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AUGUST 2012  
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Photo by Jamie Turner

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# PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

## WHERE ARE YOUR HIDDEN PROFITS?

There's a good chance you're sitting on untapped profits. That's my big takeaway from this edition of *Music Inc.*

If the recession taught us anything, it's to squeeze the most out of every sale, every expense and every employee. Several retailers featured in this issue have done just that, adding newfound dollars straight to the bottom line. Here are three highlights:

### Reward staff for cost-cutting ideas that work.

This month's cover subject, mega school music chain Music & Arts, awarded departments with the best cost-cutting ideas 10 percent of the shared savings. The end result: an additional \$1.7 million to the Frederick, Md.-based company's bottom line. These ideas ranged from canceling an unnecessary \$1,000-a-year telephone line to renegotiating a freight contract. The trick was letting employees know all selling, general and administrative expenses were fair game — and that everyone needed to pitch in. (The story begins on page 34.)

**Increase add-on sales by assessing customer needs first.** Don't assume customers know what they need. In his column this month, Gerson Rosenbloom asks visionary retailer Chuck Surack of Sweetwater Sound some tough questions. Surack

revealed one way he's always made the most of every sale.

"It's not necessarily giving the customer what he or she asks for," said the founder and president of the Fort Wayne, Ind., dealership. "Usually, they need different things than they ask for, and they need much more than they ask for."

He offered the classic example of customers who used to call looking for a \$4,000 ADAT and walked away with a \$10,000 recording setup.

**Take advantage of your business software.** This edition also features a handy special section, *Back-Office Cleanup*, which breaks out different business-solution providers and strategies. (The section begins on page 43.) Chris Basile, owner of South Jersey Music in Sewell, N.J., noted that Pro-Active's iBuy ordering platform lets him purchase up to 70 percent of his daily product needs from different vendors at once. This has given him more time to spend with customers — and sell. Lisa Kirkwood of Discount Music in Jacksonville, Fla., added that the system has helped her save money by taking advantage of exclusive deals.

Speaking of business solutions, Surack mentioned a distressing statistic from NAMM's member report: More than 50 percent of music retailers still don't use a point-of-sale system. As he said, "Computers are so inexpensive today. I cannot imagine not keeping track of who my customers are or what they bought."

Have you found untapped profits in your retail business? We'd love to hear from you. E-mail [editor@musicincmag.com](mailto:editor@musicincmag.com). **MI**

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# LETTERS

## Listen for the Sale

In Ted Eschliman's article "Ask for the Sale" in the July issue of *Music Inc.*, he gave a few suggestions on how to handle such customer objections as "I really need to shop around." He listed four examples of questions that highlight the advantages of buying from a brick-and-mortar business. The listed questions are actually qualifying questions that should have been asked much earlier in the selling process. When a customer responds to a closing statement with an objection, it's an indication that something is wrong with the salesperson's presentation.

"Where else are you going to look?" "Who is helping you make this decision?" "What are you planning on spending?" "How soon do you need this?" These four questions need to be asked before a sales-

person ever suggests a product to the customer. Eschliman concludes by stating that the brick-and-mortar business offers key advantages in each of these areas of customer concern. So why wait until the end of the selling process to mention them? Something is amiss.

When a customer offers an objection, it's first necessary to determine if the objection is real. Just because someone says he wants to "shop around" doesn't mean that's what he intends to do or that it's the real reason he's not willing to buy today.

There are two ways to respond to Eschliman's suggestions. The first would be to offer the

salesperson suggestions on how to handle objections. A better approach is to focus on the selling process itself because the need to handle objections is symptomatic of inadequate qualifying. If you improve your qualifying early in the sale, you eliminate objections.

When a customer objects to



buying, what he is really saying is, "I am not convinced." This is a signal that the salesperson wasn't able to help the customer convince himself. A review of the selling process will illustrate where the problem occurred. The selling process contains five steps. Each step takes time to complete, and most often, a salesperson allocates less time on the steps where more time is needed.

Typically, time is allocated (as a percentage) for each of the steps as follows: 5 percent to meeting and greeting the customer; 5 percent to defining the problem; 20 percent to providing a solution to the problem; 30 percent to demoing the product;

and 40 percent to closing the sale.

A salesperson who allocates selling time in that fashion probably relies on advanced and complicated closing techniques. However, consider what happens when time is allocated as follows: 40 percent to meeting and greeting the customer; 30 percent to defining the problem; 20 percent to providing a solution to the problem; 5 percent to demoing the product; and 5 percent to closing the sale.

In the first two steps, the customer is the one talking. This is when the salesperson listens for clues about what the customer needs and wants and, more importantly, what he might later object to when asked to buy. You want the customer to elaborate on his needs. Yes, he has a problem. The solution

is simple as long as the problem is thoroughly understood. After a short demonstration, the customer will more easily accept the suggested solution. The least amount of time should be allocated to closing. Throw out all your clever closing strategies. The secret to successful selling is found in listening.

I can appreciate Eschliman's emphasis placed on asking for the order, but when more time is spent listening and qualifying, it's more often the case that you will not need to ask for the order. The customer will ask to buy it.

**Kent Moore**  
Coppell Piano Shop  
Coppell, Texas

## Ted's Response

Kent Moore's constructive criticism of my above mentioned piece, "Ask for the Sale," is correct — in principle.

Respectfully, in the world of piano sales (his perspective), there's ample opportunity to greet, probe, qualify, solve, cross-examine and overcome objection.

However, that conversation is usually a measured interview rather than the average drive-by sales confrontation that's frequently found on the floor of a brick-and-mortar full-line store (what the article addressed). It's easy to just take on the lazy "can't win 'em all" mindset, and my contention is we're even doing the customer a disservice — not to mention missing out on a sale — when we completely surrender.

I agree with Moore that time can be saved by asking good questions up front, when there aren't two people waiting in line to pay for their reeds. I'm not suggesting rattling off all four questions, but there's still fragile time after the unsuccessful close for reconnaissance. Even one question would be an improvement, especially in today's smash-and-grab retail.

If you can devote 40 percent of your conversation to just developing a rapport, I'd opt for that in a heartbeat. Unfortunately, we typically have to dive into the "30-percent solution" at "hello."

