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TRENDS
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MUSIC VILLA CREATES
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PAGE 42





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PUBLISHER

Frank Alkyer

EDITOR

Zach Phillips

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Katie Kailus

ART DIRECTOR

Andy Williams

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Hilary Brown, Bobby Reed, Aaron Cohen

WEST COAST CORRESPONDENT

Sara Farr

ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER

John Cahill

WESTERN ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE

Tom Burns

CONTRIBUTING DESIGNER

Ara Tirado

CLASSIFIED AD SALES

Theresa Hill

CIRCULATION MANAGER

Sue Mahal

CIRCULATION ASSISTANT

Evelyn Oakes

BOOKKEEPING

Margaret Stevens

PRESIDENT

Kevin Maher

OFFICES

Ph (630) 941-2030 • Fax (630) 941-3210

e-mail: editor@musicincmag.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE

(877) 904-7949

Jack Maher, President 1970-2003

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Photo by Steve Winslow

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– ultimate-guitar.com

“Overall, the American Stage cables—which actually are made in the USA, so extra credit for that—nail the two crucial cable criteria for instruments: They’re built to take the rigors of the road, while making the right sonic choices for getting your signal from point A to point B.”

– [Craig Anderton, Harmony Central](#)

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– [Simon Bradley, musicradar.com](#)



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PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

TIME FOR A FACELIFT

Within the pages of this issue, you will glimpse the new look of music retail.

Two featured brick-and-mortar dealers reveal just how far store design has come. One of them, Music Villa (page 42), is an independent MI dealership, the other, Sam Ash Music (page 12), a national chain. Both invested in aesthetic overhauls during the economic downturn — and it shows. They now boast world-class stores that serve as a model to not only the music industry but retailers everywhere.

What's most surprising, though, is they're not alone. NAMM recently asked me to help judge its Top 100 Dealer Awards. As I sifted through entries, one factor stood out more than any other among the truly excellent retailers: They invested in strong store designs. And what I saw was nothing short of revelatory.

Slatwall panels had been reduced to a minimum or, better yet, eliminated altogether in favor of single wood slats or, best of all, no slats. Instruments were merchandised like jewelry under the glow of halogen. Paint schemes were impeccable. Flat-screen TVs abounded in strategic positions. Signage was gorgeous and, most of all, consistent.

Customers had places to relax — comfy couches, slick-looking easy chairs. Storefronts resembled those of high-end department stores. More than anything else, every design element looked intentional. Nothing was slapdash.

This, folks, is your future. And, in my opinion, it's the new face of mom-and-pop retail.

So if your store looks woefully behind the times, here's the good news. Lots of design upgrades can be done on the cheap.

Don't have the budget to invest in rows of halogen track lighting or a custom-built accessories counter? Can't bear tearing down that slatwall or pegboard? Then paint it an earth-toned color scheme. (Black also helps instruments stand out.) Invest in a couple pieces of inexpensive furniture from Ikea. Scour Craigslist, and set up a rotating display of new and notable products on old, antique tables, chests and furniture, a la Anthropologie. Create more open spaces in your showroom for intuitive traffic flow. Sometimes, that's all it takes to go from musty to modern.

And if you're looking to make a capital investment in your business, you could do a lot worse than a store redesign. Music Villa owner Paul Decker shelled out roughly \$20,000 to revamp his acoustic guitar room. One year later, he has recouped that cost and seen a boost to his gross profit margins.

If you don't think design is critical, ask yourself this: What's the first thing you notice when you walk into a new store? I'll bet it's the layout first, products second.

And if you're still unconvinced, ask your customers what they value. **MI**

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LETTERS

MAP and the Small Music Retailer

I recently read the article “Responses to Guitar Center’s New MAP Policy” in the March/April issue of *Music Inc.* Most small dealers find out pretty quickly that you cannot operate a business in the red with debt to suppliers or banks.

These creditors don’t want to hear excuses, such as, “I just need another week to get your money.” Instead, they are all going to add on late charges and interest. Before you know it, you can’t make any money if you sell the products at list price. And we know that’s not going to happen, even if you don’t advertise a price. MAP is now the street price.

Small dealers have to concentrate on service — by that I mean repairs, lessons and community involvement. You are not going to pay your overhead with retail sales. All those pretty instruments look great on the walls as decoration, but they’re not flying off the walls fast enough to cover expenses. We all have to offer something the big boxes don’t. If they ever get repair technicians that can do the job and teachers that can hold the student’s interest, we will all be in trouble.

Borrowing doesn’t get you out of debt. Be sure to have an exit strategy. I feel sorry for the GC suppliers should GC decide to exercise its exit strategy.

Rudy Abbott
Capitol Music
Montgomery, Ala.

Policing MAP Policies

Thank you for running Alan Friedman’s article, “Decoding GC’s Letter,” in the March/April issue of *Music Inc.* I found it insightful and informative.

I agree with Friedman: GC advertising products below vendors’ MAP policies is its “way of telling vendors to start doing a better job of policing their MAP policies.” Why should GC and websites like Musician’s Friend comply with MAP if no one else does? GC signed a contract agreeing to abide by MAP. In signing a contract, a company like GC assumes the vendor is going to hold other sellers to the contract’s rules. If vendors don’t enforce their MAP policies unilaterally, why should GC abide by them? Why should anyone?

One thing I didn’t get out of reading GC’s letter was that it was going to violate policies of vendors that do a good job of upholding MAP. This letter was aimed at vendors that don’t do a good job enforcing MAP. It certainly wasn’t aimed at companies, such as Yamaha and Shure, that year after year have shown the industry how effective an enforced MAP policy can be.

When MAP first became everyday vernacular, we were interested in margin to MAP. As years went on, people began to see MAP as a starting price point rather than an ending price point. We are still interested in margin to MAP, but a somewhat more important interest took hold: What is this thing selling for online?

A trip to Google’s shopping tab quickly reveals which vendors enforce MAP and which don’t. If a vendor enforces it, you’ll see a stream of prices that are the same or in a similar range as the searched product, effectively putting advertisements on equal footing. If not, pricing will be random and

wild. After seeing this, a retailer makes a decision whether or not to carry the product and, if so, at what price. At my store, Honolulu-based Easy Music Center, we make these decisions often.

A company like GC doesn’t have the luxury of picking and choosing lines that make sense and dropping the ones that don’t. It has to carry almost everything to maintain its market position. With this in mind, I can see why MAP maintenance is a big deal to GC.

‘If vendors don’t enforce their MAP policies, why should GC abide by them?’

— Peter Dods,
Easy Music Center

So, does GC like MAP as long as it’s well-enforced? I think so. GC is in a great position to out-advertise, out-market, out-hype and outperform other businesses in this industry. When you are the dominant player and price leader, you are worried about other people chiseling away at your market share. MAP keeps other people from having a competitive pricing edge over GC and Musician’s Friend.

Seven years ago, we used to view sites like Musician’s Friend as the bandits. These days, it’s all the other guys who are chipping away at the big sites and independent stores like mine. Musician’s Friend was more of a resource than a pricing threat. If people came in with a GC catalog, we were

excited to mob them and tell them we’d beat their pricing. If they wanted to go to Musician’s Friend, we were happy to tell them we could match that price and were glad to leverage the site as a pricing and information resource.

Things changed this year as we saw Musician’s Friend and guitarcenter.com start getting more aggressive with blanket discounting. I think it was a slap at all the Web stores, such as Amazon.com, that were cheating MAP and the vendors that weren’t doing their jobs to enforce it. The discounting let Musician’s Friend and guitarcenter.com be competitive and in range on anything being sold.

I think we should be excited GC is sounding the alarm about a problem that’s destabilizing for our entire industry.

If vendors don’t have effective MAP pricing, this industry will be priced into the ground. When brick-and-mortar stores can no longer make enough margin on product to stay competitive with the Internet, they will close. Without brick-and-mortar stores, people can no longer try out the product. Instead, they’ll buy it online for less and scale back their musical instrument purchases. Once the showroom is removed, demand will scale back dramatically. Don’t vendors get that?

Peter Dods
Easy Music Center
Honolulu

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RETAIL

SAM ASH MUSIC | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

SAM ASH'S RETAIL UPGRADE

Sam Ash Music has unveiled its future retail concept.

Opened in late 2011, the company's Nashville, Tenn., location is what Mike Aurigemma called "the most ambitious remodeling" in the company's history. The store also represents the look of Sam Ash stores going forward.

"Since it's Music City U.S.A., we wanted to do something really special," said Aurigemma, director of merchandising and special projects for the Hicksville, N.Y.-based full-line chain.

To remodel, Aurigemma and his team essentially "built a new store inside the old store" without closing for business. The overhaul gave equal consideration to aesthetics and function.

"We make them pretty, but we also make them easy for the store managers to manage," he said. "We try to make it efficient and easy for our customers to navigate and hook up with salespeople."

Every department of the 35,000-square-foot space is visible from the front doors. The audio department boasts a fully functional stage with a P.A. system and lighting. This concept has been duplicated at Sam Ash's Las Vegas store,

which hosted the company's Best In Drums Competition finals and the Roland V-Drums contest finals on its stage.

"Nashville has been up, and it continues to be up," said Aurigemma of the store's sales. "And I was very encouraged by the

turnouts to both events we've done in Las Vegas."

Here's a closer look at the two stores.

SAM ASH, LAS VEGAS



CASINO-LIKE VENUE

"Las Vegas probably features our most professionally equipped stage," Aurigemma said. "All of that is ours. It's not rented. It's ready to go at a moment's notice. It's a casino-like venue inside a music store."



LOCAL MUSIC HUB

The Las Vegas store hosted the company's Best In Drums Competition finals and the Roland V-Drums contest finals (pictured) on the stage. Each event drew roughly 500 attendees, according to Aurigemma.

SAM ASH, NASHVILLE, TENN.



FULLY FUNCTIONAL STAGE

A centerpiece of the showroom, the audio department's stage can host a high-profile clinic. The room has 28-foot-high ceilings, an intelligent lighting rig and a 15,000-watt EV P.A. system. "You just put mics up, and you're ready to go," Aurigemma said.



PICKIN' PORCH

The acoustic guitar department features a pickin' porch (pictured in the left corner), an elevated performance and merchandising area sporting an overhang. "The acoustic department is completely visible when you walk into the store."



NEW IMAGE

The electric guitar area boasts pewter brush slatwall and red trim, representing the new look of Sam Ash stores. Plus, the department houses a high-end room. "That's one of the biggest we have."



DRUMS FRONT & CENTER

"We moved the drum department onto the main floor. Before, it wasn't very visible. It made the middle of the store look kind of thin. Now, we have the immediate presentation right as you come in, straight ahead."



WIDE OPEN SPACES

"Every department is visible from the door. There's no question of where you need to go."



'REAL' STUDIO

The cozy recording room features hardwood floors "to make it feel like a real studio."

EVENT

Gist Welcomes Reznik

On May 17, Gist Piano Center hosted Yana Reznik (pictured) at the company's newly completed recital hall in its Lexington, Ky., location. Reznik performed the music of Rachmaninoff on a Roland V-Piano Grand. Afterwards, she stuck around for a meet and greet with audience members. The event coincided with the grand reopening of Gist's newly remodeled and expanded Lexington facility.



"Our Lexington business has been on a steady and dramatic incline," said John Gist, president of Gist Piano Center. "We needed more room to accommodate the growing needs of this community. Our new Lexington store will be a center for education, as well as a recital venue and a cutting-edge retail space. We look forward to bringing more events like this to families in the Lexington area."

TECHNOLOGY

Online Overhaul

A.C. Pianocraft recently launched a new website at acpianocraft.com. The design features quick, easy access to essential information on piano restoration, sale, tuning and repair services. High-resolution photos show every restored piano in the showroom. A.C. Pianocraft is a piano restoration and sales facility of Steinway, Mason & Hamlin and other brands.

GEAR

Showroom Art

Jeff Tasch (pictured, center) of Grand Piano Haus in Skokie, Ill., recently selected a Yamaha CFX 9-foot grand piano to feature in his company's showroom. Anthony Molinaro (left) and Haysun Kang (right),



both Loyola University Chicago professors, helped Tasch pick out the instrument from Yamaha Artist Services in New York. Loyola plans to purchase the instrument.



From left: Meinl's Brice Foster, Willis Music's Kevin Schwallie, Amedia's Rick Snider, Mapex's Brad Canaday, Amedia's Dominick Gagliano, Dream's Andy Morris and Sabian's Greg Zeller

WILLIS MUSIC | PROMOTION

Cymbal-Land Makes a Splash

Willis Music's Tri-County Mall store hosted Cymbal-Land Cincinnati from April 26–28. Store manager Kevin Schwallie described the event as "1,000 cymbals, five brands, three days." It featured Zildjian, Sabian, Amedia, Meinl and Dream.

Willis hosted Cymbal-Land Cincinnati after Schwallie toured a cymbal maker's facility and selected models from its vault for his own use. He wanted to create a similar event for his local market. "We've had cymbal tastings in the past, but it has always been with individual brands," he said.

"Representatives from the brands all agreed that they had never participated in a cymbal event as large as Cymbal-Land Cincinnati. Also, they were impressed by the turnout and support from the Willis Music percussion customers."

Attendees used the event to trade in old cymbals and upgrade. Willis also hosted a friendly competition

Willis Music hosts a cymbal-tasting event featuring five manufacturers

between the brands, dubbed Cymbal Olympics. Each brand submitted an entry to compete in various categories. Winners included: Best Jazz, Zildjian 22-inch K Constantinople Renaissance ride; Best Rock, Amedia 21-inch D Rock ride; Most Versatile, Dream 22-inch Contact heavy ride; and Best EFX, Amedia Dervish Stingray cymbal.

"I think between the support from the brands, the selection and having the absolute best people in the industry representing their brand, it solidified Willis Music Tri-County's reputation as being *the* place in the Greater Cincinnati area to buy cymbals."



Sweetwater's Chuck Surack (center) receives a doctorate of humane letters from Indiana University

SWEETWATER | COMMUNITY

Sweetwater Founder Given Double Doctorates

Chuck Surack, president and founder of Sweetwater Sound in Fort Wayne, Ind., recently received doctorates of humane letters from two different universities in Indiana.

Indiana University honored Surack during commencement ceremonies on May 9 at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum. Chuck O'Conner, dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW), discussed Surack's professional accomplishments and community involvement.

"Chuck Surack and Sweetwater Sound have been central to the success of the music technology program at IPFW. For all he has done for IPFW, as well as for the economic and cultural well-being of northeast Indiana, Indiana University is proud to confer upon him the doctorate of humane letters."

The University of St. Francis (USF) presented Surack with his degree at its commencement ceremonies on May 4, also at the Memorial Coliseum.

"We are pleased to award the honorary doctor of humane letters to Chuck Surack," said USF President Sister M. Elise Kriss. "His leadership, generosity and guidance, not only to the university but to so many other people and organizations, exemplify the qualities associated with this high honor."

"I'm not sure I've ever felt so honored; to be recognized in such an extraordinary and unexpected way is truly humbling," Surack said. "No one accomplishes anything without the support of others, so I will always cherish this recognition on behalf of the many hundreds of friends, partners and employees who've been a part of making my dreams a reality."

Guitar Center's new North Charlotte, N.C., store



GUITAR CENTER | CORPORATE

GC EXPANDS AS S&P DOWNGRADES COMPANY'S RATING

This past spring, Guitar Center opened four new stores as Standard & Poor's Ratings Services revised its ratings outlook on GC from stable to negative. S&P also affirmed all existing ratings on the company, including a B- corporate credit rating.

"Our ratings on Guitar Center reflect our assessment that the company's liquidity is 'less than adequate' but sufficient to avoid a default within two years," said S&P's report.

GC's recent opening brought its total number of stores to 228. April 19 marked the first of these openings in North Charlotte, N.C. This store features Guitar Center Studios, GC's in-house music lesson facility, and GC Garage, its on-site guitar repair service. During the following month, GC also opened stores in Coconut Creek, Fla.; Pasadena, Texas; and North Portland, Ore. These feature Guitar Center Studios and GC Garage, as well.

SUPPLIER HONORS

Sennheiser also recently named Guitar Center its 2011 Dealer of the Year.

According to a statement from Sennheiser, it awarded GC for its "excellent sales, customer support

and comprehension of Sennheiser's diverse line of microphones, wireless systems and headphones."

"We are pleased to announce that Guitar Center has once again captured the Dealer of the Year award for our music retail division," said Bill Whearty, Sennheiser's vice president of sales and marketing, retail division. "Guitar Center continues to excel in sales of Sennheiser headphones and microphones and has once again achieved impressive year-over-year sales growth."

Guitar Center opens four stores as S&P revises the retailer's rating to negative

"We are pleased to once again be recognized as Sennheiser's MI Dealer of the Year," said Bill Wrightson, GC's vice president of technology merchandise. "Sennheiser continues to represent a very important part of our product offering to consumers, and we continue to receive excellent feedback — particularly on Sennheiser microphones and headphones."

FULL COMPASS | EDUCATION

FC TEACHES SOUND VOLUNTEERS

Full Compass of Madison, Wis., recently hosted house of worship sound volunteers and technicians at its 4,200-square-foot studio for the “How-to Sound Workshop.”

Sound engineer Mike Sokol led the hands-on program, in which participants worked at

individual mixing consoles. Fits & Starts Productions produced the workshop. The organization travels more than 40,000 miles each year training house of worship sound volunteers.

“It’s truly a pleasure hosting the ‘How-to Sound Workshop’ at Full Compass,” said Roxanne

Wenzel, vice president of sales and marketing for Full Compass. “Those who attended received excellent instruction from a very knowledgeable and experienced instructor. We value our partnership with Fits & Starts Productions and look forward to our next event.”

