad that you may have missed. Go ahead and add them if they're relevant. A tip: Put the names of your competitors, both local and Web-based, as keywords. If someone searches for Steve Weiss in my town, my

store shows up.

Here's an example that speaks to the power of targeted advertising. New York-based Alec Brownstein created Google ad campaigns targeting directors of various advertising companies where he wanted jobs. When these executives were ego surfing their names on the Web, they noticed the Google ads with their own names, asking for an interview. This sort of targeting can find and attract your target market — people in your town, searching for the stuff that you sell, and you only pay if they click on your ad.

TRACKING SEARCHES

Google Analytics offers a service that lets you find out more about people visiting your site and where they're coming

from. And it's free! Free is good.

You sign up with Google Analytics, and it will give you an HTML code that you insert on your Web pages. This code will send info back to the company, and you can see such things as how many hits you've received from search engines, referring sites and direct traffic.

You can see what country people are visiting from, what operating system and browser they're using, how much time they're spending on your site, and the most popular pages.

Your Web presence is an extension of your advertising plan and budget. It's easy to take charge of. Make it work for you to find your target customer. **MI**

Leslie Faltin is the co-owner of Instrumental Music Center in Tucson, Ariz.



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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

The Sleeper 'Sell'

In last February's issue of *Music Inc.*, I introduced the concept of 3-D selling, making a case that the independent retailer has an edge over its less-personal cyber and box retail competition. This dimensional advantage is also fraught with caveats — I stressed the importance of physical space, body language and gestures.

Now, let's look at the evolution of effective sales culture, the way staff approaches customers and strategizes how to make their lives better through the acquisition of our goods and services.



THE JUMP-THE-COUNTER APPROACH

The sale is too often conceptualized as a military action, taught for the last several decades as an aggressive frontal assault necessary to capture a decision to buy. I suggest that, though the individual components of this old-school strategy remain conceptually sound, a conquest mentality is usually counterproductive nowadays. Customers reject being sold or coerced. They're weary of Madison Avenue-hyped commercials and tired of junk mail and spam. News alert: They aren't coming to your store to be your commission. Arguably, they don't trust salespeople.

If the sale comes through a bait-and-switch or any kind of deceptive tactic, they'll be even less trusting of your store. Customers connected through social media and message boards will publicly have your head on a platter.

A more contemporary way to gain the advantage is to come from the side with a jump-the-counter approach. If you communicate, "I'm one of you," as someone partnered in the journey for the truth, you can go a long way in establishing, at minimum, a short-term professional relationship, if not a lifelong customer.

We do this when we participate in music together outside the store — if not directly, indirectly. You may not be in their church choir, but you might be in a choir. You may not be in their band, but maybe you're in, or were in, a band. These six degrees of separation make us effective as agents in a "sleeper cell." We can live as one of them for months, if not years, and one day, that golden opportunity arises. And through our con-

nections, they will unwittingly fall into our trap and succumb to our expertise.

A COUPLE TIPS

First, you can reduce the tension and the threat of space violation to a new customer by using props. If you walk toward strangers with nothing in your hands, they'll feel like a target. If you carry a tuner, instrument, piece of print music or empty box, it looks as if you're going about your duties, and your assistance is caring but prompt. This diversion goes down a lot easier when you initiate the preliminary inquisition.

Another proposition is the soft-core interrogation. Once they're talking, start listening, and only ask questions that can help you uncover their mission. Each question — how much, what features — is an invitation for a qualifying question on your part, such as, "Who recommended this instrument?" Or, "Where will you be playing this?" It's a conversation, not a conquest.

A sleeper cell can be within the microcosm of an individual sale or a personal community involvement. Whether in the moment or in the relationship, be one of them. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 30-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.

Eliminate military-esque sales tactics and be 'one' with your customers

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THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Welcome to the Jungle III

The website for Guitar Center's lessons program, gcstudios.com, claims, "We teach you to play your instrument, while you learn to play songs from popular bands so you can ultimately perform solo or in a band."

Are you doing this with your music lessons program? If not, why? You wouldn't want to be in a band that only played one gig a year or played the same songs all the time. But that might be exactly how your students and their parents perceive your lessons program. If you only hold one recital a year, chances are half your students will quit before they get a chance to take the stage.

Holding a student performance once or twice a year doesn't cut it. Set a goal to host a performance event every 60 days. People take music lessons because they want to play music. GC knows this and uses people's desire to play to market its lessons program. Show people that's what you do, too.

PERFORMANCE MATERIALS FOR NEWBIES

In last month's article, "Welcome to the Jungle II," I outlined some ideas for coordinating songs in your lessons program. Once you develop a list, it's easier to host student performances on a regular basis. One way to do this is to have your teachers use the same print music books. In doing so, they can collaborate on performances. And remember: Keep in mind the goal of giving all your students the got-on-stage-and-played experience as you develop this plan.

Books with CDs are ideal for students who've only been playing one to three months. Hal Leonard's *Easy Pop Rhythms* lets two or three students jam along with the same track. And, by using this book, all your students will know C, G, D and Em chords, which they will use when playing other songs.

Curnow Music's *Tons Of Tunes For The Beginner* is a good book for band instrument students. Put flute, trumpet, sax and trombone students together, and have the beginning band play along with the CD.

Level-two students who've been playing between four and six months can play the songs from *Tons Of Tunes* with a band. Inte-

grate drum and voice students. Develop your store's top 10 rock songs list, and work these songs into drum, guitar, piano and voice lessons. Bob Dylan's "Knockin' On Heaven's Door," for example, features an easy chord progression and drum groove, and it isn't hard to sing. Play it as a band.

Get input from your teachers, and build a performance track for your music lessons program. Don't overlook existing print music — you can increase sales by using it.

PROMOTION, PROMOTION

Also use performance events to cross-promote your teachers. Don't just host a piano recital; feature all types of instruments at the same event. It's more interesting for the audience. Plus, when people in the audience see a student playing the piano and other students playing trumpet and guitar, they'll think, "That's what I want to do." On the other hand, if attendees only see piano at the performance, that's all they'll assume you offer.

Use these performance events to show publicly the students' progress and advancement, along with all the fun they're having.

So c'mon Tarzan — take these ideas and rule the jungle. **MI**

Pete Gamber is the owner of Alta Loma Music in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. He welcomes questions and comments at pete@altalomamusic.com.



People take music lessons because they want to play music, so make sure performance events are ongoing



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THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Small-Box Lessons

So Guitar Center and Sam Ash have finally waded into the pool and are making ripples with their new lesson programs. You, like many independent MI retailers, may feel your safe haven is under attack from the deep pockets of national retail. Of course, if you've been around for the last 10 years, you've probably been under attack before. Remember Mars Music and, more recently, Best

Buy's inroads into MI and music lessons? I'm sure these keen retailers have done their homework and studied what everyone else is doing, so they can roll out venues where learning an instrument will be fun and educational. But after looking closely at the differences between the big-box boys and small mom and pops, I don't see a reinvented mousetrap, nor do I necessarily see us sharing the same customers.

In his May 2011 *Music Inc.* column, "Welcome to the Jungle," Pete Gamber suggested that astute store owners could look at big-box lesson programs and learn a thing or two. Gamber's article also pointed out that dealers who relied on GC and Sam Ash for lesson referrals are in trouble, and I couldn't agree more. I've always believed a healthy business shouldn't rely on referrals from a potential competitor, and I've always had a feeling that Sam Ash and GC were only a few steps away from moving into the lessons business. Yet, to truly prepare for more competition, we must examine big-box programs and what they mean to their bottom line.

DON'T FORGET MARS

According to a recent article in *Twice*, a consumer electronics trade magazine, Best Buy plans to shrink some of its U.S. stores and trim underperforming areas, such as CDs and DVDs. At the same time, it plans to capitalize

on accessories, support services and subscriptions for mobile, broadband, cable/satellite and digitally delivered content services. Nowhere in the article was there mention of Best Buy's MI plans or the lesson program's affect on the bottom line.

Of course, Sam Ash and GC are better positioned to make a go with music lessons. That said, their overall models seem similar,

and I believe they will eventually face many of the same pressures as Best Buy. Consider a recent report from Moody's Investors Service that Guitar Center has asked lenders to extend maturities of its \$650 million secured debt payments by two years to early 2017. The report also estimated GC's debt load to be \$1.6 billion. This hasn't stopped the company from rolling out new store models with an emphasis on lessons and rehearsal space.

Look back only 10 years to Mars Music, which had the first national lessons campaign from a big-box retailer. I used to worry about the company's big budgets and strong talk, but I went head to head with Mars with no budget when it was right across the street with 300 students. I opened with zero students, and within a few months, we pushed our way into 200 clients by offering lessons with quality teachers with a genuine interest in our customers.

I discovered something that a Moody's analyst or savvy investor can't pinpoint on a P&L statement, and we still work under that premise today. It's something money can't buy and something that's hard to instill in an employee who has never met the company owner or founder. That something is quality and genuine interest in the customer — two key ingredients for all lesson providers. Yes, the big guys will have quality in everything



Independent lesson programs have an X factor that big-box retailers can't replicate

they do, but it's up to you and your front line to show interest in your customers.