**Ted Eschliman**  
Dietze Music  
Omaha, Neb.

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Raises funds to fight breast cancer

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# RETAIL

OKC MUSIC AND SOUND | BY KATIE KAILUS

## POWER OF PROMOTION

They say you can't advertise your way out of a recession. Don't tell that to Robin Venters, who opened Oklahoma City's OKC Music and Sound in 2008 after 23 years as a Peavey clinician and rep.

"All my projections took a year longer than I thought," Venters said. "Everyone told me, 'You started at one of the slowest times you could possibly start.'"

Venters counteracted the downturn by amping up his promotions. This included a blast of cable TV, print and direct-mail ads, which have reached roughly 4,500 people to date. He said he gets the most response when his advertisements feature a "call to action." Many boast language like "Guitar stands on sale for \$10" or "Ukuleles from \$34.99."

According to Venters, he spends about \$3,000 a month on the cable TV ads, direct-mail postcards and local print ads. He's even branched out to advertising on bus stop benches.

### COMBATING GC

Five blocks down from OKC Music and Sound is the local Guitar Center. While this might seem like an obstacle, Venters has used GC's showroom "chaos" as a marketing tool.

"I have respect for what GC



Robin Venters

does," he said. "More advanced players will try an instrument or amp out in a music store for maybe 90 seconds, but someone who's been only playing for a year loves the idea of going into a store and plugging in and playing for an hour, and GC encourages that. I think it's for closing pressure because a customer thinks, 'Wow, look at the selection. Wow, look at the prices. Wow, this place is irritating. I want to get out of here.'"

"So in our ads, we are harping on the fact that we are the local guitar experts without the noisy national chain atmosphere."

### STUDIOS, LESSONS & VIDEOTAPE

OKC Music and Sound's lesson program teaches about

150 students guitar, bass, drums and keyboards in eight studios.

An outside entrance lets students and teachers come and go after the store's regular 10 a.m.–6 p.m. hours. The back entrance stays open during normal business hours, as well. Venters acknowledged he might lose out on sales by having shorter hours, but he said he believes it's good for the store in the big picture.

"Having the hours we have allows us to develop a solid crew," Venters said. "It's difficult to develop a great crew if that crew works non-family friendly hours and/or if you have a much larger number of employees with complex rotating schedules. It's harder too for customers to develop a relation-

ship with specific salespeople if they are off frequently."

Each studio is video-monitored in real time and played back on a TV in the lesson waiting room. A second TV in the main showroom has a rotating view of the cameras. While the video monitoring is mostly a security measure, Venters said it grabs shoppers' attention and lets them know that OKC offers lessons. "It has been noticed more than once [by customers] that there are students in the back taking lessons."

### WORD FROM THE WISE

Keeping his head in the game has also helped OKC flourish. During his time as a sales rep for Peavey, Venters said he gained a sense of what worked and what didn't in MI retail. The No. 1 thing he noticed that can make or break a store is employee burnout.

"In traveling around, you see the stores that are doing well, and they have a [staff] that enjoys what they are doing and enjoys the business," Venters said. "But sometimes, you run into others that are plenty knowledgeable, but they are worn out of the business. They are burned out. You have to like and have a certain amount of passion for your business." **MI**

SWEETWATER | VENTURES

# SWEETWATER PLANS TO EXPAND HEADQUARTERS

Sweetwater Sound recently announced plans to expand its Fort Wayne, Ind., headquarters. The company will invest \$23.6 million to add 110,000 square feet to its current facility. Additionally, Sweetwater will add more than 315 full-time positions to its existing workforce of 413 during the next four years, along with a number of ancillary jobs related to Sweetwater's partners, vendors, contractors, and restaurant and music school staffs.



Sweetwater's Fort Wayne, Ind., headquarters

"Thanks to the great work of the Economic Development Alliance, Sweetwater will be able to continue to create jobs and grow in Fort Wayne," said Sweetwater founder and President Chuck Surack.

The expansion lets the company enhance its headquarters' campus and maintain fully integrated operations. The initiative will include 35,000 square feet of additional warehouse space, with the remaining 75,000 square feet devoted to marketing and sales staff, plus additional conference and training space.

Sweetwater was offered an incentive package of \$7.1 million spread over 10 years from the state of Indiana, Allen County and the city of Fort Wayne. The package will be available based on Sweetwater meeting annual benchmarks, including job creation.

"Sweetwater Sound epitomizes what makes Fort Wayne a community built for success: hard work, innovation, talented people, great service and a commitment to constant reinvestment," said Tom Henry, mayor of Fort Wayne. "When it comes to making our community and our region attractive to the good jobs, talented workers and business investment that we need to thrive, Sweetwater

is a company to emulate. They are a true hometown winner."

"It is always a great day when we can tout the success of a homegrown company like Sweetwater Sound," said Gov. Mitch Daniels.

Sweetwater moved into its new campus in November 2006. The initiative was made possible with help from an incentive package created by the Economic Development Alliance.

Coinciding with this expansion, the company recently hired Nashville, Tenn., producer and recording engineer Mark Hornsby as director of music production and artist relations. Hornsby will be expanding the services available through Sweetwater Productions and spearheading efforts to market Sweetwater Productions' studios to artists. Additionally, he'll help expand Sweetwater's educational offerings with master classes on recording, mixing and mastering.

GEARHEAD FEAST

Sweetwater also recently held a record-breaking GearFest. The annual event is an end-user-oriented music and pro audio festival, featuring exhibits, workshops, clinics, seminars, demos and performances. This year's GearFest, held June 22-23 at the company's headquarters, brought in more than 6,000 attendees and saw sales increase by more than 35 percent over last year's expo. More than 200 manufacturers exhibited.

Musician and producer Thomas Dolby; guitarists Neil Zaza and Jeff Loomis; recording engineers George Massenburg and Fab Dupont; bassist Marcus Miller; and singer-songwriters Brandon Heath, James House and Danny Flowers were among this year's featured guests.