“Working with the Full Compass crew is always a positive experience,” said Hector La Torre, Fits & Starts Productions managing partner. “They’re all pros, so I know that even the little things will be taken care of when we show up to present our ‘How-to’ workshops.”

TRIBUTE

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

Mark Spiwak

Mark Spiwak of West L.A. Music passed away May 5 from a pulmonary embolism. He had been recovering from kidney surgery and was 61.

In 1978, Spiwak joined West L.A. Music, where he served a roster of clients, including Tom Petty, Ringo Star, Jackson Browne, The Eagles and Pat Benatar.



Spiwak’s charity work with West L.A. Music raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in support of the arts, according to a tribute on the Los Angeles-based retailer’s website. He helped build recording studios for at-risk kids at Phoenix House with former “American Idol” judge Kara DioGuardi. Most recently, he arranged the donation of several autographed guitars to Artists for the Arts Foundation for its fundraising concert at Santa Monica High School.

Spiwak also formed a personal relationship with Ronald Reagan. The former president once needed a P.A. system for a black-tie event after a system rented elsewhere showed up broken. Spiwak donned a coat and tie and delivered it without asking for anything in return. Reagan later called Spiwak to help him record a public service message, and Reagan’s wife, Nancy, asked Spiwak to fix her VCR. He even designed and built a podium for the Reagan Presidential Library.

“For the past 30 years, Mark’s energy and positive outlook influenced and defined our company,” said Rick Waite, general manager of West L.A. Music.

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Note from Joe

NAMM U and NAMM U Online

Attendance at NAMM University sessions at Winter and Summer NAMM continues to surge but online participation has not.

Since introducing the NAMM U Breakfast Sessions and the Idea Center Sessions a few years back—and, more recently, the Hands-On Training (HOT) Zone—attendance has increased substantially. The combination of the most important topics, as chosen by our Members, and quality presenters representing the very best of the industry have resulted in consistently packed rooms and provided great value to those businesses trying to get an edge on the hyper-competitive landscape in music retail today.

To help support NAMM Members and empower them throughout the year, we have also created NAMM U Online, this website features some of the best offerings from the shows, as well as, extensive courses on financial management by Alan Friedman and retail sales by George Hines. You can choose from sessions on technology, lesson programs and social media. In addition, you'll find short videos of industry leaders sharing

some of their best ideas and tips for success. While the site continues to be a work in progress, it offers a lot of great, interactive content designed to help our Members grow their businesses. However, Member traffic on the site has been so light, it makes us wonder if we're missing something.

The premise of the NAMM U sessions at the shows has been simple: ask our Members what they want and then give it to them. The results have been outstanding. But with NAMM U's online offerings, we've not seen the same level of participation. Is online education—at your fingertips whenever you want or need support—important to our retail community? And, if so, how can we adapt the NAMM U Online content to be more meaningful for you and your staff?

Many of our Members have created informative websites that feature product and company content. Others have educational sites with online music lessons, and even basic information on instrument repairs. NAMM University and NAMM U Online are different; they're designed specifically to provide relevant, high-value and industry-specific education programs for NAMM Members. And while the sessions at the shows are accomplishing that mission, in my opinion NAMM U Online has not.

Please check it out at www.namm.org/nammu and give it a spin. Then call or drop me an e-mail with your thoughts and ideas. We want to make NAMM U Online as important to your success as the sessions offered at the shows. With your help, I know we can achieve that!

Joe Lamond • NAMM President/CEO

Get Connected with NAMM U Online



NAMM U Live



Finance



Lesson Programs



Retail Ideas



Sales



Technology



Courses

NAMM U Online is a convenient supplement to the standard NAMM U Idea Center Sessions you see at the shows. It offers additional ideas, useful tips and a fresh way of looking at your business.

The website is packed with great information that you and your staff can access at any time and features topics such as sales, marketing, finance, retail, lesson programs and technology.

Plug into this valuable Member resource at namm.org/nammu

NAMM
University



NAME NAMM News September 2011 No

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

90,114

Registrants

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ANAHEIM CONVENTION CENTER

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Donates guitar to NGW
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Names new Japanese distributor
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SUPPLY

MUSEUM OF MAKING MUSIC | BY FRANK ALKYER

VISIT YOUR MoMM

It's spring break in Southern California, and there's a palpable excitement from families bustling through ... a local museum.

That may sound odd, especially when the beach is a stage dive away, but this is NAMM's Museum of Making Music (MoMM), a place that brings a smile to the young and old — be they hard-core musicians or air-guitar aficionados.

Housed in the NAMM industry headquarters in Carlsbad, Calif., the museum has been open to the public since March 2000. And for industry insiders, it's a trip down memory lane, featuring everything from stately grand pianos to intricately carved mandolins, from synthesizers to stomp boxes, from drums to horns — representing all eras, shapes and sizes.

The idea of creating MoMM had its share of detractors in the early years. Some NAMM members wondered who, if anyone, outside of a few industry personnel would come to a museum about the musical instrument industry.

But come they do. The museum hosts more than 30,000 visitors a year. It's become part of a loop for tourists traveling to the area for its beaches, Flower



Carolyn Grant, MoMM executive director, with classic keyboards. Inset: Ed Roscetti performs on the electric drums at the museum's new Innovation Studio

Fields and Legoland. With a new \$500,000 redesign (funded by an anonymous local donor) and a full complement of programming, Carolyn Grant, the museum's executive director, said there's an opportunity to reach even larger audiences.

"We had this terrific decade of gathering information and seeing where we wanted to take this museum, how to bring this industry to the general public," Grant said. "We are a museum that's not only about instrument history or celebrity or music or musical genre. We are a museum of a cross section of all of that. We're a museum about a process. That's why the name is the Museum of Mak-

ing Music ... because it's the process that people go through to make music."

At the core of the redesign, and the museum's mission, is a hands-on approach to programming. MoMM reopened in October 2011 with 1,100 square feet of cutting-edge, interactive displays that give visitors a chance to play with history.

Grant noted that the museum hosted a hands-on exhibition, "Hands on the Future," early on. "It was supposed to be a six-month exhibition, but we couldn't get rid of it. Everybody loved that room."

Today, that hands-on approach is a focal point. Guests can stomp, pluck, pound and

even learn a chord or two. MoMM has also produced a steady stream of special exhibits, including "Violins in America" and "The Ukulele and You." An exhibit of reed instruments from around the world recently ended, and another on saxophones just began.

"These special exhibitions are essential to a museum because we want to keep [people] coming back," Grant said.

The activities have expanded to a concert series that delivers three to four performances a month at the NAMM headquarters. The museum also organizes a 60-member community orchestra and a 60-member band.

"In my opinion, the museum is a living example of NAMM's vision, mission and objectives in action," said Joe Lamond, NAMM president and CEO. "It celebrates our industry's history and visionary leaders and promotes music making and music education to our 30,000-plus visitors each year. Every day, the NAMM staff gets to see the impact that music has on children of all ages, kids with special needs, families, older adults and seniors. What a fitting tribute to our members to have their headquarters be alive with music!" **MI**

NAMM | EVENT

NAMM'S RUSSIA SHOWS DRAW THOUSANDS

The inaugural NAMM Musikmesse Russia and Prolight + Sound NAMM Russia shows were held May 16–19 in Moscow.

Both shows brought together 190 companies from 18 countries and drew a total of 6,275 attendees.

“Most NAMM manufacturer members and global brands in our industry are seeking out growth opportunities in new markets,” said Joe Lamond, president and CEO of NAMM.

“Exhibitors told us that they were able to do productive business, deepen relationships with existing contacts and make new contacts during their four days in Moscow. Work on the 2013 shows has already begun, with key exhibitors indicating their commitment to work closely with us to grow these events into the future.”

Brands represented at NAMM Musikmesse Russia included Yamaha, Roland, Gibson, Alhambra, Hal Leonard, Inside, PianoDisc, Karl Hoefner, Grotrian and Music Sales.

“The show was a great opportunity for us to learn about the Russian music market,” said Doug Lady, senior vice president of Hal Leonard. “We had productive discussions with potential new partners in the retail and distribution markets, as well as possible publishing partners. With Russia emerging quickly on the world trade scene, we feel this show was an essential opportunity for Hal Leonard to take part in this inaugural year.”

Prolight + Sound NAMM Russia featured distributors from Ashstone, Allen & Heath, L’Acoustics, Christie, Robe, Osram, Montarbo, Electro-Voice, Coda Audio and Hughes & Kettner. namm-musikmesse.ru; prolight-namm.ru

‘Exhibitors told us that they were able to do productive business, deepen relationships with existing contacts.’



KALA | VENUES

KALA RELOCATES

Kala recently moved into its new headquarters, doubling the size of the company’s base of operations. Located in Petaluma, Calif., the manufacturer relocated to a 25,000-square-foot facility near its old address.

“We had outgrown our old facility for some time and were waiting for the right location that would fit our needs and will provide us with room to grow,” said Rick Carlson,

sales and marketing director at Kala.

The company has also expanded the Kala Custom Shop, where California U-Basses are assembled and instruments are quality-controlled.

“We expect to continue to expand our custom shop in order to continue to provide the high-quality instruments that our customers expect and to offer more variety of specialized instruments in the future,” Carlson said. kalabrand.com

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AWARD

Godin Guitars Named Manufacturer of the Year

Godin Guitars was awarded “Manufacturer of the Year” during the second annual MIAC Excellence Awards on May 13 at Toronto’s International Centre in Mississauga, Ontario. The MEAs were presented during a ceremony at the 41st annual MIAC trade show, also held at Toronto’s International Centre.



“We’re very honored for this recognition and extremely proud of the fact that we make every single guitar right here in Canada,” said Mario Biferali, Godin’s sales and marketing manager. “It’s always nice to be recognized, and this year being our 40th year in business makes it that much more special.”

The MIAC Excellence Awards are presented to individuals and organizations that contribute exceptionally to the well-being and future prosperity of the industry. miac.net

VISIT

Vic Firth Welcomes Maine Governor

Vic Firth Co. recently welcomed Maine Gov. Paul LePage to its factory in Newport, Maine. LePage toured the plant and was interested in the programs and innovations that had



been implemented since his last visit two years ago. The governor also spoke to Vic Firth factory employees and commented on how Vic Firth Co. continues to increase Maine’s workforce by keeping the com-

pany in the state. vicfirth.com

WEB NEWS

Fernandes Goes Direct

Fernandes Guitars has opened its first direct Web store. The company’s guitars are now available for the first time directly to consumers everywhere at reduced prices. All of the guitars are protected by a full lifetime warranty and are inspected and set up by professional technicians in the United States. The Web store will also feature special offers and discounts. fernandesguitarshop.com



From left: Terry Lewis, Barry Bittman and Byron Janis

YAMAHA | AWARD

YMWI HONORS JANIS

Yamaha Music and Wellness Institute (YMWI) presented its Lifetime Achievement Award at the The Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center in New York on May 30 to internationally renowned concert pianist Byron Janis.

Produced with the support of Yamaha Artist Services, the evening highlighted the international career and personal journey of Janis, a world ambassador and composer who, despite multiple hand surgeries, continues to extend his mind-over-matter approach and gift to those in need.

“YMWI is proud to extend its Lifetime Achievement Award to Byron Janis,” said Dr. Barry Bittman, neurologist and CEO of the Yamaha

Music and Wellness Institute. “Our rationale can be summed up from three perspectives. As a musician, I recognize Byron’s immense creativity and unparalleled virtuosity as pure genius. As a physician, I’m inspired by his relentless will to persevere against what would have been career-ending challenges for others. As an individual, I’m in awe of the power of his spirit that relentlessly continues to inspire a refreshing sense of hope for those in need.”

The tribute was hosted by *Inside Edition* anchor and journalist Deborah Norville and featured a presentation by president and CEO of the Arthritis Foundation, Dr. John Klippel. yamaha.com

NEMC | ACQUISITION

NEMC TAKES ON CITY MUSIC CENTER



National Educational Music Co. (NEMC) recently acquired all the assets of School Musical Suppliers, also known as City Music Center — one of New Jersey’s largest band and orchestra musical instrument rental companies.

“City Music Center has a long history of providing quality instruments and services to its customers, and we are pleased and excited to incorporate it within our nationwide affiliate network,” said David Benedetto, NEMC’s chief sales and marketing officer. “This transaction will provide additional support to our existing affiliates,

not only providing them additional business in their territories but also strengthening our presence in New Jersey, a state with a strong school music tradition.”

City Music Center currently operates locations in Kenilworth and Burlington, N.J. NEMC plans to consolidate the Kenilworth location into NEMC’s Mountainside, N.J., operation and will continue to operate the Burlington location.

The City Music Center transaction is NEMC’s first acquisition since MidCap Equity Partners acquired NEMC in August 2011. nemc.com

SIERRA GUITARS | CHARITY

SIERRA GUITARS DONATES MODEL TO NGW

Sierra Guitars has donated a guitar to the National Guitar Workshop (NGW) for a giveaway.

Intermediate and advanced guitar students attending a recent NGW workshop were given the chance to win the Sierra Alpine acoustic-electric

guitar during one of NGW's Acoustic Seminars at the Canterbury School campus in New Milford, Conn.

NGW is dedicated to bringing music education to guitarists, bassists, keyboardists, drummers and vocalists regardless of musical style and skill level.



"Sierra Guitars is thrilled to continue our participation with the NGW for the fifth year in a row and for the opportunity to share the inspiring craftsmanship of our guitars with these aspiring songwriters and guitarists," said Craig Toporek, product manager of Sierra Guitars. (sierraguitars.net)

TRIBUTE

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

Baldwin Mourns Two Former Executives

Harold Shelby Smith, former president of Baldwin Piano, passed away on May 16 after a brief illness. He was 87. In 1971, he was employed as plant manager of Baldwin Piano & Organ in Greenwood, Miss., and in 1983, he and a co-worker purchased the company, where he worked until his retirement in 1993.

On May 26, Robert Harrison, former CEO of Baldwin Piano, passed away from cancer. He was 80. Harrison spent his 41-year career at Baldwin and retired in 1996.

Jam Industries Executive Golden Passes Away

Michael Golden, vice president of Erikson Music and Korg Canada and son of Jam Industries founder Marty Golden, passed away on May 11 from cancer. He was 50.

Golden was named vice president of Erikson Music and Korg Canada in 1996.

In July 2011, he was promoted to the Jam executive team as executive vice president of Jam Industries.

Golden is survived by his wife, Micheline, and his daughter, Dawna.



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ELECTRO-HARMONIX | INSTALLATION

ELECTRO GOES GREEN

Electro-Harmonix recently installed 213 solar panels on the roof of its Long Island City, N.Y., headquarters.

Company founder and President Mike Matthews said he wouldn't have done the installation if it weren't for the government subsidies.

"Frankly, solar cells just don't generate enough electricity to make their installation economically viable," Matthews said. "To me, the sensible crossing point would be when oil hits \$200 a barrel, unless new energy-generating sources are invented first." ehx.com



Solar panels on the roof of Electro-Harmonix's headquarters

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APPOINTMENTS

Martin Names Duncan VP of Brand Marketing

C.F. Martin recently named Amani Duncan vice president of brand marketing.



Duncan was originally hired in January 2011 as the company's director of promotional marketing.

"Amani was chosen to round out the core team at Martin for her creative thinking and great enthusiasm," said Keith Lombardi, president and COO of Martin. "In her short tenure at Martin, she has completely overhauled our marketing efforts, providing a vibrant, youth-oriented approach while still staying true to our heritage and culture. We are very lucky to have her on the team."

Fender has appointed James Druckrey executive vice president and chief operating officer. He has nearly 15 years of experience in music and audio technology. Fender also hired Jeff Quinn as its licensing director.

Yamaha Artist Services recently promoted Greg Crane to manager of artist relations for Yamaha acoustic drums and Jennifer Vierling to artist relations specialist for the band and orchestral division.

David Krall has been added to the board of directors of Universal Audio.

Seymour Duncan has named James Garza domestic sales manager.

Karl Bates recently joined John Hornby Skewes' senior sales team as pro audio area sales manager south.

EAW has tapped Adam Shulman to the position of installed systems support manager.

AES recently appointed Steve Green as business development manager.

Renkus-Heinz has added Alejandro Fidalgo to its engineering team.

Carl Jacobson has joined PreSonus in the newly created position of director of business development and strategic marketing.

LOS CABOS | DISTRIBUTION

Los Cabos Inks Another Deal

Los Cabos has named TMC its new Japanese distributor.

"This is shaping up to be an incredible year for us," said Matt Carter, director of marketing and artist relations for Los Cabos Drumsticks. "We're pleased to welcome TMC to our family of distributors, and we're

very excited to start working with them."

This announcement marks Los Cabos Drumsticks' fourth distribution addition since January. Earlier this year, Los Cabos announced new distributors in South Korea (Drum Korea), New Zealand (Hawkes Bay Agencies) and Canada (Yorkville). (loscabosdrumsticks.com)

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*VT80+ offers an extra 40 watts of power. VT120+ offers an extra 30 watts.
VT40+ offers an extra 20 watts. VT20+ offers an extra 10 watts.



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IDEAS

Inside**IDEAS** > The Customer Whisperer Page 28 > The Lesson Room Page 32 > From the Trenches Page 34

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

ASK FOR THE SALE

You've presented the most convincing pitch, complete with every logical reason a customer should hand you a credit card and walk out with the instrument you've demonstrated and justified. You can see it in his eyes. The price is perfect, and it's exactly what he needs. You want him to buy it, he wants it, and out spills the deal-killing words: "This looks good, but I really need to shop around more."