REAL RELATIONSHIPS

In my shops, we have solid relationships with customers, and we maintain and protect those relationships. We know our customers by name and live in the same neighborhoods. Our kids attend the same schools and day care centers, and we shop at the same neighborhood grocery stores. We sponsor the local PTA programs, donate to the school band programs and get involved — and by involved, I don't mean just as Facebook friends. We call or send postcards, not to sell product but to check in with them. We help carry their instruments and purchases to their minivans every week because they have their hands full with two kids and baby strollers. We say "hello" to everyone who walks through the door because we're genuinely glad to see them.

We periodically give them gift cards to restaurants and shops (locally owned) to thank them for being our patrons, and we have a special night at the local Triple-A baseball field where we rent a suite, complete with food and beverage, and give it to students and parents who've taken lessons with us for five or more years. Yes, it's expensive, but it's a fraction of what those clients have spent with us during five or more years as dedicated, quality customers.

You can spend millions on your facility and make it look as shiny as possible, but people coming into your shop aren't there to learn from your carpet, doors and fixtures. They want to have a relationship with the people in your store, and if you're genuine, you'll attract quality customers who want to be a part of your lessons program.

Customers aren't always looking for the lowest price, greatest store design, flashiest website or biggest showroom. Sometimes, they're simply looking for quality relationships with people who care about how their day's going, who don't greet them with sales pitches or always try upselling them.

Gamber mentioned the lessons binders that GC offers every new student, and I like that idea, as well. Still, I wonder if it will be too constricting to students' needs and our relationship-building process. Our personal relationships with clients set us

apart from so many lesson providers, big and small. Those relationships let us customize and tailor our lesson programs to each individual. That keeps our print music sales strong since we have multiple teachers using multiple method books. Developing a lesson program with a print partner is great, but you have to remember that every student is different and has different needs.

Your new competitors might advertise

their tailored lesson programs, expensive equipment and state-of-the-art facilities, but when they need to move product, they'll try it at the student's expense. The student will know it and won't fall for the gimmick. If you've treated students well from the start, they'll remember that relationship and stick with you. **MI**

Billy Cuthrell operates Progressive Music Center and askourmusicians.com. Contact him at billy@ppdsonline.com.

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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

Phone Handling 101

Do you remember dial phones? In this day and age of digital phone systems, VOIP and other technologies that will have probably changed by the time you read this, it's hard to remember a time when we had one phone line coming in the store. But whether you have one line or hundreds, the most basic principles of phone handling remain the same.



'The moment a person connects to your phone system, their total impression is based on what transpires.'

No matter the realities of how your company operates, the moment a person connects to your phone system, their total impression is based on what transpires. Even though your incoming calls may be peppered with solicitors or other unwelcome callers, you should assume that each call represents an opportunity.

In my current position, I make hundreds of phone calls per week, the vast majority of which are to music dealers. Some dealers are very professional and efficient in handling calls, but I've run into some issues that make my hair curl. We learn from other people's mistakes, so I thought I'd share the most critical blunders that I've heard over the phone.

The perpetual voice mail. This is so common that it's scary. I call a dealer during business hours, only to get a voice mail message stating that everyone is busy. I understand sometimes you get overwhelmed and can't get to the phone. But some dealers are *always* too busy to pick up. There was one dealer that I tried more than 30 times before I reached a live person. I understand times are tough, making it difficult to hire more staff. But this is a chicken-and-the-egg scenario. If you can't answer your phone, maybe your sales are off because you don't have enough help to handle the business.

Unanswered phones. Worse than perpetual voice mail is no voice mail at all. I hardly know what to make of it when I call a dealer and the phone rings 10 times without being answered. My guess is that customers just move on to the next dealer.

Lost messages. I'm astounded by how often I don't get call-backs. If you're lucky enough to have a customer who's actually willing to leave a message, you'd better be sure to call back pronto.

When writing this piece, I conducted an experiment. I blocked my caller ID and left messages with different fictitious names. With one dealer, I actually had six messages with six different names go unanswered.

May I speak with the president please? It's easier to get through to President Barack Obama than some music dealers. I don't get it. Some people are simply inaccessible, even after you get past the voice mail system. The other day, I actually had someone ask me, "Is he expecting your call?" Get over it. I was just one of 500 things he wasn't expecting that day.

Is this Minnie Mouse? Every person has his or her calling in life, and some people aren't meant to answer phones. Every so often, I run into someone who's difficult to understand. If you own a company, you owe it to yourself to call in once in a while and listen to the impression you're giving your customers.

If you're able to identify with any of these maladies, I suggest that you take immediate action to remedy them because my research suggests they're not isolated incidents. I'm seeing something of a plague that's undermining the effectiveness of one of our most powerful sales tools. **MI**

Gerson Rosenbloom is managing director of Wechter Guitars. He's former president of Medley Music and a past NAMM chairman. E-mail him at gersonmusicinc@gmail.com.

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Aaron Miller

RETAIL 2.0

AARON MILLER OF
PROGUITARSHOP ON
CREATING THE WORLD'S MOST
POPULAR MI VIDEOS AND
SEVEN YEARS OF GROWTH

Words and photos by Jeff Cagle

ON April 21, ProGuitarShop's staff uploaded a video to YouTube demonstrating Dunlop's JBF3 Joe Bonamassa Signature Fuzz Face pedal. Within one week, the 4-minute segment had been viewed more than 18,500 times. By the end of May, that number jumped to 85,000.

Not that it was an anomaly. Since signing up for a YouTube account in late 2007, ProGuitarShop has uploaded more than 1,000 videos that have been viewed more than 45 million times. Its YouTube channel alone has gotten 2.6 million hits and 50,000 subscribers. And the kicker: Aaron Miller, founder and owner of the Portland, Ore.-based dealership, said ProGuitarShop averages 60,000–70,000 YouTube views per day — and half that many for videos posted on his company's website, proguitarshop.com.

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{PROGUITARSHOP}

Not surprisingly, these viral videos sell gear. Up until 2008, ProGuitarShop's sales doubled annually, according to Miller. And while the recession slowed that rise, he said the company has continued to grow every year.

"Not only are viewers being exposed to unique product, but my company's name is put in front of people 2 million times on YouTube per month," Miller said. "Add in our own site, and our videos are viewed in the neighborhood of 3 million times per month."

BUY LOW, SELL HIGHER

In the early 2000s, Miller had a life savings of \$400 and was waiting tables in Portland. At the time, eBay and Craigslist began making names for themselves as free alternatives to paid newspaper classifieds. He thought he'd give them a try, even though he barely knew how to operate a computer.

He took his \$400 savings, bought a used Mesa Boogie Rocket 44 amp advertised in the paper and sold it on eBay for \$600 a week later. The foundation for ProGuitarShop was born.

"Two months later, I had sold \$10,000–\$12,000 on eBay, and my apartment was full of amps and guitars — I only had a walkway from my bedroom to my kitchen," Miller said. "I had taken my \$400 and kept reinvesting it. I'd make a couple hundred bucks and be happy but would start wondering what would happen if I bought something with \$600 instead of \$400. I just kept turning that investment, and within 60 days, my nest egg was up to \$5,000."

In 2004, he incorporated and moved into a 1,500-square-foot warehouse in Tigard, a Portland suburb. "It was just me and a desk sitting in the middle of a warehouse with a bunch of gear and packing supplies," he said, noting he also lived out of the facility for three years.

ProGuitarShop didn't venture outside of online retail at first — the buy-low, sell-high Internet retail model was too attractive as a startup. And for Miller, teaching himself search engine optimization was part of his learning process.

"I had two or three incarnations of a website before I came to a solution that actually worked and I started getting search

engine results and saw a little traffic out of it," he said.

These days, everyone in the complex knows ProGuitarShop. It has since moved into a 4,000-square-foot warehouse, video studio and office space — which Miller said the company has already outgrown — and in January opened a 3,500-square-foot show-

**Aaron Miller on
Internet retail
misconceptions:
'Hosting our
website costs as
much as the rent
for the downtown
store, and we are
in the highest rent
district in Portland.'**

room in Portland's Pearl District, an area that commands the highest rents in the city.

"I worked 10–14 hours a day, seven days a week," he said. "I was very motivated to make it work because the flip side of everything was I was going to go back to being a waiter."

ONLINE GROWTH

But as ProGuitarShop grew, so did the time Miller spent dealing with customer service issues. He'd brought on two employees but still handled everything service-related himself. It became overwhelming.

"I was answering so many e-mails asking, 'What does this sound like versus this,' or to describe this esoteric sound versus this, and you couldn't try these products out anywhere," Miller said.

His found an ace in the hole with Andy Martin, a warehouse employee and gear expert with a degree in videography. While Martin was packing boxes, Miller asked if it would be possible to make a video demonstrating effects pedals, so he could direct questions to it. They gave it a shot.

"It didn't sound very good," Miller said of their early video offerings. "We didn't

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+ PROGUITARSHOP'S VIDEO MODEL



+ CLOSE-UP LOOK

ProGuitarShop's demo video for the Orange limited-edition Union Jack Rockverb 50 head and cabinet opens with gear guru Andy Martin riffing on the dirty channel with reverb engaged. An inset of the amp's control knobs (lower right) illustrates such settings as volume, treble, middle, bass and gain. Any time settings are changed, a caption appears showing what's engaged.



+ PHOTO MONTAGE

After a minute of riffing, Martin discusses the amp's features, while a photo montage shows off the unit. The photos were taken in ProGuitarShop's on-site photo studio.



+ FEATURE WALK-THROUGH

Martin then demos other amp channels using different riffs. Again, captions and inserts display the exact settings. Aaron Miller said it takes two people a full day to produce a pedal video and up to a day and a half for a guitar or amp video.

know what we were doing. We just took a [Shure] SM57 miked on a speaker straight into a computer. It sounded horrible, but the response was instant."