COMMUNITY

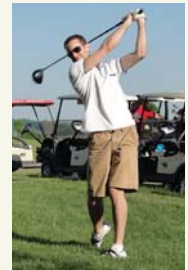
## Guitars for Autism

Cowtown Guitars of Las Vegas is currently accepting donated acoustic and electric guitars for Autism Community Trust, a nonprofit organization that provides support to families and people with autism. Autism Community Trust will distribute the instruments to local artists, who will fashion the guitars into art for a citywide gallery and charity auction in December. Cowtown aims to collect 100 guitars for 100 area artists.

OUTREACH

## FC Golfs for Scholarships

Full Compass Systems of Madison, Wis., recently hosted its 10th Annual Golf Carts for Wisconsin Arts golf tournament. The event, which drew in nearly 70 golfers, was held at The Meadows of Six Mile Creek and organized by The Full Compass Charitable Contributions Committee, an employee-run group.



These golf tournaments have raised more than \$50,000 during the past 10 years. Proceeds have been used for different charities and most recently established scholarships for freshmen in the School of Music and Department of Theater and Drama at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

TRIBUTE

## Michael Morgan

Michael Morgan, founder and owner of Morgan Music in Lebanon, Mo., died on June 21. He was 57.

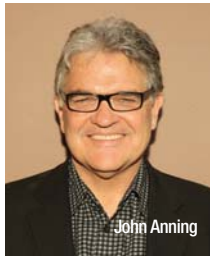
Prior to opening Morgan Music, he taught biology for a year. After he opened the dealership in a small building, Morgan lived in the back of the store. The company eventually outgrew its space, and in 1986, he built a new, larger location. Morgan was a longtime member of the local chamber of commerce. He's survived by his wife, Kathy; two daughters, Kelly and Kristen; a twin sister, Marianne Doll, and her husband, Ronald; and several nieces and nephews.



AIMM | APPOINTMENT

# ANNING TO HEAD UP AIMM

John Anning has been named executive director of the Alliance of Independent Music Merchants (AIMM). Prior to joining AIMM, he worked as a sales rep, national sales manager and marketing executive for manufacturers in the consumer electronics, home theater, sound contracting and MI industries.



Anning brings this background and manufacturer's perspective to AIMM. In his new role, his responsibilities will build on that foundation.

"This is a challenging and exciting time for our industry," Anning said. "I look forward to my expanded role with AIMM as we work to adapt to the changes within our industry while building on our proven history of success in meeting the needs of the music consumer."

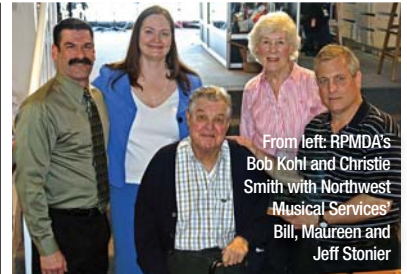
RPMDA | AWARD

# Print Industry Honors Stonier

Bill Stonier, founder of Northwest Musical Services in Vancouver, British Columbia, has received the Dorothy Award from the Retail Print Music Dealers Association (RPMDA). The award is the organization's highest honor.

RPMDA board members Christie Smith and Bob Kohl stopped by Northwest Musical Services recently to present the award to Stonier, who did not attend the annual RPMDA convention last May. A video presentation from the conference showed industry consultant Danny Rocks announcing the award and delivering a speech about Stonier. Kohl then reflected on his days as a CPP/Belwin Music rep calling on Stonier.

"He echoed Danny's sentiments that Bill was someone for whom you



From left: RPMDA's Bob Kohl and Christie Smith with Northwest Musical Services' Bill, Maureen and Jeff Stonier

always brought your A game," Smith said. "Bill was so touched and happy to be honored by the industry that he has been such a part of and that meant so much to him over the years. He gave a lovely speech telling us how much he has loved working in this industry all these years and how meaningful receiving this award was to him.

"It felt very special to both Bob and I to have the opportunity to present this award to Bill in person."



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MUSIC VILLA | DESIGN

## Remodeling the Villa

Music Villa recently spruced up two lifeless walls in a remodeling project.

"They were just big, boring slatwalls, and we realized we were missing out on key sales because of the cluttered nature of these spaces," said Dustin Tucker, who handles the Bozeman, Mont., dealer's marketing and art direction.

The two-month initiative cost \$10,000 and added an LED-lit glass case for guitar pedals and a custom-designed cabinet behind the front counter. Tucker and company owner Paul Decker spearheaded the project and hired local craftsman Russ Fry to build the pieces.

The new case puts all the pedals in one spot and gives each unit space to breathe. The cabinetry displays Music Villa merch. "We sell a ton of MV shirts and hats, and we needed a nice, organized presentation," Tucker said. An adjacent glass case features what he called the company's "three most sought-after, special electric guitars."

"We will forever be scheming ways to make our store more aesthetically pleasing," Tucker said. "We've already started plans for our next phase, which will be the front counter."

HOT LICKS GUITAR SHOP | CHARITY

## HOT LICKS BATTLES BREAST CANCER

For the third year in a row, Hot Licks Guitar Shop of Waldorf, Md., has pitched in to fight breast cancer. The company's team joined in the Avon Walk for Breast Cancer in Washington, D.C., held May 5 and 6, and also donated a guitar and amp to be raffled off. The Hot Licks team raised more than \$2,000 by selling \$1 raffle tickets at the shop.



Korg donated a Vox guitar amp as a raffle prize, and Hot Licks owner Paul McDermott offered up an Epiphone Les Paul Custom guitar, valued at \$700.

In a fitting twist, the winner of the Epiphone guitar, Austin Teets (pictured), had lost his grandmother, Virginia Redding, last March to breast cancer. She'd been a longtime customer of the shop.

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## Note from Mary

### Music Education Advocacy: Keeping the Spirit Alive

I'm an eternal optimist about what lies at the heart of music education traditions in the U.S., which includes a parent's inherent belief about the importance of music education for their children. This, along with strong music programs and music research facts about the many benefits of music making, is the glue that keeps music education strong in communities, large and small. Building on this, NAMM continues to support local music advocates, music teachers and NAMM Members by providing them with ongoing music research, advocacy materials, tools and resources, as well as access to a national network of fellow advocates via **SupportMusic.com**.