From here, you have three options. You can opt for hard core closing tactics that risk tarnishing his impression of you, Mr. Nice Guy sales pro. This could include wrestling him to the ground with empty threats. ("The product isn't likely to be around much longer.") But if your store is like ours, we don't like to push too hard — maybe to a fault. It's not our company culture.

The second response is to acknowledge the customer and thank him for shopping. Maybe even hand out a business card with the commission-inducing, "My name is John. If there's any way I can help in the future ..."

Unfortunately, the conversation is usually over at this point.



How to respond if customers say they need to shop around more

I suggest you aren't doing your business or your customers a favor if you use either of these responses. The first is rude, the second downright lazy. You need to acquiesce, but there's no reason to end the conversation, especially if you sense the customer's committed to a future purchase. So, I'll propose a third, more creative option.

Remember, we're in the Information Age. We interact with news and resources unheard of 10 years ago. We're ensconced in blogs, specialty magazines and *Consumer Reports*, all telling us what to think and devoid of a surface agenda. We betray our hard-earned cash when we don't thoroughly research purchase decisions. Our customers feel duty-bound to get as much information as they can up front, and we need to indulge them. Conversely, there's so much misinformation floating around, we need to help them sift through the debris. So when customers throw down the I-need-to-check-around stumper, consider these more productive responses.

"Where else are you going to look?" Another brick-and-mortar store? Internet? Pawnshop? You may find customers have no idea where to look next. They could be offering important reconnaissance for your next sale. They may be comparing your business to a pawnshop, a cue to say, "We have an onsite repair tech for after-the-sale service." One thing's for sure: If their next-stop competitor matches your price, they won't drive back unless you give them

compelling reasons to.

"Who or what is helping you make this decision?" A brother-in-law musician? Teacher? Internet user forum? If it's a musician or relative, it may be someone you know, and you can exploit the relationship. If it's a teacher, you can mention what other teachers are saying. If it's an online forum, find out if it's one you frequent or should frequent.

"What were you planning on spending?" Maybe you overshot the budget, and now's the time to back down to another stock item. Maybe your best offer is still in striking distance.

"How soon do you need this?" If the need is immediate, you can help save the customer time and gas.

The independent brick-and-mortar retailer has this advantage more than any other venue. Granted, folks don't like to be sold, but you can't underestimate the power of a human being, even a total stranger, validating an intent to buy.

Ask for the sale. **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*.

THE CUSTOMER WHISPERER | BY GREG BILLINGS

Be Understood

I've spent the last 35 years arguing with customers when I really should have been telling them what they wanted to hear. Yes, a beginning student does need a good instrument, but convincing parents who say, "We want to start off cheap to see if she sticks with it," has been a struggle. Maybe I've just been using the wrong words.



Fortunately, message expert and political pollster Dr. Frank Luntz has written a book that explains exactly how to find and use the right words. In this classic tome, *Words That Work*, Luntz demonstrates the effective — and failed — use of words in politics and commerce. He was kind enough to put his central theme on the cover and to repeat it every few pages: "It's not what you say, it's what people hear."

As the sidebar shows (see page 30), basic communication isn't that complicated, but not surprisingly, it's the encoding and decoding that cause problems. We give a lot of attention to our encoding, producing messages planned to persuade and convince. We're often stunned by our own brilliance, only to be frustrated when we have to say the dreaded sentence, "No, what I meant to say was ...," because our words were decoded (and therefore understood) by the receiver in ways we hadn't intended. In other words, what people hear has more to do with how they decode your message than the message itself.

If what people hear is more important than what we say, shouldn't we try to tell them what they want to hear? Thinking about the listener and how our words will be received might be even more useful than creating a compelling argument. For instance, a mom inquiring about guitar lessons for her son likely has more on her mind than the number of pickups on the guitar. She may be thinking about his social

development or reluctantly honoring a promise. There's no way we can know for sure what her agenda is, but the right words can reassure her and reinforce that she's doing a good thing.

Following a few simple rules of communication will make our message likely to be understood the way we hoped it would be. Dr. Luntz provides several of these rules, and many of them are

particularly relevant for us.

First, **use simple words.** Find simple ways to explain complex issues. Most clients will tune out if you tell them a product has an asymmetrically curved bridge. But they might be happy to learn that because of new technology, it will stay in tune longer and sound better than a cheaper model, creating a better performance experience for the student. Apple spends almost no time talking about how its products work. It shows us how they will enhance our lives.

Along with simple words, **use short sentences.** For instance, saying, "Kids do better on better instruments," is more effective than saying, "Scientific evidence supports the conclusion that students with access to higher-quality instruments have superior outcomes than control groups with only average instruments," especially if the statement's followed up with a true story about the first time you played a really good instrument and how you felt. You can always use hard data if you need it, but most of the time, you won't need it.

People live in a near-constant stream of information, and they're pretty good at filtering out anything that even hints at boredom. We have to **be compelling and interesting.** We have to grab their attention and grab it again every few minutes. Using the right words can help, if we

It's not what you say that matters — it's what people hear. Here's how to reach them



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know what the right words are.

Often the right words are words that have found their way into **popular culture**. You can't click on a news item lately without hearing about "accountability" or "consequences." We might remind our clients that we hold our music teachers accountable for our students' progress, and we hold the students accountable for their practice time. We may make the case that students can practice on lower-quality instruments, but there will be consequences. "Austerity" sends a chill down most people's spines these days, so avoid that one. The most effective word in advertising, year after year, is "free." Find a way to use it.

Here's a quick way to find other magic words. With a high-

lighter, turn to any page in this magazine. Highlight every word in an article or ad that makes you feel something — good, bad, queasy or sad. These are the words you want to use or avoid.

One word you always want to avoid is your competitor's name or brand. If you must mention competitors at all, it's better to refer to them as "the other guys" and their wares as "ordinary products." Don't advertise their brands or infer credibility by saying their names out loud.

Find a way to **reinforce your clients' intentions**, and don't challenge their preconceived notions. There's little to be gained by confrontation. The most successful mass communications experiment in history is Fox News. Ideology notwithstanding, it has

a remarkable formula. It knows the preconceived opinions of its viewers, and it constantly reinforces them. And every time viewers hear something they decode with agreement, they are rewarded with a shot of dopamine from the pleasure center of their brains, making them very loyal viewers.

If you need to challenge bad ideas, **speak aspirationally**. Nobody wants to hear about why you stopped carrying brand X. They want to hear that the one you carry will fulfill their desires. Every day, we talk with parents who are concerned their kids won't stick with the piano. Years ago, we promised to take the piano back, but today, we speak of the wonderful impact music has on kids' lives and aca-

demic success. If we reinforce their hopes and dreams, we can trigger a little dopamine rush. (And people are more likely to make a buying decision based on emotion than logic.)

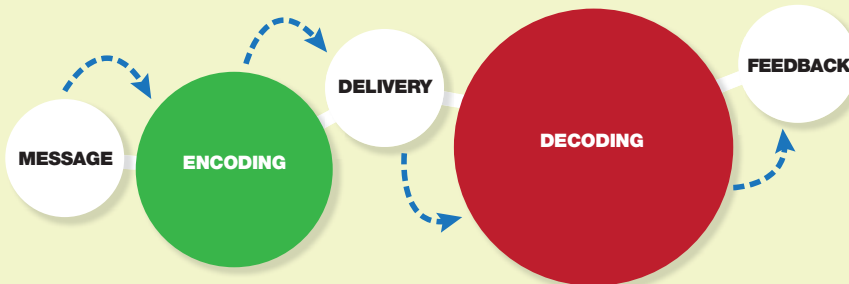
Credibility is now as important as philosophy. Don't be shy about telling clients your personal story and your commitment to music. You can see my employes roll their eyes when I tell clients I was assembling piano benches for 25 cents each in my dad's store when I was 7 years old or show pictures of my grandfather's band. But that story and those pictures reassure my clients. "Family" and related words, such as "dad" and "grandfather," are words that work well with our clients.

Finally, **consistency matters**. Refine your story using all the right words, and tell it over and over. Then refine it, and tell it again. What are the words that will work for you? They're all around you. Spend some time thinking about your customers and what's important to them. What are the words that will be red flags? Avoid them. What are the words that will elicit an emotional response? Use them. Don't be afraid of trial and error.

Let's make a conscious effort to figure out what words will be effective and use them often. Customers won't mind being told that better things cost more money if spending more will give them greater rewards, but they must receive and understand your message. So, use the right words to tell customers what they want to hear. Then, follow through. Offer great value, route the kids to the best teachers and provide exceptional service. **MI**

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

THE FIVE PARTS OF COMMUNICATION



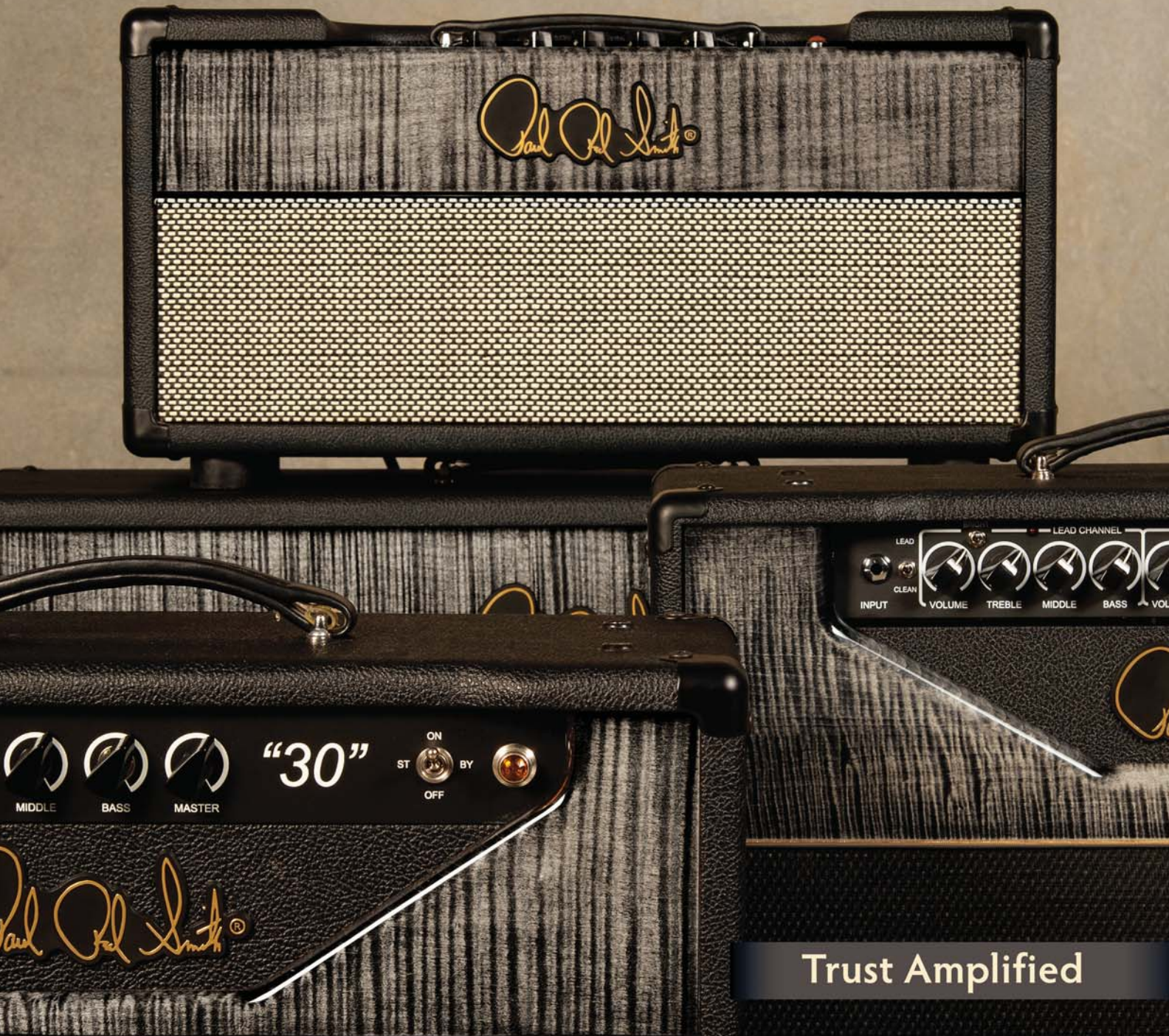
1. THE MESSAGE. A thought, idea or concept. It can be as simple as a birthday wish or as complex as the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

2. ENCODING. The sender composes a message in a particular form. It could be a language spoken or written, a picture, an icon, or even music. Invariably, the preferences, biases and peculiarities of the sender corrupt the purity of the message — sometimes unconsciously, sometimes deliberately.

3. DELIVERY. The medium. TV, radio, newspaper, Morse code, e-mail, Facebook, smoke signals and simple conversation are all ways to distribute a message. Some are more efficient or more fun than others, but all are simply delivery systems.

4. DECODING. The message's receiver interprets the message using intellect, while coloring it with his or her personal preferences, biases and peculiarities. This framing of the message is subconscious and not deliberate, but it's powerful in determining how the message is understood. Again, "It's not what you say, it's what people hear."

5. FEEDBACK. The action taken as a result of the message — or confirmation that the message was received and, hopefully, understood.



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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

Sales Aerobics

When you hire people for sales positions, do you hire musicians or sales professionals? The right answer is “both wrapped up in one tidy package.” But the reality is that frightful numbers of stores do little more than find good musicians without much regard for their sales chops. And even fewer dealers do anything to train those who are untrained or develop those who are.



I did the same thing for years. I had the good sense to at least find people with the right raw talent to be in sales. But for too long, I did nothing to nurture their talents while hoping that my new hires would develop into good salespeople.

That changed when I learned a valuable lesson from a veteran speaker, the late Jack Berman. He suggested a program called “Sales Aerobics.” It inspired me to create my own program and keep it in effect every day up until I closed my store.

The concept is simple. Professional athletes would never dream of going out on the field without regularly practicing their chosen vocation. But unlike athletes, most sales “professionals” hit the floor and hope for the best. Sales aerobics offer your people the opportunity to practice their craft before they’re face to face with the person who pays their salaries: the customer.

I went back to my store and incorporated sales aerobics into my company culture. In my version of sales aerobics, we conducted a 15-minute session every morning before opening. (It lasted 30 minutes on Saturdays.) When done day in and day out, those quickie sessions added up to a fair amount of sales practice. It wasn’t optional, and my people quickly learned that it paid big dividends.

CONDUCTING A SESSION

The key to a sales aerobics session is team involvement. Start with any imaginary but realistic sales scenario. For instance, a customer comes into the store asking for a brand you don’t carry, or a customer tells you he or she is going home to speak with a spouse about buying a product. One sales associate plays

the customer, the other is the salesperson.

Let them role-play for a minute or two. That’s all it takes. You’re not looking for a complete transaction. Next, everyone gets to comment on what’s transpired. You’ll be amazed by what people learn in these interplays. Hope someone made a mistake during the mock sales approach. This is when the real learning takes place and when everyone has the opportunity to work together to make it better.

Some of our training focused on phone calls. The two participants worked through the bevy of miscues that often short-circuit any hope of converting a caller into a customer. One of my favorites was putting the caller on hold and requiring all the participants to sit in silence for 2 minutes. I witnessed an immediate reduction in call holding times throughout my organization.

Sales aerobics work because it’s much easier to see someone else’s mistakes than your own. I watched sales associates easily pick out miscues in role-plays that they regularly made. Everyone was grateful for the opportunity to err in front of colleagues rather than with a paying customer — when it could hit them smack dab in their wallets! **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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FROM THE TRENCHES | BY MYRNA SISLEN

Ten Years & Counting

On March 22, two members of the Washington, D.C., city council presented Middle C Music with a resolution that not only honored the store's 10th anniversary but also proclaimed the day Middle C Music Day. Mayor Vincent Gray even issued his own proclamation.

Ten years earlier, as I was leaving a kickboxing class across the street from the then-failing music store, I decided to buy Middle C, which had been losing \$5,000 a month for five years. The decade since has seen it become the only full-service music store in Washington — and one that's profitable.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

How have I managed to turn Middle C around? When I bought the store, I had no retail experience. I was a classical guitarist and tap dancer. As a musician, you work 24/7, and that turns out to be great preparation for running a small business. In the beginning, my greatest fear was I'd never have a day off for the rest of my life. That has turned out to be pretty much the case, but it doesn't bother me anymore. I also didn't know the rules of business, and that seems to have been a plus — at least for me.

That said, not knowing *how* to run a business can be disastrous, and I didn't know that either. I had a lot to learn, and I needed to learn it fast.

Luckily, I realized the best way to learn is from other people. My first convention was Summer NAMM 2002. I attended every session and gained a sense of what worked for others. My second show was the Retail Print Music Dealers Association (RPMDA) convention in 2003. I desperately needed to know how to research music. Everyone, and I mean everyone, at the convention told me, "If you have questions or need help, call me any time." I still get emotional thinking

about those conventions. My questions were answered, and more importantly, I gained access to resources for future questions.

I have since attended every NAMM, RPMDA and, more recently, National Association of School Music Dealers convention. Frankly, I don't know how anyone can run a successful music store and not attend the industry conferences.

THE BIG LESSON

I'll never forget my first important lesson. There was a session at Summer NAMM where the panelists were asked, "If you could expand in any way, what would you do?" They all said the same thing: "lesson space." So when the opportunity to expand arose in 2005, I built four teaching studios. Since then, I have built four more studios and now have 400 students a week.