While checking Web traffic, Miller noticed a bunch of hits linking in from The Gear Page forum. Discussion on the website revolved around what a great service ProGuitarShop provided with its videos. The downside? Users hammered the sound quality.

"Here were all of these guys who are really passionate and invested an interest in what I did, but it doesn't sound good enough that they're going to find it useful," Miller said. "I created a forum account right then and told them to check back in a couple of weeks, so I could work on the sound quality. I went out and spent everything I could on recording equipment, and that's when it really began.

"I identified right then that video was my road to success, but it goes beyond video. It was about having an original idea."

CREATING THE INTANGIBLE

When asked what makes a ProGuitarShop video successful, Miller turned the question around and said, "Define success." Video views and sales figures are easily measurable, but customer loyalty is an intangible that's equally important but harder to track.

"Our videos can turn into direct sales, but they also turn into customer loyalty," Miller said. "Don't focus on the quick sale. Give them a reason to come and use your website other than, 'Buy this from me for \$99.95.'"

One way ProGuitarShop creates loyalty is through The Scoop video series. During its first episode, which went online in July 2010, Martin talks about

his first guitar and its history. It happened to be the first of a dozen built by his father, Greg Martin of Redtail Guitars. A recent episode of The Scoop chronicles ProGuitarShop's travels to Denmark. The company visits TC Electronic's headquarters to create TonePrints, a series of custom settings by renowned guitarists that can be uploaded to TC's effects pedals. It made ProGuitarShop the first company to join TC's distinguished list of TonePrint artists, which include Orianthi, Steve Morse and John Petrucci.

On Facebook, ProGuitarShop's Free Pedal Fridays campaign gives away a pedal to one of the store's 30,000-plus Facebook fans at the end of each week. When discussing his company's Facebook strategy, Miller said it's as simple as engaging customers.

"These are people who love to talk about gear," he said. "Ninety percent of the time, I'm not talking about selling. It's a conversation.

"There's plenty to be had in business — don't just take. It's very transparent in today's society: If you hoard everything, people see right through it."

ONLINE RETAIL MISCONCEPTIONS

Miller likens his efforts to engage customers online to a brick-and-mortar dealership's music lessons program.

"Retailers offer lessons and develop lessons for a reason: It brings in traffic. It isn't a free resource, but those lessons drive traffic and you're not trying to sell. It engages and opens up a conversation and is really the same thing online. Give them a reason to come to your store that is resourceful. Ask them a question. Get them involved in your company. Share like experiences with them."

As with a traditional brick-and-mortar retailer, educated, skilled employees are essential to ProGuitarShop's model. "And if you want them to be really good at what they do, you have to pay for it," Miller said. ProGuitarShop's 16 full-time employees have duties ranging from video production, warehouse management, graphic design, Web development, and sales and marketing. The company handles all of its own graphic design, Web development and video production in-house. And, as Miller pointed out, the cost of this adds up.

"There is a misconception that it's more expensive to do local retail, and it isn't," he said. "Your average-size brick-and-mortars don't have to have a warehouse manager, incoming and outgoing freight coordinators, and shipping personnel. Credit card processing online is almost double what it is when a card is present."

There are other hidden costs, too. ProGuitarShop constantly upgrades its servers, computer hardware and software. To put it in perspective, Miller said, "Hosting our website costs as much as the rent for the downtown store, and we are in the highest rent district in Portland."

ONLINE TO ON-SITE

So why did ProGuitarShop invest in a brick-and-mortar presence after so much success online? According to Miller, he needed to add a greater sense of legitimacy to his company.

"Some manufacturers are more concerned with filling 20 guitar hooks on the wall than they are with us shipping 20 guitars a day," Miller said. "[Opening the Portland store] legitimized what we do and opens doors."

It doesn't hurt that the store is situated within walking distance of major music venues. Miller noted that plenty of nationally recognized acts know ProGuitarShop and now have the opportunity to stop by the store, which happens on an almost weekly basis.

And despite the high cost of running a brick-and-mortar operation, he said the Portland store turned a profit within the first quarter of opening. He attributed it to location, along with overall product selection and service.



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"We don't pay commission to our employees," Miller said. "We pay a competitive hourly rate that basically equals what they would make if they were a very solid commissioned employee elsewhere. We focus on a team-based environment. I want these guys working together, not fighting over a customer."

"We have a very specialized product, and not every guy in our store can be an expert in every category. If you are on a commissioned sales program, that salesguy has no incentive to find the right employee to sell that product, even if he knows nothing about it. In our store, he has every incentive to say, 'You know what? Let me find the guy who has the answer for you,' and get the right product in the customer's hand."



Aaron Miller inside ProGuitarShop's new Portland, Ore., showroom

HIGH-END RETURN

Despite the recession, Miller has watched ProGuitarShop's high-end business flourish and said it continues to do so by double digits. To him, it boils

down — again — to having the right selection and best service.

"It comes down to a phone call and white-glove service," Miller said. "It's all about the relationships you build. If a customer is

willing to spend \$2,000–\$4,000 on a guitar, you don't want him to get just any guitar because he's going to send it back and likely won't buy from you again. You want to get him the right guitar, so he can have the best experience with your company."

Miller said ProGuitarShop's success doesn't ride on the back of video — his company simply had an original idea and was the first to execute it successfully.

"That's what we try to do every day," he said. "We're a marketing company. We just happen to get paid for that marketing by selling gear."

"Our obstacles and challenges are our biggest opportunities. Our biggest challenges are finding enough time and funds to capitalize on the abundance of opportunity in this industry." **MI**

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THE GUIDE

2011 SUMMER NAMM

2011 SUMMER NAMM | BY KATIE KAILUS

BRING ON THE HEAT

The Nashville, Tenn., heat index will hit new highs from July 21–23. That’s when Summer NAMM rolls into town, bringing with it the show’s inaugural dealer awards, a public day and a slew of educational opportunities. The event will be held at the Nashville Convention Center.

THE DEALER OSCARS

NAMM will host its first Top 100 Dealer Awards on the evening of Friday, July 22. The new program recognizes outstanding music retailers in “best of” categories, including “Best Curb Appeal,” “Best Use of Social Media” and “Best Sales Promotion,” along with such categories as “Support Music Local Advocacy Award,” “Wanna Play ‘Music Makes a Difference’ Award” and “Dealer of the Year.”

Attendees will get to see dealers’ submissions and the elements that propelled these 100 businesses to the top of the industry.

“I’m looking forward to recognizing our members for the great work they do each day and sharing some of the best practices within our community to help everyone grow stronger,” said NAMM President and CEO Joe Lamond.



2011 Summer NAMM features the first annual dealer awards

“We hope this event will gain momentum in future years and become another good reason for dealers to attend Summer NAMM.”

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

An earlier version of NAMM’s public day debuted at last year’s show with Wanna Play Music Sunday. This year, NAMM’s unveiling a bona fide public day on Saturday, July 23, opening the show floor to musicians and in-

dustry outsiders.

To boost traffic, the organization has teamed up with consumer magazines, including *Guitar Player*, *Bass Player*, *Keyboard*, *Electronic Musician* and *Modern Drummer*, to market the public day to their readers. The publications will promote the event to more than 1 million combined subscribers each month and offer a free three-month subscription to all Wanna Play Music Day ticket buyers. The publications will also participate in creating consumer clinics, master classes and themed events for the public on Saturday.

“We’ll have some great clinics, workshops, panels and educational sessions and special events like the World’s Fastest Drummer

competition and *Guitar Player*’s Guitar Superstar contest,” Lamond said.

INFORMATION STATION

Music Inc. columnists will be represented in full force at the convention, with educational sessions hosted by such experts as Alan Friedman, Greg and Grant Billings, Danny Rocks, and Pete Gamber. Lamond also called “The NAMM Retail Summit,” Thursday morning’s NAMM U Breakfast Session featuring author Robin Lewis, a not-to-miss educational opportunity.

“[Lewis] will explore how our members can stay ahead of the many rapid changes occurring in this new phase of retailing and give them some ideas about how to make the most of this sales year,” he said.

Lamond added that he believes there’s still a need for the industry to meet over the summer.

“We’re hearing time and time again how fast the game is changing and how critical it is for the industry to come together to navigate these changes,” he said. “We feel it’s an important role for the association to provide this opportunity for our members and the rest of the industry to meet, do business and learn this summer.” **MI**

THURSDAY, JULY 21 BREAKFAST SESSION 8 A.M.

The NAMM Retail Summit
Joe Lamond, NAMM, and Robin Lewis, co-author of The New Rules Of Retail: Competing In The World's Toughest Marketplace
Renaissance Nashville, Grand Ballroom

This session focuses on the critical changes taking place in retail and the vital information you need to stay in business and thrive.

10:30 A.M.

Wave a Wand and Make My Problems Disappear
Alan Friedman and Daniel Jobe; Friedman, Kanenberg & Company
Join these industry accountants, and discover a few simple business practices that can turn your financial nightmares into the joy of lucrative business ownership.

11 A.M.

Successful Promotions on a Dime: Creative Ways to Drive New Customers and Students to Your Store
Liz Reisman, Creative Music Center

11:30 A.M.

Store Makeover on a Dime — You Found What on Craigslist?
Lisa Kirkwood, Discount Music of Jacksonville
Kirkwood explains how she furnished her store on a budget.