Unfortunately, I am feeling the strain of school music education programs as financial challenges are addressed across the country. In some instances, programs in the process of being reinstated, as part of education reform plans, are once again being sidetracked. Other programs have been scaled back, with services consolidated, while teachers work harder with larger student loads. Frequently, access to music instruction is now moved up a grade or two, and critical learning time is lost forever.

Music education advocates are not giving in or giving up because their efforts make a difference. This is a call to action for every NAMM Member. Here's your music education advocacy to-do list as children head back to school this fall:

- Join the SupportMusic Coalition: send an e-mail to **SupportMusic@namm.org** with your company name and weblink to be added to the growing list of SupportMusic Affiliate Organizations at [www.nammfoundation.org/support-music](http://www.nammfoundation.org/support-music)
- Designate a staff member to be the liaison for your company on the Coalition's one-hour monthly call, so they can participate in the dialogue about trends in music education, and challenges and successes in advocacy for in music education
- Disseminate research and advocacy information from **SupportMusic.com** in all your communications; promote **SupportMusic.com** as a resource to your customers
- Use music education advocacy resources, like the *Why Learn to Play Music* brochure, to communicate the benefits of music education to every customer
- Join community-wide efforts working to support a quality education for all children; be sure music is included as part of the core curriculum
- Host a gathering of parents, teachers and community leaders in your store and start a local coalition to boost support for music education

The spirit of music education is alive in the advocates working across the country. We hope you'll join our efforts and start making a difference for the students in your community today.

**Mary Luehrsen**

**NAMM DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**



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# SUPPLY

YAMAHA | BY KATIE KAILUS

## MAKE SOME NOISE

Yamaha has raised the volume on its latest release.

After partnering with French loudspeaker company Nexo (which Yamaha purchased in 2008) to create mid-level to high-end speakers, Yamaha is now shipping its first-ever affordable, MI-level speakers featuring Nexo's technology.

The DXR active loudspeaker line, which debuted at winter NAMM, features four models that deliver leading sound pressure levels with high-definition sound in a versatile design.

Wayne Hrabak, marketing manager for Yamaha's live sound products, said by teaming up with Nexo, Yamaha has created a speaker with a more powerful sound, in part due to built-in multiband compression. "Nexo is known for being able to produce the loudest possible output out of the smallest enclosure," he said. "They have great basic design concepts."

### BULLETPROOF SPEAKERS

Not only are the DXR speakers more powerful and affordable than most speakers featuring Nexo's technology, they're also built with the novice end user in mind. John Schauer, product manager for



### Yamaha teams up with Nexo to release high-definition speakers without the high price

Yamaha's live sound, said the DXR line was constructed so the speaker "cannot hurt itself."

"People blow up speakers not knowing what they are do-

ing," Schauer said. "While the professional installers have put the product together, the end user is such a novice that they can hurt the speakers. These products [have a feature] that even if the user goes out and pushes the speaker hard, they will hold up night after night."

Schauer said the DXR line will be an easy pitch for retailers since cabinets with built-in amplifiers are highly desirable.

"Plus, it's a powered speaker, so the customer doesn't have to buy two parts. Since we can build the amplifier into the speaker,

we can correct and improve the output of the speaker to make it sound better than it would if you bought the separate parts."

Yamaha's partnership with Nexo also goes two ways. Yamaha currently builds amplifiers and controllers for Nexo's loudspeakers and plans to keep collaborating. "They have the acoustic know-how, and we want to exploit that into all areas of loudspeakers that we are producing," Schauer said. "It's not a one-way street — they get a lot from us, as well. It's been a great partnership." **MI**

# Full House



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KAWAI KEYBOARD ACADEMY | BY KATIE KAILUS

# KAWAI'S HIGHER LEARNING

Each year, Kawai dealers flock to the Kawai Keyboard Academy (KKA) for a three-day retail training crash course. This year, 41 participants attended the event, which was held April 16–19 at the Doubletree Hotel San Pedro in San Pedro, Calif.

Launched in 2000, the academy has trained more than 850 retail salespeople on selling skills and product demonstrations. Led by Kawai regional sales managers, the event also breaks attendees into smaller groups, so they can demo skills learned in class.

This year, Brian Chung, Kawai's senior vice president and general manager, served as the main instructor of the acoustic piano class. He discussed what he believes sets Kawai instruments apart from other pianos and had 15 pianos on hand for attendees to practice on.

Other sessions included the history of Kawai and the development of Kawai's digital sound.

"This year's academy was particularly gratifying for me due to the large number of younger, first-time salespeople in attendance," said Tom Love, Kawai's senior director of online marketing and electronics. "This is a good sign for the health of not only Kawai dealers but the industry in general."

On the final evening, academy attendees took written and oral examinations that covered the key points learned during the three-day event. Practical exams covered the students' ability



Top: Kawai's Tom Love hosts a session; below: participants practice newly acquired demo skills during a small group session

to perform the demonstrations taught in class and practiced in small groups. A dinner cruise in Long Beach Harbor followed the exam. During the cruise, a member from each group was named the "Best in Group" and received a trophy.

## RETAILER REACTION

Chung said he believes the academy leaves retailers with a wealth of knowledge about Kawai products and closing sales. Lisa Turner Maddox, a participant in this year's KKA and owner of Turner Keyboards

in Augusta, Ga., said the academy helped her close a sale once she returned to her store.

"I immediately contacted a church committee that I was having trouble closing on a new grand for their sanctuary," Maddox said. "I proceeded to do the demonstration I learned at the academy, and by the end of the demo, they were all voting 'yes' on the piano. There's no doubt in my mind that the sale was a direct result of attending the KKA."

Chris Patti, sales associate at Frank & Camille's Fine Pianos

in Carle Place, N.Y., also put his newfound skills to work when he returned to his store.

"Since I have been back from the seminar, I have sold two grands, two verticals and a digital piano within two weeks," he said. "I don't think I could have accomplished that without the new enthusiasm and confidence that the Kawai Keyboard Academy gave me."

Chung added that KKA is one of the most significant events Kawai does all year.