Early on, I decided that to survive, the store needed three income sources: retail, lessons and instrument rentals. The last piece of the puzzle was rentals. I learned the nuts and bolts of running a program from trade show sessions. As soon as I could afford it, I became a Conn-Selmer dealer, and since then, I've added Jupiter and Cannonball.

Of course, there have been bumps along the way. Hiring and keeping good employees has been a huge challenge. Holger Siems from G. Henle once told me that he had a great staff, and when they left, it took him a decade to create another great staff. That made me feel better.

We are lucky to be part of an industry that's small and supportive. I owe my success to all of my colleagues who have been there for these 10 years answering questions and giving me suggestions. **MI**

Myrna Sislen owns and operates Middle C Music in Washington, D.C.



The author (middle) with Washington, D.C., councilors Jack Evans and Mary Cheh

Surviving and profiting during my first 10 years in business

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InsideSHOWS

- > The 2012 RPMDA convention attracted more than 230 attendees.
- > The show featured 47 print music publishers and related services in the exhibit hall.
- > More than 30 first-time members attended the convention.

SHOWS



RETAIL PRINT MUSIC DEALERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

SEIZING DIGITAL

This year's Retail Print Music Dealers Association (RPMDA) convention issued a clarion call to music retailers and publishers: Embrace change, or be changed.

Held May 2–5 at the Hilton Los Angeles hotel, the show featured the very L.A. theme “There’s No Business Like Your Business.” And during those

Retailers at RPMDA seek ways to stand out in the digital realm

four days, dealers learned ways to adapt to and stand out in the fierce world of Amazon.com,

iDevices and digital everything.

“I’m reminded of Eastman Kodak filing for bankruptcy,” said Mark Cabaniss, senior vice president of Word Music. “They did not embrace the digital technologies soon enough. For retailers, they need to remember to see change as their friend.”

Digital strategies took first place at RPMDA’s “Best Ideas” session. Winner Lori Supinie,

president of Senseney Music, offered a new concept for cross-promoting physical print music with digital sheet downloads — a business that has become

1. Alfred’s Ron Manus (left) and Bryan Bradley; 2. FJH’s Claire Cornish and Kevin Hackinson; 3. Carl Fischer’s Chris Scialfa and Mary Alice McDonald; 4. Arpeges-Diffusion’s Pierre Cotelle; 5. Outgoing RPMDA President Gayle Beacock presents the President’s Award to Ward-Brodt Music’s Mick Faulhaber; 6. Retail Up!’s Gordon O’Hara; 7. The Hal Leonard team indulges its inner Julia Child

a double-edged sword for some retailers.

"[Digital downloads] take time, they can cannibalize book sales, and they tend to [attract] customers we haven't seen before and may not see again," she said. "These can also be opportunities to make and keep a customer, so for every digital download we sell, we'll give the customer a coupon for a percentage discount of an in-stock piano or piano/vocal/guitar book on a future visit."

During the panel discussion "Future View," audience members expressed concerns that Apple could become a chief print music seller if enough consumers migrate to iPads. Afterwards, Chris Scialfa, Carl Fischer's senior vice president of sales, explained that, for now, he believes that won't happen.

"Digital downloads should continue to increase steadily," he said. "However, until a device comes out that is affordable, reacts to every nuance to

emulate sheet music and reaches its marketing tipping point, digital sales won't dominate our industry. The content owners didn't change the way people purchase recorded music, the iPod did. The same will hold true for print music should the iPod of our industry ever exist."

Still, print music publishers used RPMDA to roll out services to help dealers add value to their websites and businesses. Soundforth debuted new webcasts, and Word Music announced its upcoming digital reading sessions. Both let dealers link the video content back to their

own websites. Hal Leonard also announced Essential Elements Interactive, an interactive website for the company's best-selling method series. The site will give teachers, students and parents practice and learning tools that coordinate with Essential Elements.

Amid this hubbub, Schott Music publicized that its Classical Piano Method series won't be available digitally. "We think as long as there is no ideal electronic device that fits the music, sheet music will still have a big life," said Bernhard Mueller, international sales manager for Schott. "For music publishers, print will always make up the majority of their sales."

But at its heart, RPMDA is more about ideas than products. Participants at the 2012 conference dove neck deep into learning and sharing new business tactics. Turn the page to read the highlights. **MI**

1. From left: Online Sheet Music's Chaim Rubinov, Alfred's Krista Hart and Lorenz's Kris Kropff; 2. Popplers Music's Don Langlie; 3. Schott's Bernhard Mueller; 4. Willis Music's Kevin Cranley (left) and Brian Watson; 5. Word Music's Tony Bakker (left) and Mark Cabaniss

ALFRED'S 90TH ANNIVERSARY



On Friday, May 4, Alfred Music Publishing held a rollicking 90th anniversary party at its headquarters. Clockwise from top, left: Sassafraz, the evening's entertainment, featuring (from left) Alfred's Ron Manus and Rich Lackowski with Daisy Rock's Tish Ciravolo and Tommy Norton; Manus addresses partygoers; previous Alfred head Morty Manus thanks attendees for their support; and Lisa Loeb performs. Alfred's Elisa Palladino also received the 2012 Don Eubanks Publisher Representative Award from RPMDA.





Chip Averwater

THE GOSPEL OF RETAIL

Chip Averwater adopted the persona of a southern preacher to spread the gospel of *Retail Truths*, his new book. During his session of the same name, the Amro Music chairman and former NAMM chairman shared 30 of these truths. Highlights:

+ **A company is known by the people it keeps.** “A store is the product of the people it sells.”

+ **Love your products, but only for their sales.** “We’re stocking a store, not a museum or a trophy case.”

+ **The measure of a manager is the situations he can handle amiably.** “A good manager can deliver a difficult message with respect and consideration.”

+ **Volume feeds egos; profit feeds families.**

+ **A manager is not a referee.** “A manager cannot resolve disputes between employees.”

“The solution is we need to ask them to work it out. ‘It’s not good for the company for the two of you to be fighting.’”

+ **Happy customers come and go; unhappy customers accumulate.** “It’s worthwhile to find them and make

‘Happy customers come and go; unhappy customers accumulate.’

up with them. They can be as great an advocate as they are an adversary.”

+ **A good salesman makes a bad buyer.** “They have too much empathy with other salespeople. Their personality is at odds with detail.”

“And why do we want to keep them from the sales floor?”

+ **An aggressive competitor deserves the bad deals.** “A lot of sales don’t make sense. Let ’em go.”

“Sometimes, when we raise our prices, the competition does, too — eventually.”

+ **A retailer’s effectiveness can be measured by the animosity of his competitors.** “There’s no good sportsmanship in retail.”

+ **If at first you do succeed, try not to believe you’re infallible.** “We really need periodic failures to keep us realistic.”



Maribeth Barrons

MERCHANDISING NO NO'S

During “What NOT to Display,” Hal Leonard’s Maribeth Barrons showed retailers how to “eliminate decades of display deficits,” as she put it. The humorous session outlined what she sees as three major mistakes dealers make in merchandising print music and how to correct these blunders.

1. Don’t display that you have the lowest price. “Dot-coms with their low prices aren’t the end all and be all. Seventy-eight percent of consumers list information as the most significant purchasing factor. So don’t advertise that you have the lowest price.”

“And I’ve seen stores prohibit consumers from using their smartphones in-store. Don’t do that. That consumer is trying to make a buying decision.”

2. Don’t display method books. “What the heck are you doing giving that kind of space to an item that’s already sold? Milk and eggs are not at the front of the grocery store.”

“Indeed, method books are already sold. You or a publisher already did the work to sell them.”

3. Don’t use header cards to display print inventory. “Trust me, I want you to be able to have all that product in your store, and I want you to be able to sell it, too.”

“Add tiers to your displays to create more selling opportunities.”

CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

Bob Kohl and Alan Friedman dissected the art and science of print inventory management in “Strategic Purchasing: The Big Bang Theory for Your Bottom Line.” The spirited session included a video of both of them lip-synching — and, in Friedman’s case, playing Brian May-style air guitar to — Queen songs. Here are their tips for bolstering the bottom line:

Bob Kohl, Print Purchasing Manager for Long & McQuade

- “Create a weekly purchasing plan to restock sold titles quickly. Additionally, make sure to schedule stock orders so that you have adequate inventory for the coming selling season.”
- “Schedule purchasing dates for special events, such as workshops, reading sessions and convention exhibits. And mark return privilege dates so



Bob Kohl



Alan Friedman

that excess stock may be sent back to the publishers on time.”

- “Expect the unexpected.” (He used the example of a clinician who cancels at the last minute.)
- “Get new issues on the sales floor fast to maximize the sales potential.”
- “Be aware of suppliers’ payment terms and policies. There

are often enhanced new-issue reorder discounts and other special deals that can be taken advantage of.”

- “For clearance inventory, determine how much time you will allow it to remain on hand before finding an alternative way to get rid of it. Consider donating clearance stock to a worthy cause.”

Alan Friedman, MI Retail Financial Guru

- “I call this the game of educated guessing. Don’t beat yourself up if you make a mistake. Just correct it.”
- Set an inventory turn goal of 2.5 to three-plus times annually. You can calculate your turn by dividing the cost of goods sold by average inventory on hand.
- Set a GMROI (gross margin return on investment) goal of \$1.50 for every dollar invested. If you’re a Tri-Tech AIMsi accounting software user, you can easily find this number in one of AIMsi’s canned inventory management reports.
- If you’re carrying product that you know moves slowly but increases your credibility with your customers, reduce your advertising budget by the cost of that inventory.



Chris Scialfa

EMBRACING THE CHANGING ECONOMY

Chris Scialfa, Carl Fischer’s senior vice president of sales, hosted a panel discussion, “New Rules,” that delved into “retail solutions for today’s changing economy.” Panelists weighed in on their biggest business challenges.

- Tracy Leenman explained her difficulty getting foot traffic into her store, Musical Innovations of Greenville, S.C., soon after opening. “We decided that if we couldn’t get people to come to us, we’d go to them.” She began attending “every convention,” where she said her company was the only one displaying print music. Musical Innovations also began hosting author clinics with help from publishers. According to Leenman, the result has been dramatic annual sales increases. “The pendulum’s swinging back. People aren’t interested in talking to a computer.”

• Bruce Treidel, founder of Bethel Music Center in Bethel, Conn., mentioned seeing revenues dip from 2008 through 2010. “The old ways of advertising weren’t working. I needed a way to disseminate my information to customers locally.”

He took advantage of Google AdWords and set a budget, so he didn’t overspend. Google caught wind of his company and, in May 2011, shot a 90-minute spot about Bethel Music Center that positioned Treidel as a local hero.

HAL LEONARD | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

THE INSTANT AUDIO DEPARTMENT

The biggest up-and-comer in the audio industry might just be a music publisher.

During the past three years, Hal Leonard has forged a series of distribution partnerships with such names as Avid, Blue Microphones and, most recently, Ableton. This is good news for retailers hoping to capitalize on the burgeoning technology products marketplace.

“Music technology is a growing category,” said Brad Smith, Hal Leonard’s senior sales and marketing manager, who noted that the company’s sales in the category have tripled in three years. “Anyone with a laptop or a song can make a quality recording. So think about the potential marketplace with that type of need.”

To tap into that customer base, Hal Leonard can give dealers instant access to a stable of popular brands — currently 22 in all, representing more than 500 products. The company also offers a simple purchasing solution, with freight savings through bundled orders and no required minimums.

“We can be your one source,” Smith said. “We can pretty much completely supply a recording department for a store. They don’t need to go, ‘We need a mic line. We need to go somewhere else.’ Or, ‘I need a mic stand line. I need to go somewhere else.’ They can go to Hal.

“And a lot of times, [retailers] have the product go along with their print orders, so they’re saving freight because they consolidate.”



Brad Smith (seated) with the Hal Leonard tech sales team, from left: Brian Swinehart, Kevin Klemme, Brandon Mathieus and Scott Brooks

TAILORED PACKAGES

Hal Leonard’s specialty in small goods inspired its team to go deeper into the audio category. The company’s sales reps are required to cross-sell everything from classical sheet music to Pro Tools recording software. Hal has even created a tech sales team — four in-house pros focused on technology products — to handle highly specific questions and technical issues.

“Hal Leonard is really good at the mechanics of the business,” Smith said. “Technology companies are great developers and have killer product. That is their strength. As partners, we add reliability and faster service.”

He stressed that retailers going through Hal Leonard won’t be cut off from manufacturers. In many cases, Hal’s reps work in partnership with the audio manufacturer’s sales team.

“[Retailers] still have direct contact with the manufacturer,” Smith said. “But when it comes to ordering and customer service

Hal Leonard’s distribution business gets dealers started in technology products with little risk

issues, they’re dealing with Hal Leonard. And I can’t think of one exception where a dealer has said, ‘You know what? This plan is not working.’”

One big reason it’s working is Hal can tailor packages for each retailer’s needs. The Get Acquainted program offers six basic product mixes for dealers hoping to dip their toes in the category. Plus, dealers can call on Hal for merchandising materials, such as empty boxes for pricier software, and product upgrades. The company’s monthly *Tech Talk* e-newsletter also keeps dealers abreast of new gear.

“We function like a full-fledged technology distributor,

with everything from marketing materials to the product,” Smith said. “In the situation where there’s a software update, we’ve got a system in place that’s seamless, that’s hassle-free. And we’re not going anywhere. So you get that combination of the Hal Leonard legacy and the proven brand-name product.”

REPEAT SALES

And Hal’s product offerings continue to grow. The company recently formed distribution agreements with XLN Audio, maker of Addictive Drums, and Arobas Music, supplier of Guitar Pro tablature editor software — now in its sixth iteration.

Smith added that he’s especially excited about Hal’s mobile device accessory business, a segment he encouraged retailers to embrace.

“Some dealers are anxious that everything is going around them with downloading apps,” he said. “But in fact, we have an incredible amount of new accessories that support that. They’re all being run through the retailer — iPad clamps, earbuds and USB microphones. We distribute wireless page turners. These are all products for [retailers] to sell.”

And according to Smith, those who dabble may find themselves with repeat sales. “You can have a customer who, once he or she gets into recording, wants microphones, studio monitors, soundproofing material and plug-ins with different ways to manipulate the sound,” he said. “That’s where it’s an expansive, cool category.” **MI**

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A Taylor acoustic guitar is leaning against a striped armchair. The guitar is positioned vertically, with its headstock at the top and its body resting on the chair's seat. The chair has a wooden frame with ornate carvings and a seat and backrest upholstered in a multi-colored striped fabric. The background is plain white.

BY JEFF CAGLE
PHOTOS BY STEVE WINSLOW

MAKING A SCENE

Paul Decker took a tough lesson from the downturn to heart. He's since rebuilt his combo dealership, Music Villa, as the ultimate community hot spot

During the worst of the downturn, Paul Decker found himself in an uncomfortable position. He had to keep telling customers everything was great while sales plateaued, bills piled up and he struggled to find a way to keep his staff employed.



Inside Music Villa's store in Bozeman, Mont.



Then came a turning point in May 2011. A longtime customer walked in, looked around and told Decker, “You just don’t have anything anymore,” referring to his previously well-stocked, highly regarded high-end acoustic guitars. After licking his wounds, Decker realized the customer was right. The conversation set in motion an effort to revitalize Music Villa.

During the next year, Decker and his team reimagined the high-end acoustic room, remodeled the front of the building and focused the company’s Web efforts to create the best acoustic guitar demo videos available.

“I wanted to tell that customer, ‘Duh, we’re in the middle of a recession — it’s kind of a hard time,’” Decker said. “I was really mad, but I thought, ‘You know what? He’s right. My selection of nice acoustics flat-out sucks.’ It took a little slap in the face for me to wake up and realize some people were still spending money, and I wanted them to shop with me.

“I always told my employees during the recession, ‘Don’t whine. Don’t complain that it sucks. Tell people things are great.’ Because if you’re around someone who’s crabby all day, you start getting into that mindset. But it was really hard. We were trying to pay the bills and keep everyone employed and trying to be happy all the time while watching our good inventory dwindle. [That conversation had] good timing, and it was a good snap moment. We really set out on a mission to get back into the high-end acoustic business.”

PITCHING QUALITY

Decker grew up hanging around Music Villa in junior high and high school. His father, Fred, had bought the business

in 1981 when it was a small combo shop in downtown Bozeman, a city of about 40,000 in southwest Montana. Paul left after high school to travel in bands for a number of years but was drawn back to Bozeman and Music Villa. In 1999, the store moved from its original 2,000-square-foot location to its current 10,000-square-foot digs, and in 2000, Decker bought the business from his father.

As a combo dealer, Decker said Music Villa keeps things simple through a good, better, best product mix, with a special emphasis on “best” when it comes to acoustic guitars.

“I’ve found in the past couple of years that everyone is in a race to the bottom on everything,” he added. “But I’ve found that people want a quality product. They want someone who knows how to run the device and has some knowledge about it.”

Music Villa’s acoustic inventory includes custom-built guitars from Martin, Taylor and Gibson, many of which have been designed in-house, all the way down to the woods.

“You can get anything at a million places for as cheap as possible, so what’s going to make you stand out?” Decker asked rhetorically. “I’m not interested in selling the cheapest item anymore. I want to sell a quality item that’s going to work and going to last. If people love your store, a couple bucks on something isn’t going to make or break the deal.”

‘SELF-SUSTAINING’ BUSINESS

Getting people to love his store is something Decker has worked hard at during the 15 years he’s been running the business. That said, his formula is relatively simple: On top of not stocking the same products

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as everyone else, Music Villa strives to provide the best service and product knowledge around, be different, and have a lot of fun doing it.