DOUBLE SESSION

Noon

The Basics to Valuing Music Stores
Alan Friedman

Participate in a hands-on approach to valuing a music store in today's market.

1 P.M.

Cloud Computing — Bringing Google Docs Down to Earth
Peter Dods, Easy Music Center

1:30 P.M.

Stake Your Claim! Make Your Google Place Page Work for You
Grant Billings, Steinway Piano Gallery Madison and Music Inc. columnist
Join Billings as he demonstrates how to claim and build

a Google Place Page for your business in just 30 minutes.

2 P.M.

Customer Loyalty Ladder
Robin Walenta, West Music
Create a customer relationship-based culture that supports repeat and loyal customers.

2:30 P.M.

Get Out in Your Community to Help Your Business Thrive — It's a Win-Win
Gordy Wilcher, Owensboro Music Center

3 P.M.

Getting Things Done: Organization for Creative Types
Donovan Bankhead, Springfield Music

3:30–5:00 P.M.

90-Minute Session
I Love to Buy! Now, I May Need Some Help to Sell Thru
Danny Rocks, The Company Rocks; Alan Friedman & Panel
Learn the steps these retailers have taken to make sure that the products they bought actually got sold.

FRIDAY, JULY 22 BREAKFAST SESSION 8 A.M.

The Top 10 Web Marketing Trends and How to Use Them
John Arnold, Marketing Writer and Columnist at Entrepreneur.com
Renaissance Nashville, Grand Ballroom

Learn the best ways to spend your time and money, how to use such tools as social media and search marketing, and how not to invest where you won't get results.

10:30 A.M.

How to Use Facebook to Market Your Business: The Do's & Don'ts
Music Inc. columnists Greg Billings and Grant Billings of Steinway Piano Gallery
Learn how to improve your business with Facebook and how to make interesting, relevant and engaging postings.

11 A.M.

How to Capitalize on Your Greatest Source of New Business

Bob Popyk, founder of Bentley-Hall; Music Trades columnist

11:30 A.M.

How to Handle Objections in 5 Words or Less
Bob Popyk

Noon

Shoot for the Star\$, You Might Hit the Moon
Daniel Jobe

Jobe gives a strategy for engaging the members of your team and helps you find additional income within your store.

12:30 P.M.

Hook Them With Your Home Page
Kate Blom; Associate Director of Marketing & Communications, NAMM
Blom discusses skipping the jargon, keeping your contact information up to date and keeping your site simple.

1 P.M.

Marketing Locally on the Internet
John Arnold

Get tips on how to advertise your business on thousands of local websites, maps, search pages, blogs and more.

1:30 P.M.

Monetize Your Facebook Page
John Arnold

2 P.M.

The Top 10 Marketing & Promotion Ideas That Experts Say "Try Now"
Scott Robertson, Director of Marketing & Communications, NAMM, with retail panel
This session features the Top 10 ideas from varied retailers who have firsthand experience of what does and doesn't work.

DOUBLE SESSION

2:30 P.M.

Fan Your Success
Presented by Jen Lowe, Boom-Boom Percussion; Tony Caporale, TwinBear Management
Learn how to identify your fans and how to engage, involve and inspire them.

3:30 P.M. — Special Three-Part Series

Get Ready for the "Next Generation" of Music Lessons, Part 1: Applying Social Media and the Internet to

Your Music Lesson Program

Pete Gamber, Alta Loma Music and columnist for Music Inc.
Discover how to use social media to create new lesson signups, position your music store prominently on Google and the Web, and more.

4 P.M.

Get Ready for the "Next Generation" of Music Lessons, Part 2: Print Music and Your Lesson Program
Pete Gamber
Learn how the power of music lessons and print music can increase your cash flow and success.

4:30 P.M.

Get Ready for the "Next Generation" of Music Lessons, Part 3: Where's Your "Woodstock"?
Pete Gamber
Learn how to implement your print music program, social media, and inherent heart and soul to thrive.

SATURDAY, JULY 23 BREAKFAST SESSION 8 A.M.

Best in Show: This Year's Hottest Products
Frank Alkyer, Music Inc.'s publisher, with panel
Renaissance Nashville, Grand Ballroom

Join the panel of retail buyers and gear experts as they discuss the show's best products and trends.

DOUBLE SESSION

10:30 A.M.

What is Working in My Music Store Now
Danny Rocks
Rocks shares tips on what product mix to buy right now and more.

11:30 P.M.

Successful Lessons Series: Selling Lessons as a Retail Item
Donovan Bankhead

Noon

Build Your Own Buzz — and Grow Your Business!
Presented by Rick Hubbard, Kazoobie Kazoos

12:30–4 P.M.

Wanna Play Music Day Clinics and Sessions

WHAT to SEE



Revamped & Ready

St. Louis Music will unveil the redesigned and revamped Alvarez Artist series and Alvarez Masterworks series. The Artist series offers a variety of colors and a wide range of styles. The Masterworks series features modern, thin-profile necks and is designed for fast playability. stlouismusic.com

SKB's Footnotes

SKB recently released the 1SKB-FN-8 FootNote, its first amplified pedalboard. Features include a built-in 5-watt combo amp and a 6-inch Eminence speaker, a headphone output for silent practice, and a line out for live or recording use. MAP: \$179.99. skbcases.com

Singin' the Blues

The Loar's new LO-16 updates the traditional L-00-shaped body style and features a hand-selected solid spruce top. The guitar boasts a mahogany back and sides and a mother-of-pearl headstock inlay. The LO-16 also rocks a historic blues guitar look with its black finish. MAP: \$329.99. themusiclink.net

Boulder's Strong Lineup

Boulder Creek Amps have been designed for the most discriminating acoustic players. The amps' compact size, natural tone and convenient control panels make them ideal for both stage and studio use. boulder creekguitars.com

211 Guitars.....	1701
3RD POWER Amplification.....	1627
Abbatron.....	547
acouStaCorp.....	327
Advanced Plating.....	913
AFM.....	140
Akai Professional.....	400
Alesis LLC.....	400
Alto Professional.....	400
Amedia Cymbals USA.....	505
American Audio.....	518
American DJ Supply, Inc.....	518
American Educational Products.....	210
American Express Open.....	162
American Way Marketing LLC.....	230
Ampeg.....	928
Amptweaker, LLC.....	1710
AMV Sales & Consultation LLC.....	1636
ANAFIMA.....	721
Analysis Plus.....	547
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AP International.....	629
AQUARIAN.....	713
ART-Applied Research and Tech.....	300
Art Strings Publishing.....	1018
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Audio Plus Services, Inc.....	309
AxeGlove.....	1343
B & S USA.....	232
BA Ferguson Guitars.....	268
Bass Player.....	928
Beamz Interactive, Inc.....	418
Bedell Guitars.....	1210
BES Audio.....	1330
Big Island Ukulele Co.....	1009
Bite Me Electric Guitars.....	233
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BlueBook OnLine.....	1027
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BOSS.....	900
Cedar Creek Custom Case.....	1106
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Cherry Lane Music.....	1018
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EASTMANSTRINGS.COM

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Gretsch Co.....700

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HUGHES-AND-KETTNER.COM

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HUNTER MUSIC

BOOTH 828

HUNTERMUSICAL.COM

International Bluegrass Music.....	150
IEBA.....	150
ION Audio.....	400
Istanbul Mehmet Cymbals.....	500
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SKB

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TWENTY-SEVEN DEALER-RECOMMENDED
RISING GUITAR BRANDS THAT ARE
REINVIGORATING THE MARKET

+ Unsung Heroes

THE NEW SCHOOL

* Dealers recommend these entry-level models with students and hobbyists in mind. Also, note one of the industry's most talked about accessories, which keeps newbies from falling flat.

SNARK SN2 CHROMATIC CLIP-ON TUNER

With its bright, colorful display and effortless portability, Snark's flagship product is a runaway hit. Jason Pachona of PM Music Center in Aurora, Ill., said he loves the Snark tuner for its price point and margin, as well as its universal appeal and merchandising possibilities. "We always have it on the headstock of a ukulele or guitar," he said. "Plus, we try to tune all our string instruments with them, so customers can see us using them."



LUNA GUITARS SAFARI TRAVEL GUITAR

"Our teachers recommend the Safari guitars, and our desk staff recommends them when anyone signs a student up for our guitar group class or private lessons," said Billy Cuthrell of Progressive Music Center in Raleigh, N.C. At three-quarter size, slightly over 3 pounds and packaged with a gig bag, Luna's travel model has become the ideal starter guitar for the 6- to 9-year-old set. "Get them a quality instrument that does not break the bank to start with, and you will have a greater chance of them sticking with it than if they are playing a low-budget junk instrument," Cuthrell said. "[Luna instruments] stay in tune and sound like a real guitar because they are a real guitar."

AUSTIN GUITARS With four entry-priced models — including student-friendly "000"-sized acoustic pieces — the Austin line has become popular in the classroom. Evan Jones of Bandland Music in Clarksburg, W.V., keeps parents in the loop by promoting Austin through his education reps. "We have also started selling guitars to schools, as there are more guitar classes being offered," Jones said.

LANIKAI UKULELE

PACK Like it or not, the uke has transitioned from short-lived fad to retail mainstay. Lanikai has been a best-seller for Rick's Music World in Raynham, Mass., where owner Rick Santos cross-merchandises Lanikai ukes with Snark ukulele tuners for increased add-on potential. One instructor even put a uke in the hands of every student and taught them a simple song. "They really get hooked and end up buying a uke, too," Santos said.