"Most attendees will tell you that our agenda is one of the most challenging and rigorous in the industry — over 30 hours of training time in just three days," he said.

"But I think they would also say it's one of the most satisfying product-training experiences they've ever had. Our training team really enjoys helping the participants become more successful on the retail floor because it helps so many people improve their skills." **MI**

## THE LACEY ACT | LEGAL

# THE RELIEF ACT APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

In a 25 to 19 vote, the House Natural Resources Committee approved H.R. 3210, known as the Relief Act, on June 7. The bill, which provides an exception for instruments created before The Lacey Act's 2008 amendment, will now go to the U.S. House of Representatives.

According to a statement from NAMM, the Relief Act represents a solution to unintended consequences of The Lacey Act's 2008 amendment, while maintaining the law's overall goals of protecting forests and wildlife.

"NAMM members stand united with all who support The Lacey Act's goal of protecting our precious natural resources," said Joe Lamond, president and CEO of NAMM. "We believe the Relief Act addresses the unintended consequences of the law that affect instrument makers and owners. These new measures ensure a right of due process for innocent instrument owners and provide clarity to importers on the foreign laws they are expected to comply with."

The International Wood Products Association also issued a statement "to express its heartfelt thanks" to the committee for approving the bill. "While moderate in scope and simple in execution, the provisions of the Relief Act will significantly increase the protection of forests around the globe and also save American family businesses," said the statement. "It simply and elegantly brings the intent of the Lacey Act — preserving international forests from the ravages of illegal logging — in line with the practical effects of its implementation."

Not every group was as pleased. Climate Advisers, a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm focused on climate-change policy, released a statement that claimed the bill will "open the floodgates for illegal imports, resulting in job losses in the U.S. forest products industry." [namm.org](http://namm.org)

**Committee OKs the Relief Act, sending it to the U.S. House of Representatives**

## DIGITECH | EVENT

# DIGITECH JOINS WARPED TOUR

DigiTech has teamed up with the 2012 Vans Warped Tour, which began June 16 in Salt Lake City, and will be on-site for all 41 of the tour's stops across the country.

Festival-goers will be able to try out DigiTech pedals at interactive demo stations, and clinicians will also be demonstrating some of the company's latest products, such as the Whammy, iStomp and iPB-10.

"We are bringing the DigiTech experience to the fans, and we are doing it alongside the biggest names in punk rock, metal and alternative music today," said Rob Urry, vice president, Harman professional division and general manager of signal processing and amplifier business units.

In partnership with the Warped Tour, DigiTech will also sponsor band signings and acoustic segments on the DigiTech truck's stage. [digitech.com](http://digitech.com)



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ARTIST APPROVED

**Yamaha Signs 2Cellos**

Yamaha has added cross-over classical music group 2Cellos to its artist roster.

Members Luka Sulic and Stjepan Hauser both play Yamaha SVC-110SK silent cellos.

"2Cellos are a fantastic addition to our celebrated artist roster," said John Wittmann, director of artist relations at Yamaha. "Their talent and creativity, as well as their ability to bring cello music to an entirely new audience, is sure to make them a formidable force in the music industry."

"Yamaha cellos have been our best companion in the last year," Sulic said. [yamaha.com](http://yamaha.com)

EVENT

**NAMM Backs Make Music New York**

NAMM lent promotional support to the Make Music New York celebration, a June 21 event that offered free concerts and hands-on, recreational music making opportunities throughout the city.

The collection of more than 1,000 free outdoor concerts consisted of both large-scale productions and street-corner concerts in 424 public spaces throughout all five boroughs. Performances included a gamelan walk, cello and flute concerts, guitar mini-lessons, and harmonica and ukulele seminars.

Other major participating U.S. cities include Chicago and Pasadena, Calif., with new events launching in Denver, Los Angeles and Santa Fe, N.M., as well as more than 100 countries. [namm.org](http://namm.org)



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MUSIC GROUP | PERSONNEL

**Music Group Forms Pro Division**

Music Group recently launched its global professional division, which will bring together the company's Midas, Klark Teknik and Turbosound brands. The division will synergize the brands and deliver more integrated solutions to customers while driving product development. It will be managed from Music Group's new Manchester, U.K.-based Center for Engineering Excellence.

"The new pro division brings together

three of the most respected brands in professional and touring sound under one roof," said Music Group's founder and CEO Uli Behringer. "Our goal is to offer exceptional pre- and post-sale support with a team of dedicated professionals who operate at the elite level of our most demanding customers, while maintaining the independent character of each individual brand."

[music-group.com](http://music-group.com)

**APPOINTMENTS**

**DPA Names President of U.S. Operations**

DPA Microphones has appointed Eric Mayer as the new president of the company's U.S. operations. With two decades of industry experience, Mayer will use his expertise in the market to help the company continue its growth stateside.

"I am very excited to be working with a high-quality brand like DPA Microphones, which develops innovative products that are standouts in the industry," Mayer said. "For most of my professional career, I participated in the growth and development of another premium microphone company, and I plan to use that experience to help DPA expand further in the States. I look forward to ensuring that the company adjusts in a sales and marketing perspective to the changing and increasingly competitive environment of the microphone industry, as well as to overseeing the entire U.S. operation."



**Community Professional Loudspeakers** recently appointed Rod Falconer as director of technical training and education and promoted Rich Bellando to strategic development manager.

**Korg USA** has promoted Mike Filosa to production supervisor for Lâg and Vox guitars.

**Martin** has named Kit Culpepper director of U.S. sales and Nick Colesanti vice president of corporate operations.

Lynne Latham has joined the **LudwigMasters'** staff as a string editor.

**OnlineSheetMusic.com** has added Dave Olsen as its new vice president of publishing.

**Seymour Duncan** has tapped Scott Miller as its new products project coordinator.

Mark Engbretson has joined **Vue Audiotechnik** as an engineering consultant.

**Universal Audio** has named Rick Fabiano chief financial officer.

**Hohner** recently appointed Rock Clouser as its new guitar, bluegrass and Latino stringed-instrument product manager.



HAL LEONARD | DISTRIBUTION

# Hal Leonard Takes on Ableton

Hal Leonard has reached a deal with Ableton to distribute the company's recording software to music retailers across the United States.