One of Music Villa's unorthodox approaches, which Decker said his fellow MI dealers have questioned, is having a computer with Internet access in the middle of the showroom, so customers can compare prices online.

"We also use it ourselves," Decker said. "Customers are always asking how much this is, how much that is. We use all the big online stores as our reference. It lets customers know that we've priced our products the same way and we're not afraid to compete. The thing is, everyone has [the Internet] on their

phones, so it's not a secret. It's nice for the customer to have a computer screen to look up stuff and research. We use it all day long."

When Music Villa doesn't carry a particular product, Decker and his staff often help customers buy the item from another retailer. "If I don't have it and it's something I don't really want to bother with getting, I help them get it somewhere else," Decker said. "I'll say, 'Here, try this guy — good, reputable place. Buy it from them.' And then I'll sell [the client] all the accessories to go with it.

"It builds trust with your customer. You're helping them get something that they would have had to look on this massive World Wide Web to find,

and if I can recommend another dealer or a store that I know is suitable, I believe it gives them confidence to buy it from them and makes them trust me even more."

Building these trusting relationships keeps a steady stream of customers flowing through the doors at Music Villa. Decker mentioned some of the regulars come in nearly every day, often just to hang out — something he encourages.

"We're packed in here every day," Decker said of his foot traffic. "And we're in a fairly small town of about 40,000. The point is you have to be a store where people want to hang out. Even on a slow day, if I don't sell a big item, we still have a nice ring out because we've

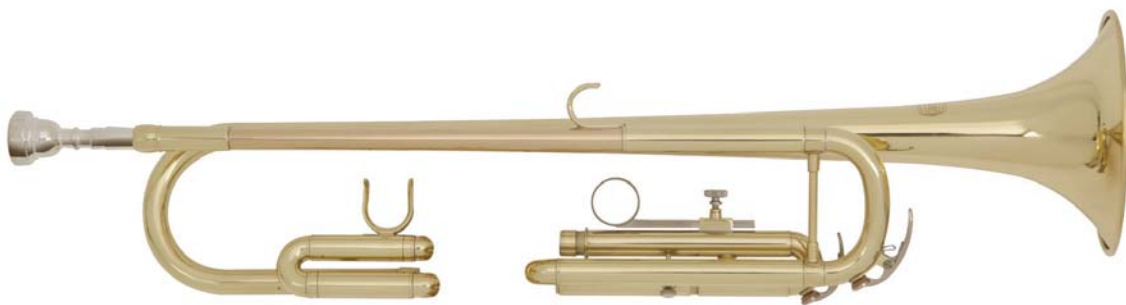
sold so many little cables, parts, pieces and accessories people come to us for or buy while they're hanging out."

Fifteen years of hosting clinics and workshops, as well as constantly remerchandising, have also helped build community at the dealership, according to Decker. But employing a trained staff of 15 who he said "live to have fun" is even more critical.

"In any business or store out there, if you've built a community, the business becomes kind of self-sustaining. It becomes a living, breathing thing."

A MILLION VIEWS

Music Villa's also making a splash with its virtual store. Visitors to the company's website can view guitar demo



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videos or watch a Web series, “The Music Store,” which got picked up by Bozeman’s local CW television affiliate. Local musicians and people looking to hire a band can connect through two networks built by Music Villa’s Web team, montanabands.com and montanamusicians.com.

Decker accomplished this by hiring two full-time online specialists, which he noted is a point of contention with other MI retailers. “It’s hard for people to understand why I would hire full-time Web guys,” he said. “News flash: The Web is not going away, and it’s the avenue for everything. I don’t know about search engine optimization or designing websites. I can’t do that stuff. I don’t want

to. I’m trying to sell guitars and run a business and go pick out woods to build more guitars. There’s so much to do, but you have to have a Web presence — more than just a website.”

He admitted that perfecting Music Villa’s online presence has been a process of trial and error. Specifically, Decker said he tried selling everything in his store online until he realized he needed to simplify, and do one thing well.

“I looked at it and asked, ‘Why am I doing this?’ To sell a set of strings, I have to go box it up, mail it. The big-box stores do it well, so why would I want to compete with them? I see dealers trying to provide all this stuff on their websites, but unless you’re going to do it as

well as the big guys, what’s the point? You’ve got to do something different.

“It was pretty basic for us: We’re good at high-end acoustics. So we asked, ‘Why are we trying to do all this other stuff on the Web? Let’s get back to selling nice acoustic guitars.’ Now, our whole Web focus is having the best video demo of an acoustic guitar anywhere. I want to have the best demos and the best guitars.”

According to Decker, Music Villa’s team can knock out about two videos per day from start to finish, and online traffic is growing. Some demos have accumulated 50,000 or more views, and most see nearly 1,000 views within the first week of being uploaded. All told, the

company’s videos have been viewed nearly 1.5 million times on YouTube.

“We knew [we were onto something] when we looked at our YouTube page a few months ago and saw we had a million views,” Decker said. “It’s like, ‘OK, now we’re getting it.’ I wish we would have done it earlier, but it’s never too late to start doing these things.”

THE ORIGINAL SOCIAL NETWORK

Decker said he likes to claim Music Villa was social networking online long before MySpace and Facebook. To back that up, he points to online networks his company has built with montanamusicians.com and montanabands.com, which got their starts when he

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jumped back into the business in the late '90s.

"Back then, we had a paper file box on the counter where someone would always be looking for a drummer or guitar player," Decker said. "It was like a little musicians' filing cabinet. That was our community directory. People also were always calling me looking for a band for a wedding or other event."

He built montanabands.com as a Rolodex to free himself up from all those phone calls; montanamusicians.com soon followed as a statewide effort to connect musicians. Both have developed into Facebook-meets-Craigslist hybrids where bands can upload information with links to their websites or demos, and people looking to hire bands

for events can search by genre.

"We've tried to bring the Montana scene together," he said. "[The sites] are great resources."

Though Music Villa is starting to see the fruits of its online efforts — nearly a quarter of the store's high-end acoustic sales are now shipped orders — Decker said he's been criticized over the years for his less sales-oriented projects, including the networking sites and "The Music Store" Web series, which features short webisodes chronicling life at Music Villa in the vein of such shows as "Pawn Stars."

"A lot of music stores are always chasing the dollar and always following the money," he said. "For a lot of the Web stuff we've been doing over the years, I've gotten asked many

times, 'Well, how much money is it making you?'

"After a couple of years, I'm seeing the store is packed every day. A lot of people comment about ['The Music Store'] and call us to ask when we're going to do more episodes. We had to quit in January because we have to sell guitars. But hopefully, we're able to go back and make a few more episodes because it seems like people really want them."

Decker added that "The Music Store" and social networking sites can break up the atmosphere of constant selling that consumers get bombarded with daily.

"People want quality information they can use," he said. "How many e-mails are you signed up for where after awhile

you just can't take it anymore? I don't care what they're selling — I don't even want to hear about it, you know? I get an e-mail every day from Guitar Center and Musician's Friend for an extra 15-percent off — every single day. After awhile, people get sick of it, and then they're just used to it. Then if you don't sell it for that, you're in trouble. Every day is a sale.

"We're not trying to sell people anything [with these projects]. We want the sites to help people and bring musicians together. It's good for everybody. How can it not be good for a music store in the long run? It has nothing to do with trying to sell them everything. It's about keeping a good vibe and community thriving." **MI**



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THE GUIDE

2012 SUMMER NAMM

SUMMER NAMM 2012 | BY KATIE KAILUS

MUSIC CITY MANIA

From July 12–14, the MI industry will descend upon Nashville, Tenn., bringing with it a bustle of Summer NAMM educational sessions, better-business tips and the second-annual Top 100 Dealer Awards.

“We are up a little in the number of exhibitors,” said NAMM CEO Joe Lamond of the summer show. “It’s pretty steady right now. This show is all about the community music store trying to tune up as the fall and holiday selling seasons are right around the corner. This is the best time for suppliers and dealers to get together, but also to focus on education because things are changing so quickly out there. Retailers need to evolve if they are going to stay competitive.”

NAMM MUST-SEES

One educational opportunity is the show’s first Retail Boot Camp, a seven-hour workshop put on by Independent Music Store Owners (iMSO) and NAMM on Wednesday, July 11 — the day before the show starts.

Presented by retail expert



Bob Negen of WhizBang Training, the camp is designed to energize independent retailers of all sizes and will offer strategies that can be implemented immediately. Lamond said the camp has been well-received, already racking up almost 100 participants.

“This training session will help sharpen skills and prepare the independent brick-and-mortar music stores to improve business,” said iMSO President Gordy Wilcher.

The second annual Top 100

Dealer Awards will be handed out on Friday, July 13. The awards recognize retailers in multiple “best of” categories, including “Best Curb Appeal,” “Best Website” and “Dealer of the Year.”

Lamond said NAMM has worked out the kinks from last year’s inaugural ceremony, and he has high hopes for this year’s event. “The awards are almost like a NAMM University course because everyone can study what the winners are doing and emulate it,” Lamond said.

Also topping his list of must-

sees is Thursday morning’s Breakfast Session, held at 8 a.m. in the Renaissance Nashville’s Grand Ballroom. During the session, Lamond and Chip Averwater, Amro Music’s chairman and author of *Retail Truths: The Unconventional Wisdom Of Retailing*, will break down the book, providing ideas that will strengthen any business regardless of industry changes.

“You don’t want to miss this one,” Lamond said. “It’s going to be a one-on-one to really get into the details of the book.” **MI**

THURSDAY, JULY 12 BREAKFAST SESSION

8 a.m.
NAMM Retail Summit
Joe Lamond, NAMM President and CEO, with Chip Averwater, Chairman of Amro Music and Author of *Retail Truths Renaissance Nashville, Grand Ballroom*
Industry veteran Chip Averwater discusses his street-smart retailing insights and business savvy with NAMM's Joe Lamond. (Free breakfast will be served until 8:30 a.m.)

10:30 a.m.
Poor Cash Flow is Not the Problem!
Daniel Jobe of Friedman, Kannenberg & Co. and Joel Menchey of Menchey Music look at five immediate and dramatic ways to increase cash flow and bolster profitability.

11 a.m.
What Do You Mean You're Going to Look Around?!?
Bob Popyk of Bentley-Hall offers ideas for selling to the toughest customers.

11:30 a.m.
5 Easy Fixes for ZMOT
If there's a disconnect between customers and your store, it's time for your own zero moment of truth (ZMOT). Billy Cuthrell of Progressive Music Center explains how to make ZMOT work for your business.

Noon
From Hire to Fire — Keys to Creating a Dream Team
Peter Dods of Easy Music Center shares a plan for creating a top-notch team of employees.

12:30 p.m.
How to Structure Your Business for Success
Donovan Bankhead of Springfield Music walks you through a plan to structure and delegate your business for peace of mind and success.

1 p.m.
Locally Grown: Community Ties That Grow Your Business
Liane Rockley of Rockley Music Center presents ideas for getting involved with teacher organizations and marketing your store and products.

1:30 p.m.
Beware of How You "Treat" Your Music Teachers
Alan Friedman and Daniel Jobe of Friedman, Kannenberg & Co. discuss the do's and don'ts of how to classify your music teachers (i.e., independent contractors versus employees).

2 p.m.
Getting Your Employees to Rock for Applause!
Colleen Billings of Billings Piano Gallery teaches how to keep your rock star employees happy and attract the best new employees.

2:30 p.m.
20 Tips for Riding the Economic Waves: Unique Places You Can Cut Costs
Tracy Leenman of Musical Innovations offers quick, easy tips for cutting expenses, along with ideas that will take some rethinking of your business practices.

3 p.m.
Increase Your Music Lesson Sign-ups Now!
Pete Gamber of Music & Arts shows how to use today's technology, along with a host of old-school techniques that work, to get a massive boost in your music lesson sign-ups.

3:30 p.m.
Do Your Customers Trust You Enough to Buy?
Jen Lowe of BoomBoom Percussion and Tony Caporale of TwinBear Management offer tips for developing a loyal connection with current and potential customers.

4 p.m.
How to Evaluate the Pros and Cons of Social Media Sites for Your Business
Join Danny Rocks of The Company Rocks as he gives a clean, clear table outlining the pros and cons of the most popular social media sites.

4:30 p.m.
Snares, Sticks and Sales — Drum Up New Customers
Billy Cuthrell and Chris White of White House of Music moderate a panel that discusses free, easy ways to grow your drum and percussion business.

FRIDAY, JULY 13 BREAKFAST SESSION

8 a.m.
Becoming a Category of One: How Extraordinary Companies Create and Sustain Success
Joe Calloway, Author & Performance Expert
Renaissance Nashville, Grand Ballroom
Joe Calloway shares ideas and engages you in a conversation about the attitudes and actions that people in top-performing brands bring to the marketplace every day. (Free breakfast will be served until 8:30 a.m.)

10:30 a.m.
You're on Facebook ... Now What?
Grant Billings of Billings Piano Gallery discusses the most common Facebook faux pas and how to get your business' Facebook presence in line with your marketing strategy.

11 a.m.
How to Promote Your Business on \$5 a Day
Bob Popyk presents steps you can take every day to bring people into your store.

DOUBLE SESSION
11:30 a.m.
A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words — Video is Priceless!
Billy Cuthrell of Progressive Music Center demonstrates why now is the time to start harnessing the power of video.

12:30 p.m.
Everything I Learned, I Learned From My Fellow Retailers!
Danny Rocks hosts a panel of retailers, who share the best ideas they've picked up from their fellow dealers.

DOUBLE SESSION
1 p.m.
How the Best Stores Attract Customers: The Art of Enchantment!
Gayle Beacock of Beacock Music demonstrates how to train staff, so they will consistently enchant your customers.

2 p.m.
How to Fine Tune Your Lesson Program
Myrna Sislen of Middle C Music shares her best prac-

tices in building and running a profitable lesson program.

DOUBLE SESSION
2:30 p.m.
Top 10 Smart Things to Do in 2012
Alan Friedman and Daniel Jobe explain how financial distress can be prevented with a little foresight and planning.

DOUBLE SESSION
3:30 p.m.
How to Implement Your Social Media Strategy
Danny Rocks shares the best tips for using social media to attract more customers to your website and store.

4:30 p.m.
Making Your Store the Hub for Music Education Advocacy in Your Community
Mary Luehrsen moderates a panel discussion with music retailers, who discuss how their commitment to music education has become a valuable asset.

SATURDAY, JULY 14 BREAKFAST SESSION

8 a.m.
Best in Show
Frank Alkyer, Publisher of *Music Inc.*, with Panel *Renaissance Nashville, Grand Ballroom*
Music Inc.'s Frank Alkyer hosts a panel of retailers and buyers who present their findings after having combed the show floor in search of the best products, ideas and trends at Summer NAMM. (Free breakfast will be served until 8:30 a.m.)

10:30 a.m.
Haiti 10: Faith, Love and Music
Pete Johnston of NAMM presents a session on indie film "Haiti 10."

11 a.m.
Sticks 'n' Skins — The Sessions
A music industry panel addresses everything from contract negotiations to self-promotion.

2 p.m.
The Psychology of Producing Hit Songs
Record producer and songwriter Joe Solo leads a master class.

WHAT TO SEE



Royal Treatment

Burriss Amps has launched the latest version of its Royal Bluesman amp head, the Royal Bluesman v2. The all-tube 18-watt Royal Bluesman v2 is hand-wired and maintains the quality, tone and power of the original but brings a more aggressive gain that retains a clean character based on touch response. {burrissamps.com}

Molded Perfection



SKB recently released the 3i Series Injection Molded Mil-Standard Water-tight cases. Molded of high-strength polypropylene

copolymer resin, the cases feature a gasketed, water- and dust-proof, submersible design that is resistant to corrosion and impact damage. MAP: \$299.99. {skbcases.com}



Pretty & Practical

Shubb's new Lite series capos are now available in five colors for steel-string, classical, 12-string, 7.25-radius, banjo and ukulele models. The capos are available in blue, red, green, violet and silver. {shubb.com}

Bluesy Boxes



Big Joe stomp boxes are 100-percent analog in design. The boutique boxes are handcrafted and built in the spirit of great blues players.

{bigjoestompboxcompany.com}



Versatile Uke

Ohana has unveiled a five-string tenor, the TK-35G-5. The double-course G in octave gives players an extra range and versatility. {ohanaukuleles.com}

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WHAT TO SEE

Super Bass

Kala recently added five new models to the U-Bass line of acoustic-electric 21-inch scale bass instruments.



The new models include Sunburst, Gloss Black, Solid Spruce Top HH (Hutch Hutchinson Model), Spalted Maple and Exotic Mahogany. The Sunburst, Spruce Top HH and Gloss Black all come with solid spruce tops and mahogany back and sides. The Spalted Maple features a solid spruce top and maple back and sides, while the Exotic Mahogany body is assembled from mahogany wood. ubass.com

New in Town

SHS International's Indy Custom Guitars has released three new models. The guitars feature a slim C-shape neck with a 7.25-fret radius and an etched neck plate with an engraved serial number. The guitars come with a hardshell case. MAP: \$319.95. shsint.com



Guitar Noir

Levy's Leathers' new Noir Straps are inspired by 1930s city life. The designs feature gambling, girls and guns. The 2-inch polyester straps boast sublimation printing, leather ends and tri-glide adjustment. The Noir straps are available in six original designs. levysleathers.com

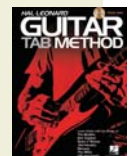


Flat Top Ac

The Loar recently unveiled the LO-215 and 216, two small-body single-0 guitars with a 25.4-inch dreadnought scale length for extra projection. The guitars are flat tops that have the comfort and light weight of a small body instrument but benefit from the extra volume of a longer scale. MAP: \$389.99. theloar.com

Guitar Tab 101

Hal Leonard will highlight the *Guitar Tab Method*. Designed for electric or acoustic players ages 10 and up, *Book 1* teaches young players single notes with riffs from "Day Tripper" and "Crazy Train," power chords with classics by AC/DC and The Who, and strumming with songs from Neil Young and Nirvana. halleonard.com



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Students in Salina South Middle School's guitar class

ROCKIN' THE CLASSROOM

Guitars are no longer strangers to school music programs. In fact, the rise in school guitar instruction, along with the popularity of the ukulele, has made these new wave string programs the coolest classes in school.