THE OLD SCHOOL

✿ Retro aficionados and collectors alike are delighting in these boutique and vintage-style wares.

MAD PROFESSOR BLUEBERRY BASS OVER-DRIVE

The Mad Professor Blueberry Bass Overdrive makes low-end vintage tone readily available. This true-bypass pedal offers the overdrive qualities of a classic tube amp with bass player-friendly low-frequency clipping control. "[Mad Professor] pedals have done very well here," said Lindsey Petsch of Atlanta's Maple Street Guitars. "Nothing sells something like just putting it in somebody's hands. I usually tell anyone who walks through the door about it."



FANO GUITARS ALTO DE FACTO JM6

An avid vintage enthusiast himself, Cory Ferraro of Cranford Guitar & Music Center in Garwood, N.J., picked up a Fano guitar and fell in love. "I was amazed by the tone and how effortlessly it played," he said. The JM6's round '50s shape complements Fralin P90 pickups for a modern throwback with classic tone. When it comes to marketing the Fano brand, Ferraro said the boutique business demands a "maximum-exposure approach." He advertises in guitar magazines, while maintaining an active online presence. "The key is to keep [customers] interested in your brand by interacting with them in those mediums," Ferraro said.



LSL GUITARS T-BONE

One of the first dealers to stock these hand-crafted axes, Dan Duran of California Vintage and Guitar in Sherman Oaks, Calif., said his stock of aged T-Bones fares well with the vintage Fender-loving set. "We were his first customer and have probably sold more of his guitar than any other store," Duran said.



STRYMON EL CAPISTAN

"Strymon has made some technological advances that have given them a temporary feature edge," said Jan Howell of New York's Ludlow Guitars. None has received as much critical acclaim as the El Capistan pedal, which recreates the hard-to-achieve warmth of a late '60s tape echo using hand-crafted dTape technology. Along with five knobs for versatile DSP tone shaping, the pedal offers a range of "hidden features" — tape crinkle, tape bias and low-end contour — that can be accessed for even more concise tape echo control.

NEW VINTAGE RETRIBUTION 30

Aaron Peterson of MacDaddy Music in Salem, Ill., has predicted that the New Vintage will turn heads among the weekend warrior set. He said the high degree of customization and lifespan of this "heirloom amp" are important selling points. It's "something that will outlast the original owner and be something passed down through a family," he added. Featuring three 12AX7 tubes, the single-channel Retribution 30 serves up 30 watts of clean British sound, encased in a high-grade pine cabinet.



EASTWOOD GUITARS AIRLINE SERIES

Greg Decker of Denver's Music Gear Guys said that Eastwood is bringing the '60s to a new generation. With "retro looks and modern tone," the Airline series has cultivated the interest of young artists and retro-philes. Decker said Eastwood lets customers "obtain their youth with guitars they always lusted over as a kid. Honestly, they sell themselves!"

TONE CONTROL

✿ Retailers sound off on the industry's coolest-sounding gear, made especially for audiophiles seeking the ultimate tone.

ENGL POWERBALL 645/2 For Brian Meader of Washington Music Center in Wheaton, Md., ENGL inquiries tend to come from the 20-something metal set. But many customers are pleasantly surprised by the line's more classic applications. Meader said he abides by a "bigger is better" merchandising mantra, using a large stack display and a second "boutique corner."

PROVIDENCE EFFECTS DLY-4 CHRONO DELAY Aaron Peterson of MacDaddy Music in Salem, Ill., said that Japan-based Providence Effects supplies "one of the most comprehensive and best-sounding delays on the market." Attractive to people in search of top-quality analog effects, the Godlyke-distributed DLY-4 Chrono Delay's Vitalizer feature curbs signal degradation, while Beat Split simplifies tedious quantization with seven time variations.

EMPRESS SUPERDELAY For Aaron Miller at Pro-GuitarShop in Tigard, Ore., the best way to draw tech-savvy "pedal geeks" and high-end buyers to Empress pedals is through creative online videos. He emphasized the Empress Superdelay as one to watch. The compact, ergonomic delay pedal features 2.8 seconds of extra-long delay time, fast and slow modulation effects, and eight modes, including a 12-second looper. "It is an exceptional-sounding delay pedal — world class tone and functionality," Miller said.

PIGTRONIX TREMVELOPE This up-and-coming boutique effects series has found overwhelming popularity online. Jason Kae of Drum City-Guitarland in Wheat Ridge, Colo., said he's already "stocking the whole line." Its envelope-modulated tremolo pedal comes equipped with not only versatile speed and depth controls but also an acceleration option to adjust response time, creating rotating speaker-like acoustics for Leslie fans.

JOE BARDEN ELECTRONICS JAZZ BASS PICKUPS

These aren't exactly newcomers, but Joe Barden has broadened its product range. Matt Baker of Action Music in Arlington, Va., has a 40-foot case of pickups and pedals. "Put Bardens on a guitar, and anybody can walk onstage and you will hang right in there," Baker said.



TREGAN GUITARS SYREN SERIES

Mike Walsh at GuitarQuest in Thomasville, N.C., attributed Tregan's success to the Syren line's high-end look and "miles-above" construction, along with the company's attentive customer service. Its quick response to a recent inquiry actually prompted a customer to purchase a second Tregan a few weeks after he bought his first. As an online dealer, Walsh uses Google AdWords to draw in the younger crowd.

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GOING PRO

* Dealers say these axes and amps will make any professional player gig-ready — on the road or in the studio.

DBZ GUITARS BOLERO Frank Cuevas of Music Nation 1 in Rockford, Ill., called Dean Zelinsky's custom-style axes "the next evolution of standard guitars." He referred to the popular mahogany-bodied, maple-top Bolero as a "refined, next-generation Les Paul," an electric with a body style and fretwork that create an immediate "wow" factor for customers who can forgo the "label mindset." He shows them how the streamlined-shaped neck design makes for seamless playability and unique tone.

BLACKSTAR HT CLUB 40 COMBO AMPLIFIER The secret to pushing Blackstar's gig-friendly Venue series amps at Daddy's Junky Music Store in Manchester, N.H.? It's all about placement, according to Lew DiTommaso. He's created a Blackstar "hotspot" to redirect foot traffic. With combos starting at \$249, DiTommaso can "determine the budget, expertise and style of the customer." The HT Club 40 Combo's overdrive switch alternates between "a sensational clean channel that is difficult to accomplish in many amps twice the price and a high-gain, gorgeous tube-saturated second channel that rips," DiTommaso said.

REVEREND GUITARS SEN-SEI RT Reverend has made such a name for itself in the retail marketplace that the line takes up a third of the guitar merchandise at Durdell's Music in Toledo, Ohio. "They have their own section here," said Fred Shuman, Durdell's owner. "I stock about 10 or 15 of them at a time." By separating his Reverend inventory from the rest of his stock, mature players and seasoned pros have started to take note of the line's potential. The brand's latest addition, the set-neck Sensei RT, comes equipped with a double-cutaway korina body and custom-designed hot Revtron pickups for a boosted midrange.

RECORDING KING RD-316

"We've had less returns for work on Recording Kings than any other guitar," said Joe Vest of Big Joe's Guitar Works in Madison, Tenn. The brand has garnered popularity among Nashville studio musicians because of its affordable price and pro features — real dovetail neck joints, forward scalloped X-bracing and high-grade materials. Vest readily stocks them with his high-end acoustics and said that most pros in search of a Martin typically walk out the door with a Recording King.

EASTMAN GUITARS AR880

Eastman's newly revamped archtop guitars and mandolins have sparked the interest of bluegrass players normally grounded in American tradition. "To see them talking about Eastman mandolins and recommending them amongst themselves, that's a massive change of attitude," said Fred Petsch of Atlanta's Maple Street Guitars. He's meticulous about setups, which he believes are fundamental to selling the line. "We invest in making sure everything is set up properly," Petsch said. "I can unreservedly recommend it because I've hand-selected it."



CLEARTONE COATED

STRINGS A "front-and-center" mantra sells Cleartone coated strings for Mills Music's Brian Bell. "They are some of the first things people see when they come in," said the Kennewick, Wash., dealer. He has a Cleartone-only display to set the company's product apart from his other string brands. Unlike other coated strings, Cleartone's protective EMP film prolongs the lifespan of a set without compromising tone.

O-PORT

Using custom-blended materials for maximum flexibility and sound hole protection, the O-Port suppresses feedback and enhances the clarity of any acoustic guitar. It's readily available for demo at Firehouse Guitars in Grandville, Mich., where Terry Lewis keeps them installed in similar models for cross-comparison. "I had two Seagull S6 guitars, one with the product, one without," Lewis said. "What a difference! They pretty much sell themselves."

KALA U-BASS

The anticipation for Kala's short-scale U-Bass has been so great that Scott Maxwell of Reno's Music has even created a separate website, ukulelehotline.com, to further promote the ukulele category. Along with a uke-specific book section, he's spread out 20 ukes over 16 feet of slatwall, which garners the attention of almost every customer base. "Families, kids, adults and musicians — they are all part of the demographic for this easy music maker," he said.



AX-CESSORIES

* The guitar sector's hottest new margin-producing add-ons.

BLUE CHIP PICKS Concocted from a "space age" composite, Blue Chip picks provide tortoiseshell tone without any wear or need to polish. Their self-lubricating properties make for flawless, quick play, and the critically revered brand also comes as thumbpicks. "You can't break it," said Joe Vest of Big Joe's Guitar Works.