Headquartered in Berlin with a U.S. office in Pasadena, Calif., Ableton offers software for creating, producing and performing music.

"Ableton is a clear leader in the field," said Brad Smith, Hal Leonard's senior sales and marketing manager. "Their software is intuitive and musician-friendly. It's ideal for folks just getting into recording but also robust enough that Ableton Suite serves as a complete studio in a box. Their titles are a superb addition to our arsenal of products."

"Ableton's founders started the company to realize their personal vision of a computer-based music making solution," said Tony McCall, national sales and marketing manager for Ableton. "We now enjoy working with a team of exceptionally bright and talented people, including the Hal Leonard team, who will help us expand our market reach. We get great gratification from serving and interacting with the Live user community, and we hope to add many more musicians to it."

On June 1, Hal Leonard also became the U.S. distributor of Tycoon Percussion. Hal Leonard will initially distribute more than 30 of Tycoon's best-selling products. [halleonard.com](http://halleonard.com)

SCHECTER | VENUES

# SCHECTER FINDS NEW HOME

Schecter recently relocated its headquarters from Burbank, Calif., to a new 35,000-square-foot facility in Sun Valley, Calif.

The new location boasts new offices, a guitar-setup area and a cafeteria. It also includes an additional structure dedicated to the in-house photo and video department and a full custom shop.

"We expect 2013 will be a big year for us," said Marc Lacorte, Schecter's executive vice president. "Lots of new and exciting things are on the way, and the space just was no longer adequate." [schecterguitars.com](http://schecterguitars.com)



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## TRIBUTE

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

### Eddy Shenker

Eddy Shenker, co-chairman and partner at Jam Industries, passed away on June 11 from cancer. He was 70.

Shenker joined Jam Industries in 1974 as a vice president and partner. He contributed greatly in expanding the company into a distribution network of 13 Canadian and U.S. divisions.

Shenker recently received a lifetime achievement award from the Music Industries Association of Canada (MIAC) for his influence on the Canadian music industry.

He is survived by his wife, Fran, and two sons, Brian and Robert.

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# IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## SELL LIKE DON DRAPER

If you're like me and a huge fan of the AMC hit TV drama "Mad Men," you are familiar with the advertising prodigy of lead character Don Draper. In some ways, the show is a darker version of "Bewitched," in which an ad agency hunts for tricks to win a deep-pocket account, although with much more interesting and complex characters. Having grown up in the 1960s myself, I find the scenery and costumes as fascinating as the stories, but as a self-confessed marketing geek, my favorite part of the show is watching its star's advertising prowess.

Draper swaggers with an uncanny, mystical charisma. We see his underlings often struggle to connect product with consumer, let alone win the heart of the client himself. Don consistently saves the day with a keen discernment in marketing an octave higher than his talented staff. And his No. 1 rule always seems to yield a winning campaign.

This rule could be summed up as: The customer is the product. Draper's staff often gets sidetracked from the rule, so it should be no surprise that our retail employees often overlook it, too. In one classic episode, he's pitching the benefits of



### Applying the legendary TV ad exec's No. 1 rule of advertising to music retail

this new Kodak wheel-shaped invention that shows slides. Everyone's wrapped up in the flashy technology. (Remember, this is the '60s, decades before PowerPoint). But he pitches the idea of a "carousel." Nostalgia. A cold piece of technology becomes a ticket to a profound personal experience — and a broader base of new customers. Genius.

#### DRAPER ON PRODUCT

How much of what we invest in training is simply teaching product specs? "Mahogany is warmer, spruce is brighter, rosewood and ebony denser." But what does that do for the customer's personal experience? OK, monel is harder in a piston, but what does that do to improve a trumpet player's life? Yes, these are important features, but what if we start with the player and work backwards, rather than the other way around?

Thinking of a guitar player, not the guitar, as a product not only revolutionizes our approach to educating about (and selling) the instrument but also sets us up for myriad accessory sales to complete the player's experience. Don Draper would look at our wall of guitars and, rather than obsess about stop tailpieces and rosewood fingerboards, be thinking, "Is this guitar for a 14- or 44-year-old? Is it for stage or garage-band socializing? Will it need an amp for the player to be malevolently loud? What will she need to strap it on and look aesthetically pleasing while she's playing? What will this guitar mean to the player's self-esteem in front of friends and family?" Draper would think about the

experience, not cold numbers and features.

#### DRAPER ON DESIGN

The way we lay out our stores can also be altered to convey that the customer is the product. Everything on the floor delivers a confluence of emotion, store branding and technology. Draper would create a space for auditioning instruments similar to the player's own lifestyle — an inviting chair; adequate playing space; less interference from nearby noise, aural pollution and foot traffic. He'd put up posters of contemporary artists validating that our wares are used by the best. He'd put in a full-length mirror.

He'd establish post-sale communication that's consistent with the lifestyle, keeping customers aware of store clinics, enticing new gear and sales promotions. He'd create environments and events where our customers could hook up with others who use that gear, too.

Your product is not on the walls or shelves. It just walked in your door. **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*.



LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLUM

# LEARN FROM THE BEST

**D**o you ever feel as if you're working in a vacuum? Does it seem the decisions you need to make are something like a roulette wheel? If you feel as if you're coaching a game without a playbook, I have a simple solution. Years ago, I learned that if you want to be successful, you should emulate successful people. Make decisions the same way that they would in the same circumstances, and you can expect similar results. For this reason, I'm a big fan of biographies. Getting inside the head of a winner helps to become a winner.

Our industry, not unlike many others, has a tiny handful of superstars from whom the rest of us can learn, and lots of ink is spent on interviews with these luminaries. I recently thought how helpful it would be to not only hear their stories but be able to ask the pointed questions that every retailer would love answered. To that end, Chuck Surack, owner of Sweetwater Sound, was kind enough to accommodate me.