Matt Gerry, music teacher at Salina South Middle School in Salina, Kan., said he'll teach four sections of his guitar class (more than 100 students) next year. He added that the program has grown so rapidly that he has a waiting list of another 100 students.

"The guitar class is very popular," he said. "The students always amaze me at the amount they learn in a single

semester. I have expanded the instruction into the summer where, through our local parks department, I teach guitar classes to all ages."

And the impact from these programs on MI retailers' bottom lines has been evident. Greg Weast of Columbia River Music, located in The Dalles, Ore., rents both ukuleles and guitars to schools in his area and said he's noticed residual sales for both instruments.

"That is one of the beauties of having ukes in the classroom," Weast said. "The kids will often move up to a guitar or much nicer uke."

GAMA'S INFLUENCE

As the number of schools adding guitar and ukulele

programs increases, the Guitar and Accessories Marketing Association (GAMA) is one group looking for more schools to get involved. GAMA is entering its 17th summer of hosting workshops for school music educators to enhance, or start, classroom guitar programs.

Rob Sulkow, association manager for GAMA, said that Teaching Guitar Workshops (TGW) not only instructs school music educators how to play but focuses heavily on teaching them how to conduct a strong guitar class, especially since many are teaching a large group of students at once, which is different than teaching one-on-one.

"A lot of what we teach is classroom management and how to hold a substantive guitar pro-

gram in which children learn to play and gain a strong musical competency," Sulkow said. "We are not necessarily interested in teaching educators to be great guitar players. We want them to be great guitar teachers [and] focus on the end product, which is the student."

The workshops are held in various cities across the United States and Canada and are taught by a group of educators representing the elementary through college level. To date, the program has reached about 3,000 teachers. According to GAMA, each teacher reaches an average of 65 students every year. A GAMA-conducted survey of the teachers revealed that approximately half of their students end up purchasing gui-



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tars or related products.

“We estimate that the program has reached over half a million students and has influenced over \$50 million in sales since 1995,” Sulkow said.

He added that the program has benefited the industry because more players means more consumers.

“People who would have played anyway are starting earlier, which means more years of consumption,” he said. “Teachers are more secure in their jobs because they

are reaching so many more children, so the program is actually helping band and orchestra indirectly.”

UKES IN THE CLASSROOM

Since guitars and ukuleles don't have school rental nights like band and orchestra instruments, many retailers get the word out through their road reps.

“All our road reps are aware of what schools have guitar classes and what schools don't,” said Jeff Mozingo, owner

of St. Louis-based Mozingo Music. “It's a great opportunity for our reps to help a school without the program and get it acquainted with how it works and help get the program put into the school day. Not to mention they can sell guitars to the school to get it started along with accessories and wall hooks.”

West Music, based in Coralville, Iowa, also uses its road reps to promote the benefits of ukulele classes in schools. The store works with a local school in its area to develop a four- or five-week ukulele club that meets during lunch or after school. Doug Ducey, West's community outreach director, said the company is in discussions to develop a ukulele rental program.

Pacific Winds in Eugene, Ore., has a classroom set of 15 loaner ukuleles that it makes available to school groups to help get programs started. However, since ukes are inexpensive, Shawna Gribskov, head of the ukulele department at Pacific Winds, encourages customers to purchase their own instruments.

“Once the kids have had some experience in a group setting, they have a pretty good idea about what they want,” she said.

Pacific Winds contacts instructors individually and keeps in touch through e-mail. Gribskov also said the company makes a point of attending ukulele events and concerts to keep in contact.

“When a school group is ready to make a purchase, we essentially quote a school-bid price, realizing that the good will generated toward the instructor pays back in their recommendation for their students to purchase from us,” Gribskov said.

Pacific Winds is also involved in a local ukulele festival, UketoberFest, where the retailer sponsors and supports the children's activities, so students, teachers and parents are aware of the store's offerings.

Greg Weast said he's noticed uke sales to schools far exceed guitar sales because ukes are easy to play and inexpensive. According to Weast, word-of-mouth has been his most effective way to promote ukes.

“It also helps to have a foundation that is assisting with helping the schools purchase



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Pat Knaus (left) and Shawna Gribskov

instruments and training the teachers to function with ukes," he said.

Bertrand's Music has made itself the source for one school district in San Diego's guitar and uke after-school programs. The company not only sets up the program's curriculum but also provides the teacher.

Kala's Ukulele in the Classroom program makes it easy for schools without a curriculum to participate.

The sequential, performance-based ukulele method teaches students the elements of music, including melody, harmony, rhythm, form, tempo, dynamics and tone, along with such skills as singing, picking, strumming, ear training, sight-reading, improvising, music theory, harmonizing and arranging. The program also includes teacher editions, companion CDs, flash cards and quizzes.

"Schools are finding it to be an economical way to keep music literacy programs alive," said Rick Carlson, Kala's director of sales and marketing. "Alumni who have discovered ukulele in their own lives are also helping to mentor programs to help kids experience the joy of making music."

GUITAR FOR RENT

Developing a rental program for guitars and ukes has proven to be profitable in the long term for many dealers.

Columbia River Music offers a three-month contract on a guitar for \$60, and the price will apply toward the purchase of any new guitar. Bertrand's Music charges \$35 for a ukulele and \$79 for a guitar per class session. After the program, the renter can either keep the instrument at no charge, return the instrument and get a credit that can be used toward a step-up instrument purchase, or receive a \$20 refund for the ukulele or a \$50 refund for the guitar.

Joel Bertrand, owner of Bertrand's Music, said his program leads to residual instrument sales and even gains the students' accessory business.

"Oftentimes, we will sell an upgrade on the instrument," he said.

"We get some students that start to take lessons, but we get a lot that join our free ukulele circle that meets twice a month. Once we get them into the store for either lessons or the ukulele circle, it leads to more sales." **MI**

— By Katie Kailus

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In 2011-2012, thanks to the NAMM Foundation, GAMA, the D'Addario Music Foundation, the Fender Music Foundation, Guitar Center Charitable Giving, and the Martin Guitar Foundation, GUITARS IN THE CLASSROOM is continuing to bring musical learning to K-12 classrooms around the country. We wish to express our gratitude to these foundations and the following forward thinking guitar related companies for empowering and equipping us to spread the love of making music with guitars to young people every day.

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Alpha Music's
Micah Spruill

STOMP!

Bananas at Large is a pedal attic.

The glass showcases at the San Rafael, Calif., dealership house hundreds — and hundreds — of unique effects. From DIY garage concoctions to vintage Uni-Vibes and tape echoes, the number of tones and manufacturers is daunting. And when it comes to the pedal market in general, that same analogy is not far off.

“Everyone makes pedals now,

**If you’re not
invested
in the effects
category,
step on it**

from the larger companies to small guys in their basements,” said Orin Portnoy, founder of Mod Kits DIY. “In the 20 years I have been in this business, I have never seen this many ped-

als on the market.”

Boss, a division of Roland, boasts a sizeable catalog of more than 100 pedals, as does Electro-Harmonix. MXR and Pigtronix aren’t very far behind. And in a weak economy, accessorizing is favored over major rig renovations.

“People aren’t able to buy new guitars and amps all the time,” said Alan Rosen, owner of Bananas at Large. “The pedal represents a nice, little voice change without breaking the

bank. When you rotate your inventory, highlight different builders or have limited runs of products, it excites people. They can come in and spend under \$500 and get something interesting.”

With its relatively low overhead cost, the pedal category can be a profitable treasure trove, but it’s easy to get lost in translation. The number of smaller builders can make retailers’ “heads swim,” said Godlyke President Kevin Bolembach.

DISTORTION DIRT GRIT CHUNK FUZZ OVERDRIVE GRIND...

It goes by many names and comes in many flavors. With vintage pedals, however, finding that sweet spot isn't so easy. You have to deal with noise, signal loss, and tones that can change with battery life or when things heat up on stage. Some of those old Germanium-powered effects are more sensitive than a train-car of nitro.

Tech 21's all-analog circuitry unifies righteous, vintage tones and modern dependability. Utilizing the best individually-selected, hand-biased discreet components, each unit delivers a wealth of hot driven tones. A powerful Boost function kicks in up to 21dB of clean boost, which can be used independently from the effect. It is a true post-boost to punch up the volume of the tone you dialed in, not to simply smother it in excess distortion.

Give your pedalboard a boost with some tasty vintage distortion, dirt, grit, chunk, fuzz, overdrive, grind...



BOOST DISTORTION

Hey, remember the '80s? A lot of bad clothes perhaps but some way-cool, aggressive distortions. Tight, muscular grind with buzz-saw harmonics never went out of fashion and the Boost Distortion delivers that fast punchy tone. It features its own unique SAG control that adds an expressive, tube-like response to every pick stroke.



BOOST OVERDRIVE

Putting an overdrive pedal in front of a hard-pushed amp has been the secret weapon for generations of guitarists wanting to punch up the midrange and add sustain. The Boost Overdrive is packed with voluminous amounts of screamin' tone. Just hit the Boost switch to go bigger and badder. The unique SPARKLE control adds upper harmonics for an open, snappy sound.



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Vintage pedal hounds know that germanium fuzz sounds are way sweeter than silicon fuzz...but only when the temperature is just right and doesn't spike. The Boost Fuzz solves that problem by nailing that creamy germanium tone, consistently all night long. This SAG control allows notes to bloom and sing at your command, for dynamic, organic performances.



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DIGITAL VS. ANALOG: THE EPIC DEBATE

Effects modeling apps. iPad-controlled chassis. The presence of iTechnology was inescapable at The NAMM Show 2012. But does it translate to the pedal category? Many retailers and manufacturers said it's just a flash in the pan.

Summer NAMM Booth 332



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micro pedals, macro sound

“Most of the real technology-based innovations in the multieffect category have been rejected, which is definitely not a macro trend,” said John Kelley, general manager of Musiquip. Industry folks agree that the digital and multieffect pigeonhole is dominated by younger, amateur players seeking bang-for-the-buck effects libraries.

“Multieffects have always been a favorite of novice players, who see a very obvious intrinsic value to obtaining so many effects in one shot,” said Micah Spruill of Alpha Music in Virginia Beach, Va.

But according to Rosen, digital units with expansive effect selections only fuel the consumer desire for single stomp boxes, especially when a guitarist’s playing style demands just a handful of effects.

“Next thing you know, they’re in actually trying to buy the pedal that it’s emu-

lating,” Rosen said. “To a certain extent, it’s a nice marketing feature, but it doesn’t really translate.”

On the flip side, MI retailers and suppliers highlight the small footprint as a prevalent industry trend. The beauty of compact, digital multieffects units and pocket apps, according to manufacturers, lies in their convenience, especially in the case of portability-seeking pros.

“One of our artists, Howie Simon, uses a Line 6 Pod for touring,” said Ben Leck, U.S. dealer and artist relations representative at ProSound Communications, which produces Xotic Guitars and Effects. “That’s all he has to carry!”

Then there’s the most widespread anti-digital argument of all: Musicians are traditionalists, according to tone purists. DSP units, though efficient, simply lack

PEDAL PUSHERS

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1 ELECTRO-HARMONIX ANALOGIZER Electro-Harmonix’s Analogizer pedal warms up cold, processed tones of digital delays but won’t get in the way of the guitar’s original sound. This 100-percent analog tone-shaping unit has 26 dB of gain and can fatten even the most lifeless, metallic sounds with dark and earthy substance. [\[ehx.com\]](http://ehx.com)

2 MAD PROFESSOR SWEET HONEY OVERDRIVE Jonathan Brosnan at Rogue Guitar Shop in Bend, Ore., said he sells at least one of these smooth-sounding overdrives daily. With super-sensitive distortion control features and simultaneous EQ adjustment, the Sweet Honey Overdrive is versatile enough to distort power stacks but also offers light overdrive and clean tones. “That’s probably our best-seller,” Brosnan said. [\[mpamp.com\]](http://mpamp.com)

3 PIGTRONIX PHILOSOPHER TONE SUSTAINER The top SKU of Pigtronix’s pedal offerings is actually a compressor, which is typically one of the category’s smaller segments. “By adding so much sustain, the pedal allows the musician to interact with their instrument in a slightly different way and makes possible certain techniques and tones that are otherwise far more difficult or impossible to achieve organically,” Koltai said. [\[pigtronix.com\]](http://pigtronix.com)

4 ZVEX BOX OF ROCK With the rising popularity of distortion combo stomp boxes and a desire for experimentation among consumers, this boutique brand is “finding success in more adventurous options,” Spruill said. The latest series of this radically high-gain booster/distortion solution comes hand-painted by visual artists and delivers high-headroom, unity-to-50x gain booster with nominal input impedance and low hiss. It follows the distortion channel for hard-hitting solos. [\[zvex.com\]](http://zvex.com)

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the reactivity, precision and character of their analog counterparts.

“By staying in the analog world, we offer the musician something that’s tangible,” said Peter Janis, president of Radial Engineering. “As far as tone, you can’t argue with how some of these boxes are. You don’t get that same attachment with

digital processors. With analog, there really is a connection.”

According to Rosen, people also enjoy the idea of personalizing their pedalboards. “I don’t think guitar players are responding to iTechnology at all,” he said. “It’s trendy for a moment, and then they realize it doesn’t really sound great.”

In some categories, however, retailers see digital effects as a viable threat. Coincidentally, those categories aren’t ax-related. The DJ and audio markets, for instance, have transformed into a booming marketplace for digital stomp boxes and rack-mountable effects.

“Ironically, while the technology behind most of these products is quite sophisticated, the more discerning professional and semi-professional players rely on a mixture of analog and DSP-based stomp box units, with each box dedicated to a specific tone or family of sounds,” said Dave Koltai, founder of Pigtronix.

BOUTIQUE GOES MAINSTREAM

High-end pedal junkies are much like vintage vinyl collectors that go the distance to unearth a rare gem. But with the pedal rivalry as fierce as it is — one-stop Internet MI destinations have exploded — boutique pedals are becoming far more accessible and affordable.

“Boutique and high-end are going away to some degree, or at least they are morphing and coming closer in price to more mainstream brands,” Bolembach said. “The majority of smaller builders are bringing their products downmarket in order to meet with increasing competition.”

By doing so, high-end pedals have become more widespread and available to a broader audience. Many pedal companies are embracing this phenomenon with a series of products that are exclusive to large stores. Pigtronix has launched a custom shop division that produces handmade runs of specialty pedals for large-scale retailers, such as Sam Ash Music, Sweetwater and ProGuitarShop.

An avid pedal constructionist himself, Rosen is even in negotiations to begin a pedal line that will be exclusive to his company. His relationships with builders are vast and established, which he said is fundamental to building an expansive pedal empire. But above all, he noted, in a market that has since been flooded with basement builders, patience is the ultimate virtue.

“You definitely have to have understanding of the industry,” Rosen said. “Customers are used to expecting deliveries in mass quantities on a regular basis. That’s just not this industry. The type of market

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this is, you have to be able to communicate to the customer that this builder has a real job and does this part-time in the garage. ‘Get in line now.’”

The most ironic aspect of an analog, traditional marketplace that eschews technology and prizes meat-and-potatoes effect options, such as distortions and overdrives? The main source of information is the Internet, which has played a substantial role in the proliferation of the small-company pedal demographic. The end result is that rather than going through the dealer, many manufacturers have gone straight to the customer.

“The pedal market has become more fragmented because of the role played by online retailers and sites, such as eBay, plus the relatively low cost of brand-awareness building,” said Eric Lind, product manager for T-Rex.

‘PEDAL’ YOUR WARES

In that same vein, retailers are trying to distinguish themselves as pedal destinations, and they’re doing it in the same way that customers set up their pedalboards: experimenting and arranging.

Bananas at Large boasts more than 75 YouTube videos of pedal demonstrations, and Rosen, like most high-end pedal retailers, uses social media and e-newsletter blasts as effective marketing tools. But, he added, marketing to tone purists is similar to the vintage products they covet: Sometimes, there’s just no substitution for the real thing.

“I think the retailers today have to differentiate themselves from the online megashops,” Rosen said. “That differentia-

tion will occur because of the staff. There has to be a mental change. It really has become the specialist who’s going to take the time to educate the customer and listen. If the retailer does not bring that to the table, there’s no way they can compete with online.”

Other retailers have opted for equally creative means of bringing in customers. Jonathan Brosnan of Rogue Guitar Shop in Bend, Ore., said his dealership’s popular pedal-testing parties have been overwhelmingly successful.

“Every month or two, we send out an invite to all the local players to come down,” Brosnan said. “They bring all their gear, and we try out pedals, swap stuff and do a vote for the top five.”

Spruill has jump-started an in-store “pedalboard-building” business, where skilled employees arrange, mount and wire pedalboards at an additional cost to the customer. Spruill has also dramatically changed his pedal displays to cater to this customer need.