SOULDIER STRAPS "[Soldier] has really given the girls something different," said Raegan Medeiros of John Michael's Music and Sound in Muskogee, Okla. The designs "fit a niche that we have dubbed the 'Taylor Swift Girls,'" she added, referring to 8- to 16-year-olds who opt for something slightly more sophisticated. She suggested pairing the strap with a traditional guitar as a great selling technique, especially "when the daughter wants a pink guitar and the parents are looking at something less trendy."

STONEWORKS PICKS

Carved out of agate jasper, StoneWorks picks "actually recreate the sound of a real tortoiseshell pick," said Harry Gillum of Showtime Music in Bridgeport, W.V. "Plus, they're very unique-looking." Gillum hands the picks to acoustic players who are demoing guitars and also arranges 25 of them at each point-of-sale area. "It's almost like potato chip bags on a clip rack."

GEAR



GODIN | MULTIAC ENCORE NYLON

Encore, Encore

Godin's new Multiac Encore Nylon offers players all the features found in the Multiac electro-acoustic lineup, including custom electronics and the ability to play in live and loud band settings with virtually no feedback. The guitar comes equipped with Godin custom electronics and features a chambered silverleaf maple body with a solid cedar top. MSRP: \$995. godinguitars.com



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Brubaker gets beastly
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Lick Library plays with Petty
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- > **DJ & Lighting**
American DJ lights up the floor
[PAGE 92](#)



AER | AMP THREE

Three's Company

AER has expanded its Bottom Line series of electric bass combos with the Amp Three. Based on a 200-watt power amp, Amp Three employs a pair of 8-inch bass speakers. The smaller speakers enhance the low-mids for clarity and punch, providing the necessary focus to cut through in both live and studio situations. MSRP: \$2,199. aer-amps.info

ELECTRO-HARMONIX | STEREO TALKING MACHINE

Blah, Blah, Blah

Electro-Harmonix's new Stereo Talking Machine Vocal Formant Filter recreates the characteristics of vowels and reshapes instruments' signals to mimic them. The new pedal provides nine selectable voices that deliver vowel sounds, as well as Bassball and wah-type dynamic filters. The unit has stereo outputs and an effects loop. MSRP: \$290. ehx.com



FENDER | PAWN
SHOP SERIES

Pawn Stars

Fender has unveiled its new Pawn Shop series guitars: the Fender '51, Fender '72 and Mustang Special. These guitars draw inspiration from Fender's creations of the mid-1960s to mid-'70s era. The Pawn Shop Fender '51 features a Stratocaster body and a C-shaped Telecaster neck. The Pawn Shop Fender '72 is a combination of classic Fender design elements, while the Pawn Shop Mustang Special features a modified offset Mustang body with a 1960s vibe. fender.com



GEAR

GUITARS, AMPS & ACCESSORIES

CORT GUITARS | EARTH 100

Earthy Enhancement

Cort Guitars has enhanced the Earth 100 acoustic with upgraded multiple abalone rosette inlays, body and neck binding, advanced scalloped x-bracing, and a genuine bone nut and saddle for enhanced tone. The Earth 100, a dreadnought-body acoustic guitar, boasts a solid Sitka spruce top and mahogany back and sides. MSRP: \$359. cortguitars.com



LEVY'S LEATHERS |
TIE-DYED STRAPS

Tie-Dyed Tapestry

Levy's Leathers has expanded its Platinum Collection line with a tie-dyed leather strap. The straps include foam padding with a soft leather backing and are available in purple, gray and brown. levysleathers.com

EMG | JH SET

Metal Mania

EMG's new JH Set was designed with the input of Metallica frontman James Hetfield. Featuring sleek black nickel-plated caps, the JH Set consists of the JH-N neck and the JH-B bridge. emgpickups.com





BRUBAKER | BRUTE SERIES

Beastly Axes

The new Brute series from Brubaker boasts a combination of single- and dual-coil-style pickups. These basses deliver a wide variety of tones thanks to such features as the Brubaker patented bolt-thru neck joint, Brubaker 5200 series dual-coil bridge and single-coil neck pickups, and B-3200 series active pre-amp. **{brubakerguitars.com}**



KALA | SOLID BODY U-BASS

Slappin' the Bass

Kala has released its Solid Body U-Bass. The solid body design is the next step in the evolution of Kala's line of 21-inch-scale bass instruments, which are equipped with polyurethane strings noted for their bottom end. The U-Basses are available in four- and five-string models with the option of a fretted or fretless fingerboard. The four color options include Translucent Satin Black, Skyline Red, Espresso and Natural Ash. **{kalaukulele.com}**

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Bassist for Bonnie Raitt
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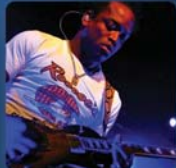
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GUITARS, AMPS & ACCESSORIES

TRAVELER | TB-4P

Travel Buddy

The new Traveler Guitar TB-4P is a 32-inch-scale electric travel bass with a built-in headphone amplifier and 1/8-inch aux-in jack for MP3 players. It's lightweight and measures about 35 inches long, letting it fit in airline overhead compartments. The bass features an Eastern American hard maple neck with a rosewood fretboard and an alder body fitted with a P-51 split-coil pickup. travelerguitar.com



REVEREND | REEVES GABRELS SIGNATURE

Added Versatility

Reverend's Reeves Gabrels Signature guitar now has a Wilkinson Trem that's recessed into the Korina body, adding versatility. The Reeves attains clarity with power through the high-output, coverless Reverend humbucker at the bridge and the DiMarzio Fast Track 1 at the neck. The guitar is available in transparent red and transparent black. reverendguitars.com

SHUBB | UKULELE CAPO

Island Sounds

The new Shubb Ukulele Capo is made of brass and uses Shubb's original cam lever design. It closes onto a smaller neck and accommodates a slightly wider fretboard. The capo's ideal for all tenors, sopranos, concerts and baritones. MSRP: \$24.95. shubb.com





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KÖNIG & MEYER | GUARDIAN

Stand by Me

König & Meyer's new Guardian guitar stand line features three- and five-guitar models. Flexible protective hangers stop the guitars from rotating and prevent damage when removing them from the stand. The units are designed to fit acoustic, electric and bass guitars. Highly flexible, subdivided support arms with integrated plectrum holders let the guitar be held from either side. **{k-m.de}**

VHT | V-DRIVE

VHT on Overdrive

The new VHT V-Drive overdrive pedal's controls offer a wide range of tones and textures. In addition to standard drive and volume controls, the VHT V-Drive also offers select, texture, depth and tone controls. MAP: \$99.99. **{vhtamp.com}**



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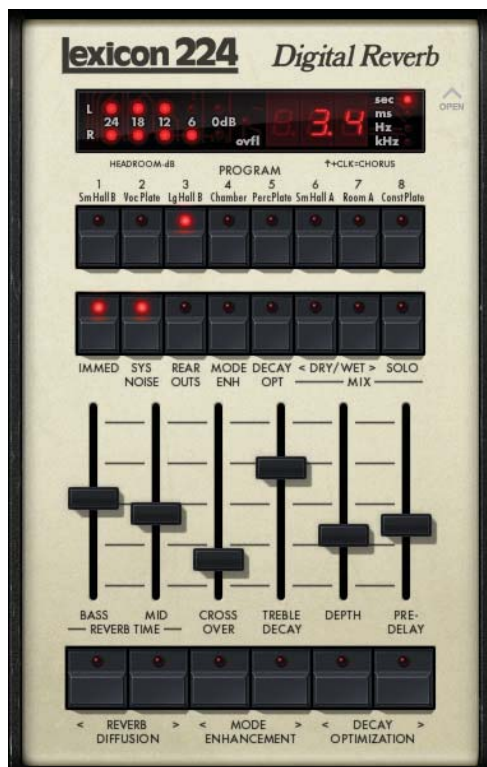
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UNIVERSAL AUDIO | LEXICON 224

Plug-in Play

Universal Audio has released the Lexicon 224 Digital Reverb plug-in for the UAD-2 platform. The plug-in captures all eight reverb programs available in original 224 firmware version 4.4, including every tunable parameter with unique fader-style controls. It also has a chorus program from final Lexicon v.4. firmware. MSRP: \$349. uaudio.com

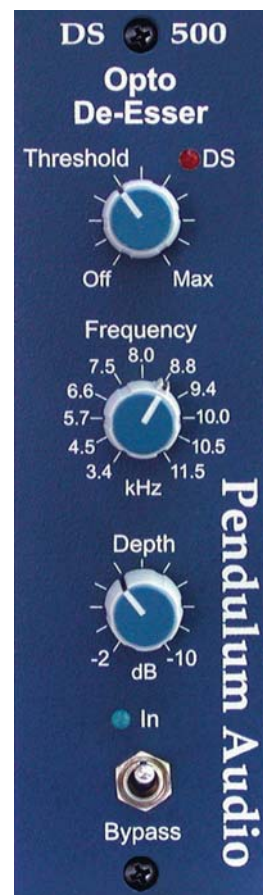


PENDULUM AUDIO | DS-500 DE-ESSER

500 Series De-esser

Pendulum Audio has launched the DS-500 De-esser. It's the second Pendulum product designed specifically for the 500 series format. The DS-500 is a single-channel, non-tube version of the De-esser in the Pendulum Quartet tube recording channel. It uses the same selective inductive detector and opto-inductive notch filter as the de-esser in the Quartet, yielding fast response. MSRP: \$749.95.