Surack's an all-American success story. He only has a high school diploma, although he was recently given two honorary doctorates. He hasn't benefitted from extraordinary endowments or surprise benefactors. He started modestly from the back of a VW bus with fewer advantages than most people reading this article. Still, he has grown Sweetwater into the third largest music retailer in the country and the



Sweetwater's Chuck Surack (left) with the author

## Lessons from Chuck Surack, founder and president of Sweetwater

eighth largest in the world, with a constant annual growth rate in the 20-percent range.

I recently sat down with Surack to ask him the tough questions. Highlights:

**GR:** *Most retailers find it hard to relate to someone as successful as you. But you were smaller than most of them once upon a time. How did you manage to do what so few seem to be able to accomplish?*

**CS:** It's simple. It's real basic customer service. I never wanted to take a short cut — I always wanted to do what the right thing was. I didn't care about making money in the short term but was more concerned about having relationships long-term with customers and getting that repeat and referral business.

It's one customer at a time,

one transaction at a time and asking for referrals all the time. We train hard for all of that. It's not necessarily giving the customer what he asks for. Sometimes that takes a little bit of educating and negotiating with the customer, but it's giving the customer what he or she truly needs — or at least trying to offer that. Usually, they need different things than they ask for, and they need much more than they ask for. So when they're looking for a keyboard, I'm not selling them just a keyboard. I'm making sure it's the *right* keyboard for their music but also making sure that they get the power supply and the stand and the case and cable and probably lots of other stuff to go with it. And how's their P.A. system? It never ends!

**GR:** *Some dealers will hear this and think it's wonderful advice and really quite lofty. But they'd also challenge you by suggesting that you wouldn't be where you are without the sales tax advantage you enjoy.*

**CS:** I can answer that in a variety of ways. I can tell you

how successful our local store is where we charge sales tax. In a town of about 250,000 people, last year we did just under \$7 million of local business, charging sales tax. That's pretty good for a market that size, and it's based on all the things that we do here, from having a lesson program to a theater where we offer musical events and training events to offering our facility to nonprofit groups to employees serving on local boards and nonprofits. We are absolutely, fully engaged in the community, not just from a musical or musician point of view but from a complete community point of view.

**GR:** *Seven million dollars is a nice piece of business, but you wouldn't be on everyone's radar based on that business. What about all the business you do on a tax-free basis?*

**CS:** I'm not at all opposed to sales tax. With the bad financial state of affairs so many states are in, I think it's a matter of time until [sales tax reform] happens. I think Sweetwater will have a small falloff in business as a direct result, but I would tell the local retailer to be careful what you wish for. At the point that we're collecting sales tax for other states, which I'm happy to do, that also opens up the possibility of marketing specifically in those states. And I personally think that it's not so much about sales tax.

**GR:** *If not sales tax, then what?*

**CS:** I think it's salesmanship that makes the difference. I can't tell you how many times I've heard that dealers have lost the deal to Sweetwater because,

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“It had the sales tax advantage.” And then I go back and look at our records. We have them all the way back to 1990 showing every price that’s quoted and everything about the customer, from the spouse’s name to the children’s names to the dog’s name to [the customer’s] dreams, their aspirations, what equipment they have. And I look up the deal and find out that when the customer first called in for whatever the product was, my salesguy did not sell him just that and did not win it just on sales tax. He won it because he outsold the competition. He put the extra accessories with it and really knew the product and how it integrated with the customer’s system.

I get letters every week from customers telling me, “I paid more to buy it from Sweetwater, but I like that you’ve got a service department. I like that you’ll take it back if there’s any issue.” They absolutely will buy it from us because of the relationship we’ve developed with them. The one to five days of shipping time is a negative in many cases. In spite of that, the customers will buy from us when we are arguably the same price as the local retailer.

On the other hand, what local guy is going to admit that he was out-serviced by a mail-order company? I would also say, very politely, if you have a customer in your store and can’t make the sale, then shame on you. It means your salesguy was not strong enough. I really do not believe it’s a sales tax issue.

**GR:** *Would you be willing to give a specific example of how you believe that you out-serve a local store?*

**CS:** We don’t believe in selling on price. In fact, when 800 numbers came out, you could

call the other places and ask for their best price on product X. For instance, when ADATs came out, after a customer had beaten down every dealer for their best price, free shipping, etc., they’d call us for our best price. I’d say, “Hi, my name is Chuck. What’s yours?” I literally would not answer his question about the price. And that, in itself, differentiated me from all the other mail-order places he had called.

Then I would start engaging in a relationship, having a conversation and trying to understand why he wanted an ADAT, what he was going to use it for, how he was going to use it, and understanding that he really needed a mixer to go with it and wiring to hook it up, microphones and microphone stands. The next thing you knew, I took a \$4,000 ADAT sale and turned it into a \$10,000 system sale. Did I undercut other dealers because of sales tax or because of the price on the actual product? No. I out-serviced the other guy that was just trying to sell an ADAT.

**GR:** *Can other dealers survive without the selection of lines you have?*

**CS:** Absolutely. I have always believed “you dance with the ones that brung you.” In my early days, I didn’t have access to the lines. I was operating out of my recording studio in the kitchen of my home, and you can imagine that most of the A lines would not sign me up. But the brands that I did sell we knew really well, sold them as hard as anyone and, consequently, grew my business. I believe that, in some ways, as our line list has grown, we don’t know some of the lines as intimately as we once did. Sometimes, I laugh and say that I wish we had fewer lines, so

my guys would know them even better. But if a dealer knows his products and has a passion and a true understanding of them, there’s a place to sell them.

**GR:** *Do you have the opportunity to see other dealers, and do you see common pitfalls?*

**CS:** I am fortunate that I get to travel a lot, and I walk into music stores all over the country, sometimes incognito, sometimes introducing myself. There are some great stores all over the country.

**‘The customers are not always right, but customers are always customers.’**

I’m not sure that I’m in a position to critique another store. But I’d encourage dealers to find their niches and find out what they do really well, and do it as well as anybody can. I’ve watched many stores across the country, some friends included, try to compete against Guitar Center. I have all the respect in the world for Guitar Center. That’s not the way that I want to do business — that’s not my model. But I’ve watched other stores across the country decide that when GC comes to town, they need to try to out-“Guitar Center” Guitar Center. They open up a big warehouse. Well, you’re never going to do it as well as Guitar Center. So when [Guitar Center is] going left, I’m going to go right. I’m going to find whatever I do best and do it. Find your expertise and the value that you bring to the market and to the community. Do that well, and then Guitar Center

can’t compete against you.