“They’re organized by type, rather than brand,” said Spruill, who explained that loopers and analog delays have experienced a recent boom. “I realized that ‘What fuzz pedals do you have?’ was a more common question than ‘What MXR pedals do you have?’ This streamlines the sales process.”

And like a classic pedal, sometimes the key to a great sales pitch is in the basics: knowing the advantages of a particular model and creating interest.

“Sometimes, it’s not about marketing,” Rosen said. “It’s about momentum.” **MI**

— By Hilary Brown

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THE ARTIST-FIRST MODEL

Ask Warwick President Hans-Peter Wilfer about the cornerstone of a profitable, global custom bass shop. He'll likely mention Jack Bruce and John Entwistle.

"We are very oriented to listen to the artists," said Wilfer, whose company is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. "That is for sure one of the keys to the success we have today."

ARTIST AS MUSE

Wilfer spent much of his childhood on the Fra-

mus factory floor. (His father founded the company in 1947.) At its height, Framus employed a team of roughly 400, but it declared bankruptcy in 1974 and finally closed in 1981. Wilfer took the reins a year later and resurrected the operation as a modest three-man enterprise with a bevy of established artist relationships.

"I learned tons from [Bruce and Entwistle] as to what's important in building an instrument," Wilfer said.

He emphasized Warwick's unique wood selection as a core component of the company's

best-selling axes, the Streamer and Thumb Bass series. Per artist recommendations, Warwick was also one of the first MI manufacturers to use the now-popular bubinga wood.

For that reason, Wilfer credited more than just his ground-up guitar-building education as the reason for Warwick's reputation. The once-humble European builder has piqued mainstream interest through a roster of endorsing artists. The company uses these professional players to educate not only its staff but also Warwick's growing consumer base on

the merits of pro-quality specs.

From Warwick's patented nut and bridge systems to its invention of invisible fret technology, Wilfer stressed he never lets quality fall by the wayside, even with the company's Chinese- and Korean-manufactured, more economical Rock and Pro series basses, which are distributed by Mundelein, Ill.-based U.S. Music.

"Every one to two weeks, we send a guy from my facility over to China, and he checks every single instrument," Wilfer said. "If something isn't up to our standards, it doesn't go out."

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Hans-Peter Wilfer

ARTIST AS EDUCATOR

How will Warwick use its wealth of artist relationships in year 31?

New educational programs are a priority, Wilfer noted. He's already enlisted Colorado-based musician Andy Irvine to conduct a series of in-store educational clinics. Wilfer has also appointed a West Coast representative and two new employees at his New York workshop to better serve the needs of artists and answer customer questions more efficiently.

The hands-on aspect of dealer clinics and a constant flow of online information is crucial to helping consumers understand the elevated cost of Warwick's more mainstream

models, according to Wilfer.

"The U.S. market is very driven by mainstream and established brand names," he said. "Most of these brands are coming from Mexico, China and Indonesia. We try to give customers an understanding as to why we are \$100 more expensive, why our Chinese Rock bass is not costing \$299 but \$699. We try to educate our consumers on why they should pay more."

As part of his anniversary initiatives, he also plans on hosting the first-ever Warwick Bass Camp, which will run Sept. 4-7. He's already formed a partnership with Steve Bailey, who spearheads Victor Wooten's popular bass camps.

"I was inspired, and we took the opportunity to do a camp with some very cool artists," Wilfer said. "If it works, then we'll invest more money

educating consumers through our links with the artists that have."

Most importantly, Wilfer's biggest educational concern involves looking into the future more so than the present. He'd like to garner the interest of and pass the torch to his children and eventually turn Warwick into a bona fide family business.

"Like the Dunlop family, I'd like to bring on the second generation into the company," Wilfer said.

"We are working 350 days a year to drive the company and have a brand that everyone can be proud of in 30 years, as well." **MI**

— By Hilary Brown

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photo: RH Miller

SCHOOL OF HARD ROCKS

School may be out for summer, but School of Rock is in full swing.

The Burr Ridge, Ill.-based music school chain — which teaches bass, drums, guitars, keyboards and vocals to students of all ages — has been popping up all across the country. And the 80-location company is continuing to expand nationwide, as well as internationally. (It already has three locations in Mexico, a deal in the works with Brazil, and plans to expand to Australia and the United Kingdom.)

“We are growing every week,” said School of Rock CEO Chris Catalano.

So are the minds of the estimated 10,000–12,000 students who will walk through School of Rock’s doors this year. Through its Performance Program, students receive a 45-minute private lesson and a three-hour group practice per week. At the end of the session, students perform as a band at a local venue. Performances are themed and feature styles ranging from reggae and heavy metal to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones to 1980s hits.

“You can see when a kid gets it, and their face lights up,” Catalano said. “You can see it in their eyes. You don’t have to ask. Then they can’t wait to get in front of their parents and their grandparents and play for them and show them what they’ve learned.”

ROCK-SOLID INVESTMENT

Last month, Sterling Partners, which initially invested in



After receiving a \$5 million investment, School of Rock plans to expand to more than 100 locations worldwide

School of Rock in 2009, provided the company with a \$5 million investment.

“Sterling Partners is a great supporter of the business,” Catalano said. “It’s exciting for us because it ensures that we can

continue to rock.”

Part of that \$5 million investment will be used to boost franchising efforts. Currently, the company owns 23 locations — the rest are franchised.

“We are working on building up a pipeline,” Catalano said. “If we do, there will be multiple-unit deals within the next year or so.”

One of these multiple-unit deals includes the recently opened Naperville, Hinsdale and Elmhurst, Ill., locations.

THE MAGIC OF MUSIC MAKING

Within in the next year, Catalano said he hopes

the company will hit 100 total locations.

While School of Rock offers private lessons without the band experience through its Lessons+ Program, Catalano said the company urges students to join its Performance Program.

“Our purpose is to inspire kids to rock on stage and in life,” he said. “We teach kids teamwork.”

“In many ways, playing in a band is harder than playing a team sport. I did both, and if the bassist messes up or isn’t playing, everyone can tell. If you are playing on a soccer team, you can kind of hold back, and the game will still go on.”

Catalano added that he believes the program motivates students to practice in a unique way. “Instead of telling kids to go practice for half an hour, they know they have to in order to keep up with the band.”

Unlike many music programs, School of Rock doesn’t place students by experience level. Catalano said that mixing beginners with more advanced players creates a better learning environment.

“If there is one 16- or 17-year-old student that is really talented and [a beginning student] wants to be partnered with him, they can,” Catalano said. “A beginner bassist can play with a more advanced guitarist because the guitarist will play all the guitar leads and the beginner will play more simple bass fills.” **MI**

— By Katie Kailus

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EXTREME STRAPS

The way Tim Pratt talks about guitar straps, you'd think he's selling neckties or pocket squares.

"We like to make a big deal about picking out a strap to match your style — or your guitar if you have no style," joked the president of Dietze Music in Omaha, Neb.

He called straps "a statement" for guitarists and bassists, whether they're opting for "plain or exotic" models. "We like to encourage our customers to get excited about picking one out — or better yet, two or three," Pratt said.

He's not alone. Guitar straps have always been a fashion statement, and in this burgeoning era of consumer customization, manufacturers are going to new design extremes. Savvy retailers have taken note, stocking a medley of straps to meet the styles and musical sensibilities of every customer. And many of the more fashion-forward models boast high ticket prices.

"What is definitely a growing category in the music industry is incorporating color and individuality to product designs," said Virginia Castro, co-founder of strap maker Get'm Get'm Wear.

"I compare it to shirts," said L.J. Mechem, owner of LM Products. "If everyone just needed something to cover themselves, we would have one color shirt. But that would be a pretty boring way to express one's self. A strap is an expression of the guitar player's soul."



THE FASHION FACTOR

Johnna Lynn tied this fashion-strap trend to a growing demand for American-made goods, along with the rise of "the handmade and direct-from-artisan market." She even launched her strap and purse company, Copperpeace, in 2008 with the tag line "music fashion."

"The quality of design that comes with a U.S.A.-made product is an element that doesn't go unnoticed with both our guitar straps and the new purses we're crafting," Lynn said. "Now, I have customers actually send me personal e-mails when they have a new instrument on the way and want to start planning a strap. It never ceases to amaze me how into the strap musicians can be."

Fellow boutique strap maker Jen Tabor, head of Souldier, also singled out stylish straps as a core component of her business.

"Straps, just like guitars, can make a statement about style, tone, the type of music you play, and they create beauty for the owner," she said.

But the trend is hardly limited to smaller shops. Harvey Levy, vice president of strap giant Levy's Leathers, approaches strap design "the same way a fashion designer approaches the necktie." He even gave a seminar to U.S. and Canadian retailers titled "The Guitar Strap as Clothing — Fashion Forward."

"It is the one area where a man is free to be flamboyant," he said.

A LID FOR EVERY POT

A quick look at Levy's less conventional designs reveals the diversity of this segment. The MG17DP line features what Levy called "street-savvy designs," including one model that bears the words "louder,

faster, harder" and another adorned with skulls. The MSS2 and MSS3 lines, which feature garment leather and suede, respectively, deliver what Levy called "timeless elegance." And the M8HTV series is hippie-chic.

The customer base for this product is equally diverse. "The people who buy these are a pretty broad group," Pratt said. "We sell a lot to church musicians, country folks, metal players, punk rockers, female rockers and acoustic musicians."

Pam Aalbers, accessory buyer for Tacoma, Wash.-based Ted Brown Music, has also found the customer base difficult to generalize. "For instance, the bullet-studded strap may appeal to the business-suit guy as much as to the young girl in a ponytail."

"The bottom line is there is a lid for every pot, and each person has their own unique style and preferences, so any strap has the potential to be a best-seller," said Brian Vance, director of product management for Planet Waves, a division of D'Addario.

Still, straps with attitude tend to be the category's biggest hits. Vance said Planet Waves has done "really well" with patterns, including stars, checkerboards and flames, "many of which are now staples." Pratt mentioned that "embossed leather" models and "anything with painted artwork" tend to be best-sellers at Dietze Music.

Likewise, Mechem called his company's Scraps line "really hot." LM Products' website

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touts Scraps as a strap that “truly makes noise.” One features Albert Einstein’s face on a James Dean-like leather-clad body. Beneath it are the words “stand alone.” “On our Scraps line, we brought in an outside fashion design team to help us create the concept and design,” Mechem said.

Female-specific models also make up a solid category for LM Products, according to Mechem. Howard Gittli, guitar department manager for Mom’s Music in Louisville, Ky., has spotted this trend in his store.

“It seems female players embrace the more fashionable straps,” he said.

GENERATING SELL-THROUGH

So how do dealers cash in on stylish straps? In short, merchandise them like clothing.

Gittli noted that product rotation and high visibility have been key in creating sell-through at Mom’s Music. Harvey Levy also called “a tidy, well-organized display” the most important element in generating strap sales.

“A display that is overloaded with a mishmash of straps makes it difficult for the customer to see the options,” he said.

Then there’s good salesmanship. Mechem cautioned retailers to avoid giving away straps. “They should be an add-on to every guitar purchase.”

“Every instrument has a strap that goes with it, geared toward the person who is going to buy the guitar and strap,” Tabor added. “When someone is looking at a Souldier guitar strap, my first question is, ‘What color is your guitar?’”

“It definitely helps when the retailers and sales reps know the story behind the brand, and even better if they use the straps themselves and can vouch for the product,” Lynn said.

Vance mentioned that paying attention to reordering is critical — and an aspect that many dealers overlook. “Perhaps they have a lot of inventory and replacing one or two straps here and there might not seem that important. Over time, it can add up.” **MI**

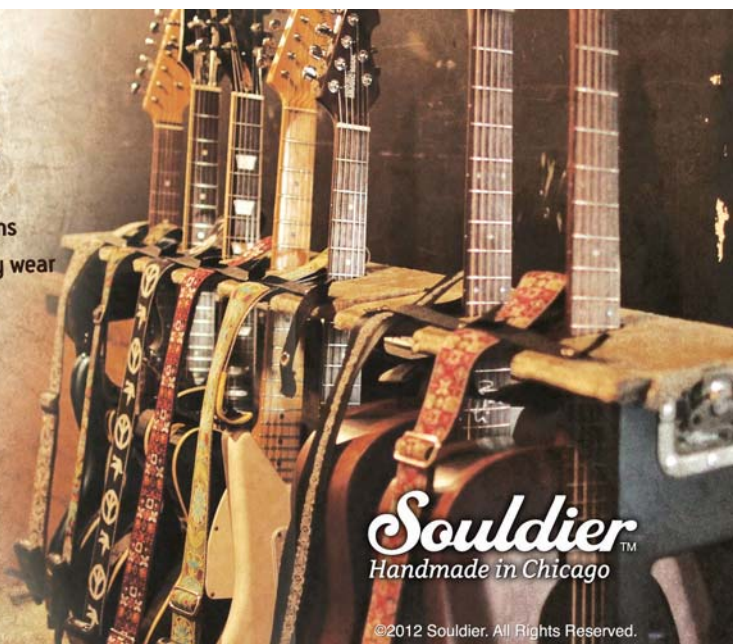
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1 COPPERPEACE "Our Herringbone guitar strap crosses all borders and could do well just about everywhere," said Copperpeace's Johnna Lynn. "It definitely helps when the retailers and sales reps know the story behind the brand, and even better if they use the straps themselves and can vouch for the product." Street price: \$60. copperpeace.com

2 LM PRODUCTS "Our Alexis line has been a solid category for a number of years with the continued growth of the female guitar market," said LM Products' L.J. Mechem. lmproducts.com

3 PLANET WAVES Planet Waves has seen especially strong growth in licensed straps during the past four years. Its lineup includes models with designs highlighting The Beatles, Joe Satriani, Woodstock and Kiss (pictured). MSRP: \$54.99. planetwaves.com

4 LEVY'S LEATHERS "Levy's offers over 400 models of guitar straps with over 4,500 SKUs, all guided by our sense of what is fashionable," said Levy's Leathers' Harvey Levy. "The M8HTV (pictured) would appeal to the Woodstock generation or Woodstock wannabes." Street price: \$36-\$42. levysleathers.com

5 GET'M GET'M "What we do at Get'm Get'm is create unique and eccentric styles offering color designs that reflect the looks and lifestyles of individual artists," said Get'm Get'm's Virginia Castro. Pictured is the best-selling Gorgi Glitter strap. MSRP: \$70-\$80. getmgetm.com

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RoadHog Series by RapcoHorizon is a unique design of cables for the touring musician. Designed Road Ready and Tour Tough, utilizing the most rugged of constructions while not sacrificing sound quality. Durable, thick, yet flexible PVC outer jackets and pure copper conductors and shields provide a superior sound and reliable operation night after night.

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Monitor Engineer



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-Charlie Daniels



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1 CORT GUITARS SUNSET SERIES Cort Guitars has unveiled its Sunset series, which includes Sunset 1 (pictured) and Sunset 2. Both feature mahogany necks and bodies with maple tops, rosewood fingerboards and TV Jones pickups. The guitars boast D'Addario strings and chrome hardware. MSRP: Sunset 1, \$1,195; Sunset 2, \$750. cortguitars.com

2 OKTOBER GUITARS WRAITH Oktober Guitars recently debuted the Wraith electric guitar. The Wraith's solid mahogany neck and body are matched with Oktober Blockhead pickups. Standard options include a set neck construction, 24-fret neck, Floyd Rose Special tremolo and Jet Black finish. MSRP: \$1,099. oktoberguitars.com

3 YAMAHA GL1 GUITALELE Yamaha's new Guitalele is a miniature nylon guitar that looks and sounds like a ukulele but features six strings and is tuned like a standard guitar up to an A. Chord fingering is the same for any standard-tuned guitar, but now guitarists can join the ukulele craze with a portable and playable instrument. MSRP: \$140. yamaha.com

4 RECORDING KING RP-06 Recording King recently introduced the RP-06. The guitar sports a solid Sitka spruce top with mahogany back and sides. The 12-fret neck joint and corresponding bridge positioning provide a warm, mellow and full-bodied tone. The vintage-style 0-style body is ideal for travel. MAP: \$289.99. recordingking.com



5 REVEREND BOLT-ON SERIES Reverend rolled out two new colors for its bolt-on series basses. The Decision bass is now offered in Oceanside Green. It also comes in Party Red and black. The Justice Bass is featured in classic cream with a tortoise shell pickguard. It's already offered in Chronic Blue and three-tone burst color options. reverendguitars.com



6 LÂG GUITARS UKULELES Lâg Guitars has expanded its ukulele lineup. Ukes in Lâg's 44 series feature a mahogany top, back and sides and are outfitted in a French satin finish. Lâg's 77 series instruments (pictured) are constructed with a mahogany top, back and sides. They are accented with black and ivory bindings. MAP: \$89.99–\$149.99. usa.lagguitars.com



7 FENDER PAWN SHOP Fender recently added four new models to its Pawn Shop series. The guitars include the Pawn Shop Offset Special, Pawn Shop Jaguarillo, Pawn Shop Fender Mustang Special and the Pawn Shop Reverse Jaguar Bass. The Pawn Shop Offset Special (pictured) features a semi-hollow double-cutaway body with an F-hole and sleek offset waist. fender.com



8 PRS CUSTOM 24 PRS Guitars' flagship model, the Custom 24, will be available as a left-handed instrument for a limited time. The "Lefty" Custom 24 features a maple top, mahogany back, 24-fret mahogany neck with rosewood fretboard, old-school abalone bird inlays, PRS's redesigned five-way blade switch, and 59/09 treble and bass pickups. prsguitars.com