pendulumaudio.com



TASCAM | MD-CD1MKIII

Super Combo

Tascam's new MD-CD1mkIII is a combination CD player and MiniDisc recorder, which can be used separately. This new model upgrades the digital I/O, while the CD player now supports WAV file playback in addition to MP3 files. The MD-CD1mkIII features a CD-text display and various playback modes, as well as various repeat modes. tascam.com





AVID | PRO TOOLS MP 9

Pro Tools Amped

Avid's new Pro Tools MP 9 software features automatic delay compensation for phase-accurate mixes and MP3 export capability, which lets users easily share their creations. The software will be offered standalone for use with select M-Audio interfaces and in value-packed bundles with the M-Audio MobilePre, Fast Track Pro or Fast Track Ultra interfaces. avid.com

HOSA | PRO INTERCONNECT CABLES

Get Connected

Hosa Technology has introduced Hosa Pro Interconnect Cables. Available in all pro audio terminations, including XLR, quarter-inch TRS, quarter-inch TS and RCA, the cables' lengths range from 1.5–100 feet. MSRP: \$9.90–\$120.

hosatech.com



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DRUMS & PERCUSSION

BLACK SWAMP PERCUSSION | PRO10 STUDIO

Swamp Monster Approved

Black Swamp Percussion has expanded its Pro10 Studio line with the addition of two field drum models. The new 10- by 14-inch and 12- by 15-inch Pro10 Studio field drums are an extension of the current Pro10 Studio snare drum series. The six-ply maple shells with red mahogany finish and 2.3-mm hoops provide a robust, throaty sound. The Pro10 strainer and snare system with locking adjustment lever provides progressive tension for a balanced dynamic range. MSRP: \$932 and \$998. blackswamp.com



ZILDJIAN | RARITIES

From the Zildjian Vault

Zildjian recently shipped select collectable and prototype cymbals from its Vault and Sound Lab. These models include the K Constantinople Renaissance ride, K Dark Thin series and K Custom Special dry crashes. zildjian.com



GON BOPS | MARIANO SERIES

Good Beats

Gon Bops' new line of Mariano series congas and bongos are constructed from sustainable Durian hardwood. They feature the same traditional counterhoops, side plates, reinforcing metal hoops and authentic Gon Bops cowhide heads as classic models. The natural heads make for a full-bodied, authentic sound. gonbops.com



PEARL DRUMS | ARTISAN II LACQUER

Pearl's Fancy Lacquer

Pearl Drums recently introduced Artisan II Lacquer finishes, Quilted Bubinga Sunburst and Mocha Tamo, premiering in the Masters MCX line. The Masters MCX series features maple shells and bass drum hoops and comes with MasterCast die-cast tom hoops and Pearl's sound-enhancing OptiMount tom holders. MSRP: \$2,499. pearldrums.com



KACES | RAZOR BAGS

Crazy Razors

Kaces has introduced two new five-piece Razor Drum Bag Sets for standard and fusion-sized kits. Both sets include five individual carry bags for bass, floor tom, mounted toms and snare. The bags are made with a tough padded ballistic nylon exterior, along with a soft, protective interior lining. Each bag features reinforced double stitching and a padded carry handle. **{kaces.com}**

PROTECTION RACKET | RUCKSACK SNARE DRUM CASE

Hands-free Carrying

Protection Racket's new Rucksack Snare Drum Case features 10 different sizes, two of which include rucksack straps and concealed shoulder straps, as well as the standard carrying handle. The bags boast fleece surrounded by a near-bomb-proof flexible exterior with zips and fastenings. Adjustable straps create customized fit for optimal comfort. **{protectionracket.com}**



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For more information about the NAMM Foundation, please visit www.nammfoundation.org.

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ROLAND | C-200 CLASSIC ORGAN

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Roland has added the C-200 Classic Organ to the Roland Classic series. The line is inspired by instruments used to create the masterworks of classical music by history's finest composers. The C-200 features a 76-note virtual dual-manual keyboard with individually defined upper and lower sections, letting users achieve a dual-manual performance from a compact instrument. roland.com



YAMAHA | CLAVINOVA CLP400 SERIES

Enhanced Technology

Yamaha's new Clavinova CLP400 series digital pianos feature enhanced technologies and craftsmanship. The line is ideal for in-home use and features a new panel reveal key cover that hides all panel buttons, removing any visible sign of technology. This gives the digitals a more classic look. yamaha.com



SCHIMMEL | K 125 TRADITION

A Traditional Contemporary

Schimmel's new K 125 Tradition model combines tradition with a contemporary design. The piano features an ebony high gloss and a new construction of the piano leg, which runs almost down to floor level and has a harmonic transition to the glider. schimmel-piano.de

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BAND & ORCHESTRA

ADAMS | ACADEMY SERIES

Welcome to the Academy

Adams has unveiled the Academy series, which is available in a three-octave graduated bar Padouk Marimba (pictured) and a 3.5-octave Light Rosewood Xylophone for school or home use. Both keyboards feature a patent-pending integrated resonator rail system and a rigid aluminum beam structure that makes them lighter and more durable. **{adams-music.com}**



MEISEL | MPT-70 POCKETTUNER

Pocket-Sized Portability

Meisel's new MPT-70 Pockettuner is less than 2 inches in diameter and will tune any instrument. It's fully chromatic and features a range from B0-B7. The tuner has a built-in stand and keychain, as well as a large display that changes color from blue to green when a note's in tune. MSRP: \$29.95.

{meiselaccessories.com}



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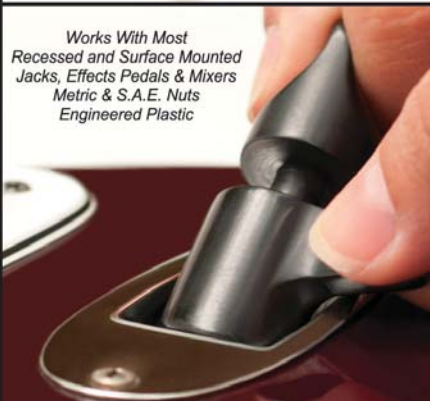
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Pink Panther

Barcus-Berry has added the Passion Pink Violato Acoustic-electric violin to its Violato Violins line. The traditional-style instrument is available in natural finish, Barcus-Berry Blue, Red-Berry Burst, Metallic Green Burst and Piano Black. All Violato Violins feature a hand-rubbed lacquer finish. MSRP: \$799. barcusberry.com



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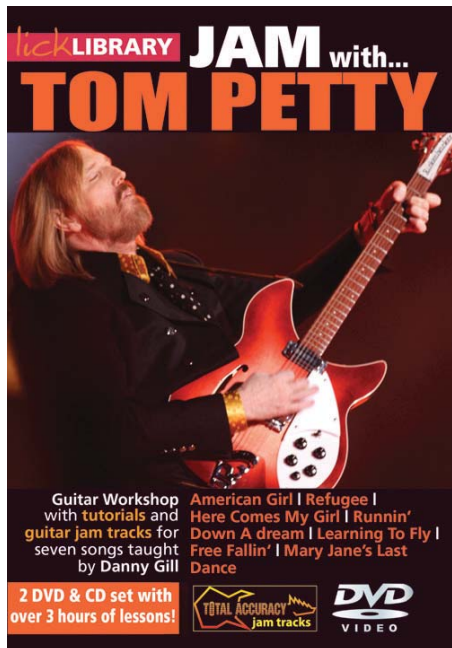


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lick LIBRARY | 'JAM WITH TOM PETTY'

Learning to Play Petty

Lick Library has released *Jam With Tom Petty*. It includes seven classic Petty tracks, such as "American Girl," "Refugee" and "Learning To Fly." The guitar tuition DVD is presented by Danny Gill, a guitar player, tutor and songwriter. licklibrary.com

ALFRED | SOUND INNOVATIONS

Continuing Education

Alfred recently launched *Book 2 Standard Editions* of its Sound Innovations series for concert band and string orchestra. The books teach with a segmented presentation of new concepts and introduce ensemble playing. They contain four distinct levels. alfred.com




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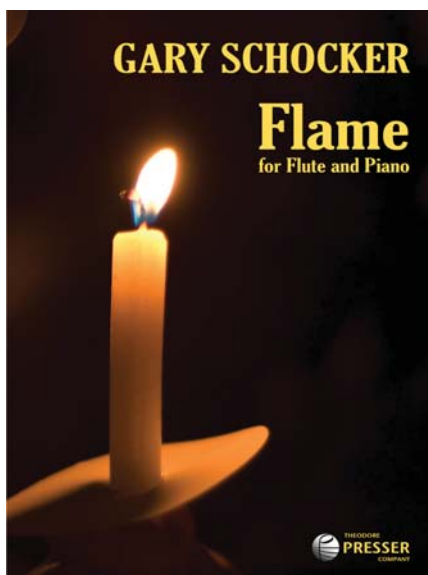
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THEODORE PRESSER | "FLAME FOR FLUTE AND PIANO"

Schocker's Flame

Theodore Presser has released contemporary composer Gary Schocker's *Flame For Flute And Piano*. The piece was composed as a memorial to flutist Judith Lap-ple, and it's ideal for recitals and devotional use. MSRP: \$9.95. theodorepresser.com