RITTER | HÉRGÉT GIG BAGS

Serve & Protect

Martin Ritter recently launched the Hérget gig bag line. The bags boast an anti-wear base protector panel with added diamond bumpers, polyester bridge and headstock protectors, polyester end-pin protection, and a large neck-positioned pedal pouch. Made from luggage-grade 1680D polyester, the Hérget line is offered in black and olive green. ritterusa.com



PRO ROCK GEAR | LEGEND SERIES

Pro Rock Gets Hard Core

Pro Rock Gear's new Legend series of hardshell cases is constructed from a lightweight, ultra-sturdy reinforced hardwood shell that provides a high level of protection. The cases are wrapped in Tolex, tweed, twill and leather outer coverings. All Legend series hardshell cases feature a form-fitting interior with an ultra-plush velveteen padded interior lining, gold hardware and stitching, and an internal accessory compartment. prorockgear.com



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GATOR CASES | SLINGER

Zip It Up

Gator Cases has updated its lightweight Slinger guitar gig bag line. The new Slinger 3G series takes the same lightweight padded design, adds a new look with reflective accents and features a pick clip zipper pull. The clip holds a backup guitar pick and doubles as the zipper pull for the front pocket. The bag also boasts Gator's Slinger-style single-shoulder strap with contoured back padding.

gatorcases.com



AMPTWEAKER | TIGHTFUZZ

Fuzztastic Pedal

Amptweaker's new TightFuzz includes a tone control to tame fuzzy edges and a tight control, which varies the pick attack from smooth and thick to tight and aggressive. The pedal also has the ability to get lower gain tones easily with an auto bias that adjusts appropriately with the fuzz control. amptweaker.com



MOD KITS | TEA PHILTER

Phantastic Philter

Mod Kits recently released the Tea Philter, which produces a fixed wah tone, letting it be locked in without rocking the pedal back and forth. Users can dial in everything from their favorite vocal midrange tones to thick lows. Using point-to-point wiring and easy-to-follow instructions, players have a working fixed wah pedal in a matter of hours. modkitsdiy.com



GODLYKE | PROVIDENCE FDR-1

Up in Flames

Godlyke has rolled out the Providence FDR-1 Flame Drive. In addition to standard drive, tone and level controls, the pedal features a bass boost switch for added low-end punch. The Flame Drive boasts Providence's vitalizer noiseless switching circuit, which consists of a low-impedance output buffer combined with a filtering circuit. godlyke.com

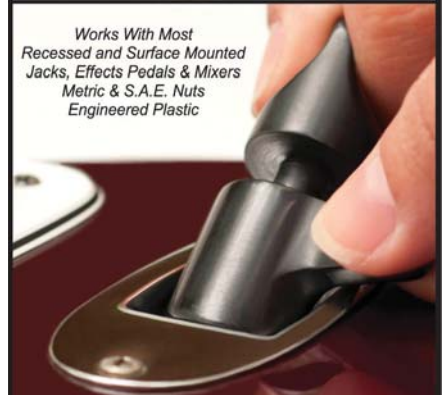


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MARSHALL FX | HEADPHONES

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The new Marshall FX headphones are equipped with an Apple-certified microphone and remote with the additional functionality of volume control. A chip lets users navigate their iPods, iPhones or iPads from the remote located on the FX cord.

{marshallheadphones.com}



EMINENCE SPEAKER | BETA 10CBMRA

Economical Eminence

Eminence Speaker recently introduced the Beta 10CBMRA, a 10-inch closed-back midrange version of its Beta 10A. With its economical stamped steel and closed-back chassis, the Beta 10CBMRA offers versatility by eliminating the need for separate sub-enclosures. **{eminence.com}**

SENNHEISER | SKP 300

Instant Wireless

Sennheiser has debuted the SKP 300 G3 plug-on transmitter. The SKP 300 G3 quickly converts any conventional cabled microphone into a wireless version. The phantom power required by condenser microphones is also supplied by the transmitter, a versatile device that enables cabled microphones to become wireless easily. **{sennheiser.com}**



YAMAHA | MG MIXER

Mix Master Yamaha

Yamaha's MG Mixer line now includes the MGP16X and MGP12X models. High-end features include D-Pre discrete class A microphone pre-amps for phase response and Xpressive EQ using Yamaha's VCM (Virtual Circuit Modeling) for a more musical sound. The mixers also include a ducker function. **{yamaha.com}**



JOHN HORNBY SKEWES | LUCAS NANO 300

Ultra-compact

John Hornby Skewes has rolled out the HK Audio Lucas Nano 300. It features an ultra-compact subwoofer and two fist-sized satellites. The subwoofer houses the electronics and a versatile three-channel mixing console so that the Lucas Nano 300 doesn't require additional equipment. The comfortable grips let the entire system be easily carried in one hand. jhs.co.uk/hk.html



DPA MICROPHONES | D:FACTO

Extreme Performance

DPA recently unveiled the hand-held d:facto vocal mic. It offers natural sound and extreme SPL handling. The unit features strong gain before feedback, and the built-in three-stage pop protection grid effectively removes unwanted noise. The mic boasts isolation from handling noise and accommodates extreme sound levels. dpamicrophones.com



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Randall May International recently launched the Airlift system, which powers conventional stands with an internal customized gas spring. This lets the user effortlessly raise and lower percussion products, P.A. speakers, guitar amps and large wind instruments quickly with the touch of a finger. randallmay.com



LATIN PERCUSSION | AMERICANA SERIES

Patriotic Percussion

Latin Percussion has unveiled the Americana Cajon series. Manufactured entirely in the United States, Americana cajons are constructed using hand-selected, 11-ply, plantation-grown Baltic birch, selected for its durability and resonance. The series features three handmade models. lpmusic.com



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UNION DRUMS | UNIONX
RECORDING SERIES

Signature Snare

Union Drums recently introduced the UnionX Recording series with two Sean Carey Signature snare drums. Carey is the drummer for indie folk band Bon Iver. The drums feature walnut-ply construction, six inner plies of maple and chrome vintage-style tube lugs for a classic look. uniondrums.com

BRADY DRUMS | WALKABOUT

Goin' Walkin'

Brady Drums has added several new snare drums to its Walkabout series. These drums, which feature hand-selected, rare woods from the deserts of Australia, are handcrafted into limited editions, rarities and one-of-a-kind block and ply-shell snares. The latest drums include two Karijini finish models, 10 Australian cedar wattle models and two brown mallet ply snares. bradydrums.com.au



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PIANOS & KEYBOARDS



KORG | KRONOS LIBRARIES

Kronos Expands

Korg recently released diverse expansion libraries and sample sound libraries for its Kronos music workstation. The libraries include the EXs13 Jazz Drums Expansion Kit, the EXs11 Legendary Strings Expansion Library and two series by Karo, a sound design team based in Germany. korg.com

ROLAND | RP301 DIGITAL PIANO

Beginner-approved

Roland has launched the RP301 digital piano. It's equipped with the SuperNATURAL piano sound engine and Ivory Feel-G keyboard. The instrument is ideal for entry-level pianists and families. The user-friendly panel layout with dedicated buttons provides easy access to the RP301's sounds and functions. The instrument features useful education tools, including a built-in metronome and a twin piano mode. rolandus.com



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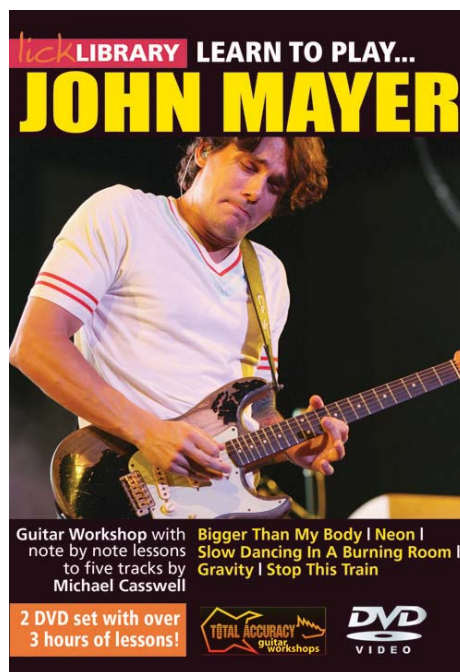
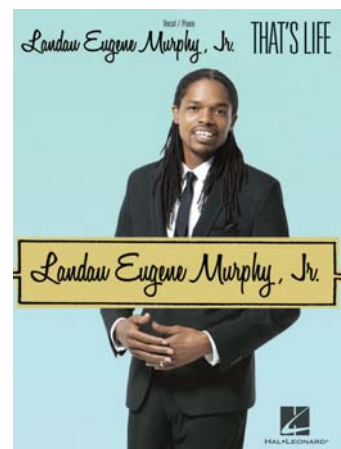
Mystery Music

Alfred recently released *Sherlock Holmes: Sheet Music Selections From The Warner Bros. Pictures Soundtracks*. Ideal for aspiring film composers and pianists, the folio provides an exploration of the music with solo piano reductions of three standout selections from each soundtrack, including "Discombobulate," "I Never Woke Up In Handcuffs Before" and "It's So Overt It's Covert." MSRP: \$14.99. alfred.com

HAL LEONARD | 'THAT'S LIFE'

Hal's Got Talent

Hal Leonard has unveiled a matching folio to "America's Got Talent" winner Landau Eugene Murphy Jr.'s debut album, *That's Life*. The folio features note-for-note transcriptions of Murphy's performances in vocal and piano format. Songs include "Ain't That A Kick In The Head," "Baby, It's Cold Outside," "Fly Me To The Moon (In Other Words)," "I Get A Kick Out Of You," "My Way," "I've Got You Under My Skin" and "That's Life." MSRP: \$16.99. halleonard.com



LICK LIBRARY | 'LEARN TO PLAY JOHN MAYER'

Play Like Mayer

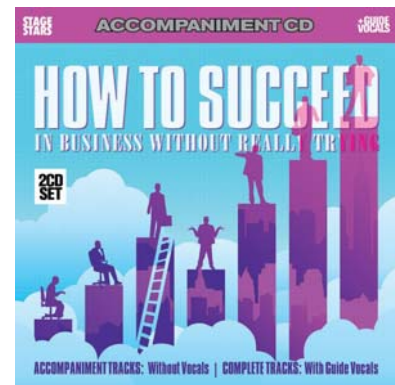
Lick Library's new *Learn To Play John Mayer* double DVD set features three hours of guitar lessons. The DVD provides note-for-note lessons for five songs, including "Neon," "Bigger Than My Body," "Slow Dancing In A Burning Room," "Gravity" and "Stop This Train." The instructor, guitarist and producer Mike Casswell, takes the five Mayer tracks back to the bare notes. The DVD features a split screen, so users can see Casswell's fretboard and how he emulates Mayer's strumming technique. licklibrary.com



STAGE STARS | 'HOW TO SUCCEED ...'

New Star

Stage Stars Records has debuted *Show To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying*. This book for the current Broadway revival features music and lyrics by Academy Award and Tony Award winner Frank Loesser. Written by Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert, the book includes an accompaniment CD. stage-stars.com



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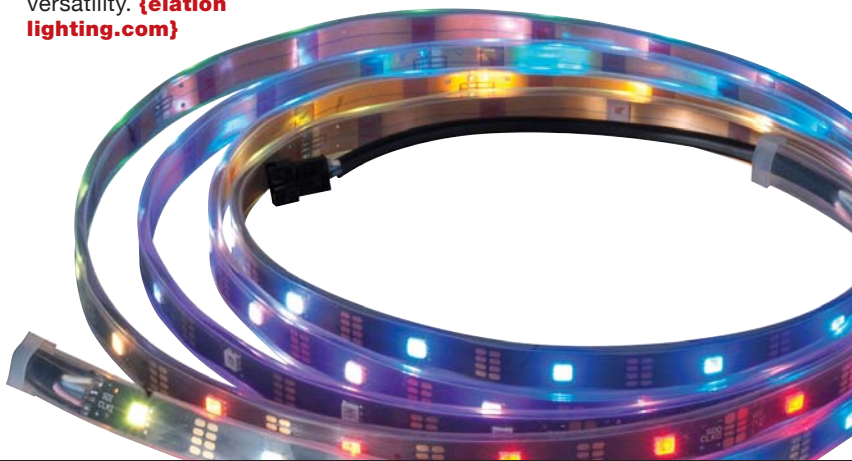
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ELATION | FLEX PIXEL WP

Caught on Tape

Elation has unveiled Flex Pixel WP, a 10-foot tri-color SMD LED flexible tape with pixel control and a water-resistant covering. Each tape features 72 tri-color LED pixels. The tape offers a variety of mounting options, and the ability to mount the tape on nearly any surface using the optional Flex IP Clip kit allows for versatility. **{elationlighting.com}**



ARRIBA CASES | AC-115, AC-125

Safekeeping

Arriba Cases recently debuted two soft-shell gear bags, the AC-115 and AC-125. The versatile bags can accommodate more than 75 different American DJ mobile lighting fixtures. The Arriba AC-115 measures 9.5 by 9.5 by 13 inches, while the Arriba AC-125 measures 13 by 13 by 14 inches. MSRP: AC-115, \$39.95; AC-125, \$45.95. **{arribacase.com}**

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AMERICAN AUDIO | VMS4.1

Next-Gen Controller

American Audio's new VMS4.1 is a follow-up to the VMS4 MIDI controller and analog mixer. The VMS4.1 offers better audio quality and faster processing while retaining all the DJ performance-enhancing features of the original. The VMS4.1 lets users bundle their choice of Traktor American Audio VMS4 Edition or Virtual DJ LE software. **{americanaudio.us}**

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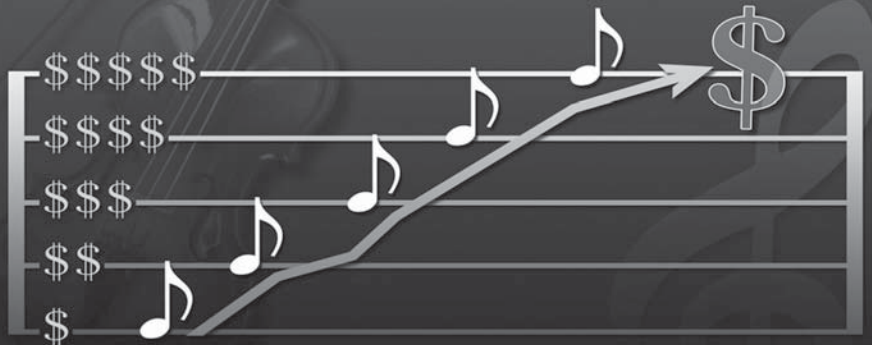
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Dan Grabski

Dale's Drum Shop
Harrisburg, Pa.

We are really excited about the new JoJo Mayer pedal that is coming out from Sonor. Dale's is a huge Sonor dealer and supporter of the products and company. I feel this pedal is a great representation of German engineering and Sonor quality.

Sonor went with a different approach than most other pedal manufacturers. Where most others are focusing on speed and "accel or turbo cams," Sonor went with a round cam design, something that is overlooked in the current market. Other features are the self-mounting clamp and the ability to fold the pedal in an included compact bag. These are just a few designs and attributes that make this pedal unique in the current market. I feel this pedal is really going to make an impact with Sonor enthusiasts and the new breed of up-and-coming drummers.



>>>

Chris Johnson

Musician's SuperStore
Westminster, Colo.

I think the most exciting new company that I have seen in a long time is Blackstar amplification. Those guys are the real deal. Everyone I have met at the company is truly passionate about guitar amplifiers, and they have the experience, the passion and the drive to really do something special in this industry. Not only do they have great people but they also have the product to back it up. The amps flat-out rock your brains out. So when anyone asks me what up-and-coming product I'm excited about, those guys are it.



>>>

Jesse Amoroso
(left, with Roxie Amoroso)

Cowtown Guitars
Las Vegas

What up-and-coming company or product are you most excited about?

□ chopark guitars are absolutely amazing. Being a vintage guy, I like them because they're a new guitar company with original designs, but when you pick one up and play it, they feel like a vintage guitar that you've had and played for the last 25 or 30 years. They're all 100-percent handmade, and there's no CNC machine involved. Each one's totally individualized, and the guy who built them, Gabriel Currie, has a really cool story. The best-sellers are the Downtowner set-neck solid-body guitar and the Triphonic designs. The guitars are merchandised right in the front with all the vintage

stuff. They've got that vibe to them, so I figured it'd be a good idea to mix them in with that collection. The guys that come in looking specifically for vintage stuff play them.

I also like Lava Cables because they're completely American-made. I stock Lava's pedalboard cable kits and Retro Coil cables. You can get them in any color you can imagine, and they're incredibly well-crafted. I know a lot of pros that use them and guys that pick them up just because they look great. When a customer comes in asking for a boutique cable, I say you can get this one at the same

price point.

Souldier is one of the only straps that I carry. You can get a strap just like the one Hendrix wore at Woodstock or the one that Neil Young wore with the peace symbol and doves. You have the seatbelt-material backings that are durable and comfortable; nice sewn-in double-stitched leather ends; and cool patterns.

Being a mom-and-pop shop, our philosophy has always been to carry the smaller upstart companies because they don't supply to big-box stores. It's always worked for us because you can't get it anywhere else.

THOROUGHBREDS



IronHorse Head shown with DHK212 Cabinet

DarkHorse Head shown with DHK12 Cabinet

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- Simple Gain, Bass, Treble, Master Controls
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- Brit / USA / Pure Switch for the Tone Stack
- Uses Hand Selected 12AX7 (x2), 6V6 (x2), and 12AU7 (x1) tubes
- Versatile Speaker Outputs
(allows Dark Horse Head to drive Varying Cabinet Configurations)
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