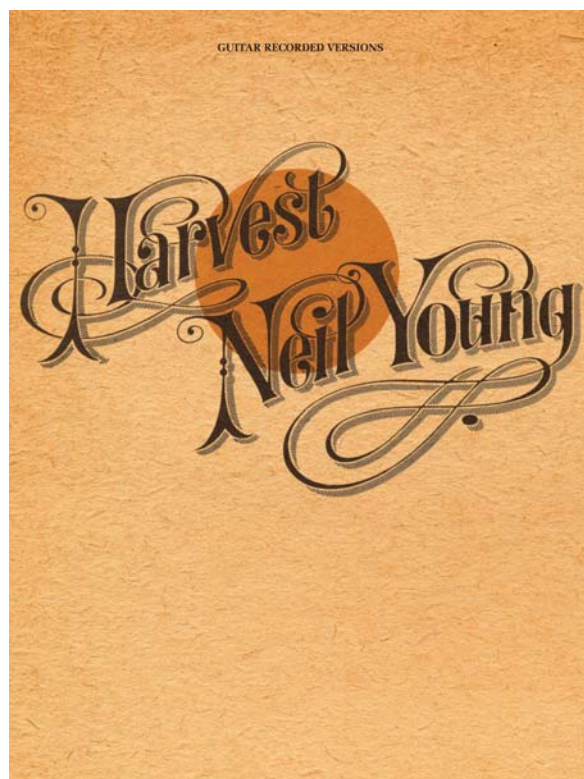
HAL LEONARD | "HARVEST"

Harvest Time

Hal Leonard has introduced Neil Young's *Harvest Guitar Recorded Versions* tab folio to match the seminal CD.

The deluxe volume features new note-for-note transcriptions in standard notation and guitar tablature for all of the songs, including "Alabama," "Harvest," "Heart Of Gold" and "Are You Ready For The Country?" MSRP: \$29.99.

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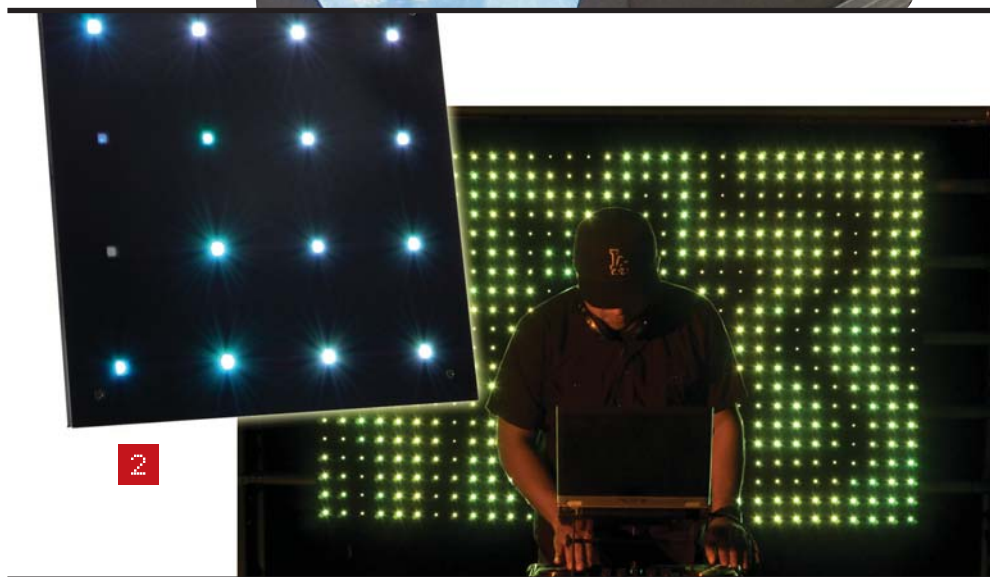
MBT Lighting recently launched the LEDQUADCASTER, a low-heat, energy-efficient LED effects light. It has 256 bright LEDs arranged in a square projection pattern and active matrix technology, creating 15 built-in patterns. The LEDQUADCASTER features DMX, auto and sound-active modes, three-pin XLR inputs for master/slave linking, and a three-channel DMX control. MSRP: \$339. mbtlighting.com

1



2 AMERICAN DJ FLASH PANEL 16 American DJ has released the Flash Panel 16, a LED screen solution for mobile entertainers. The Flash Panel 16 is a square-shaped panel with 16 RGB pixels that can be controlled individually via DMX to create dynamic, colorful effects; chases; images; and text. The unit is lightweight and easy-to-use and can be linked in multiples to form a video screen of any size. MSRP: \$179.95. americandj.com

2



3 CHAUVET PLUG-AND-PLAY LASERS

Chauvet has rolled out three ultra-compact plug-and-play lasers: MiN Laser FX, MiN Laser RGX (pictured) and MiN Laser Star. The lasers project thousands of red and green laser beams onto any surface and cover huge areas with or without fog. The palm-sized lasers weigh less than 1 pound, can be controlled by a wireless infrared remote control, and feature automated and sound-activated programs. Each laser includes two convenient mounting stands and the wireless infrared control. chauvetlighting.com

3



MARKETPLACE

- Rates: Classified display: \$25 per column inch. Reading notices: \$1.00 per word; \$15 minimum charge. All ads are prepaid.
- Payments: Send check or charge it on MasterCard, Visa or discover.
- Deadlines: Advertising closes the 15th of the month, six weeks prior to issue date—i.e. the May issue would close March 15.
- Send your advertisement to: Music Inc., 102 N. Haven Road, Elmhurst, Illinois, 60126: or FAX your ad to: (630) 941-3210.
- Questions? Call Sue Mahal at (630) 941-2030, Ext. 121.



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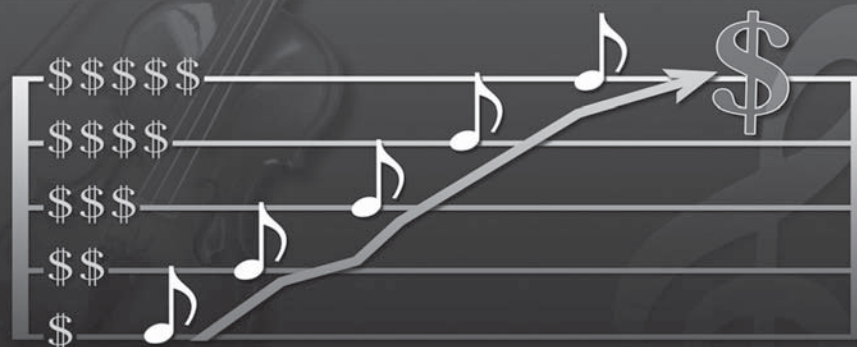
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Bruce Marion

Marion Music
Melbourne, Fla.

Having a great product like Paul Reed Smith (PRS) makes all the difference. People are always going to buy quality no matter what. We put together a letter letting our customers know when we first got PRS a year ago, and some of them are just now paying off. We sent the letter out to every single guitar prospect that we knew of, teachers and so forth, saying, "We're a PRS dealer. Come take a look."

It was a handy-dandy typed letter that we did on the computer and threw in customers' [shopping] bags. We also e-mailed them to people who were former or potential buyers.

>>>

Stu Carter

Fat Sound Guitars
Cary, N.C.

To continue to boost our high-end business we are constantly on the lookout for new and exciting products from emerging companies that offer something exceptional, both visually and sonically, and have market staying power. Consistently offering innovative and exciting new products not only keeps our website and inventory fresh for our long-time customers but helps us to reach out to new clients, as well.

Something specific that we are currently doing is investing in left-handed guitars from a wide range of high-end builders. There's a huge need in the marketplace for these instruments. Other than a handful of left-handed specialty shops, no one else seems to be trying to fill this void. We've had such a positive response to this new, niche inventory that we're having a difficult time keeping them in stock.

From a marketing perspective, we are using several of the Web-based networking services to maintain visibility and to alert our existing customers to new products as they arrive. Actively networking in this way is not only expected by today's MI consumer, it's also easy, fun and free.

With so little co-op advertising available to small shops in this industry, we have found a way to create long-lasting ads, while providing a reference tool for our customers through professionally produced Fat Sound Guitars-branded demonstration videos.



>>>

Frank Cuevas
Music Nation 1
Rockford, Ill.

How are you boosting high-end guitar and amplifier sales?

We're actually using language like "boutique," "hand-wired" and "made-in-the-U.S.A." in our radio ad campaigns. Radio seems to work best.

We advertise on a number of local stations, but really the demographic that we're trying to get to is current rock music listeners. That seems to be where the market currently is.

Our demographic is so strangely broad that we can get a guy in here who's 60 years old buying a boutique amp, just like we can get a 40-something hard rocker who plays classic rock.

We also promote things via our fan club. When people walk into our store, they

register for a fan club, and we send out e-mail newsletters without being obnoxious and spamming people. We try to send something out every two to three weeks and might send a photo of a boutique amp and say, "You have to check this out." The fan club is now pushing 1,000 [members].

The key thing we want to know is customers' interests. Some people will say, "I'm really into high-end guitars and high-end, hand-wired amps." It sells from there. It's key for us to gather information on how our customers heard about us because the touch points are very important.

Pointing out high-end

amps when people walk in the store is important. The first thing customers want to know is what we have that a big-box retailer doesn't.

We are the exclusive dealer in [Northwest Illinois] for Nash Guitars. We try to find lines where we can be the exclusive provider and are not found in a big-box store.

We definitely promote the boutique and unique higher-end stuff in our store [through social media]. We've added Facebook to our business cards, and we take pictures when a new boutique amp comes in and post it on our Facebook page.

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