**GR:** *Is Guitar Center your toughest competitor?*

**CS:** I’ve never looked at our competition as being other music stores. Obviously, they are, and I’d be naïve to think otherwise. But I look at our competition as more of the other places that discretionary income can go. I’m talking about businesses like hot tubs or new cars. Those, in some ways, I would consider more competition than other music stores. Frankly, it’s in my own best interest to see other music stores be successful. I would like to see as much success in the music industry as possible, and I’d much rather find business by creating new business rather than stealing business. This is why we do so much education, so much training.

To be crass, I think good businesses should do well, and I believe bad businesses deserve to fail. I recently read a NAMM member report that said that 50 percent of businesses across the country still don’t have a point of sale system. Computers are so inexpensive today. I cannot imagine not keeping track of who my customers are or what they bought. That’s what does it for me. I just invest as much into my business as I can — financially, emotionally and personally.

**GR:** *While dealers everywhere worry about Sweetwater and companies like yours, what keeps Chuck Surack up at night?*

**CS:** I started the company 33 years ago. I remember the early days of having credit cards maxed out, being worried about payroll next Friday and those sorts of things. But it wasn’t very long until I didn’t have to worry about that anymore. What I worried about was did we do the right job for the customer?

It's amazing. Those are easy, trite words to say — to give good customer service. But following through is probably a little harder for most companies. In the short-term, it sounds and feels expensive, but I have found that it's the right thing to do. It allows me to lay my head on the pillow at night. But it's also the right thing long-term to do. We do whatever it takes to make the customer happy. The customers are not always right, but customers are always customers.

**GR:** How do you assess whether these customer service efforts are being well-received?

**CS:** By teaching all my employees that they always need to do the right thing, it makes it real easy to be very visible. I'm on forums and bulletin boards — everything from Harmony Central to the Digidesign user conference to Gear Slutz. I publish my own personal e-mail address. My phone rings to my desk and my assistant, and after hours, it rings to my cell phone and my home phone. I'm able to do that because I feel that we always do the right thing for customers, and therefore, most of the calls I get are people raving about their experience and not upset customers. I absolutely do not hide nor screen calls.

**GR:** So sales tax isn't one of those things that keeps you up at night?

**CS:** Sales tax is certainly a big controversy right now, but I'm looking at that as an opportunity. That may sound too altruistic, but I really think that when they take our handcuffs off and allow us to collect sales tax for all the states, then I'm happy to collect sales tax for those states, and I'd be happy to go into those states and market and do what we do. I think that will allow Sweetwater to go into more homes. This isn't to compete against other music stores — rather a chance to go after people who didn't even know they were looking for a musical instrument. That's where I see the opportunity.

What else keeps me up? I'm always wondering if manufacturers can keep up with our needs as we grow. All the stuff going on with The Lacey Act right now is kind of frightening. The concept of whether product comes from [Asia] or the U.S. is an issue. But not any one of those is an overwhelming challenge.

**GR:** Flash-forward five years. What does your crystal ball tell you this industry will look like?

**CS:** I think the strong players that bring value and offer something extra, something unique will be doing just fine. I think if you think you own a town just because you put up a music store shingle and you don't bring anything extra to it, then watch out! There are too many other smart business

people, either other businesses that will take that discretionary income, or there will be other music stores or other ways to buy musical instruments. No longer do you own the town or some mileage radius just because you hang out your sign. **MI**

Gerson Rosenbloom is managing director of Wechter Guitars. He's the former president of Medley Music and a past NAMM chairman. As a retailer, he competed directly with Sweetwater. As a supplier, he works directly with Surack.

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THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

# Sell Relationships

In my last two articles, I discussed the two worst sales calls I have ever had the displeasure of receiving. The mistakes, poor manners and unprofessionalism combined with a general lack of understanding for my business needs could make the calls a great case study at any business school.

However, I recently received a really good sales call. The salesman understood the benefits of a long-term customer relationship and taking the time to build a solid foundation on which to grow future sales.



**John (salesman):** Good afternoon. Is Billy Cuthrell available please?

**Me:** This is Billy. How can I help you?

**John:** Hi, Mr. Cuthrell. My name is John, and I work for Acme Guitar Widget Corp. based in Houston. I wanted to speak with you for a few minutes about the Grand Guitar Widget that we manufacture for guitar teachers and students. If it's not a good time for you to talk, I will be happy to call you at a day and time that's more convenient for you. Or, I can give you my contact information, and you can call me anytime.

**Me:** No, now works well for me.

**John:** Great. Again, Mr. Cuthrell, I appreciate your time, and I will not keep you long. We don't have a local sales rep in your area yet, so I wanted to call and introduce our product and myself since I will eventually oversee the local reps in North Carolina. As I said, we manufacture the Grand Guitar Widget, along with several other guitar products, and we are opening new dealers in the southeastern part of the country. However, out of all our products, I think the Grand Guitar Widget is probably a good fit for you. Have you heard of the Grand Guitar Widget?

**Me:** I don't think so.

**John:** OK, no problem. I was looking at your website, and I did some research on your company and your lessons. From what I read about your teaching staff and your curriculum, I think our widgets may work well because of our proprietary learning software built into the widget. If I can get your e-mail address, I'll send you some links to our online tutorials and YouTube

videos, so you can see the widget in action. I'll call you back in a few days or e-mail you if you prefer to discuss it further and answer any questions. Would that be OK?

I gave him my e-mail address, and we set a day and time to talk the following week. I received his e-mail that afternoon with links to the product and a nice follow-up thanking me for taking the time to speak with him. His e-mail ended with a reminder that he would be in touch on the day and time we agreed on. About two days later, a package arrived. Inside was one of the widgets with a handwritten card telling me to pass it around to our teachers and see what they thought. Three days later, John called me to follow-up.

**John:** I hope you received the complimentary widget and had a chance to look it over with your staff and teachers.

**Me:** I have looked it over, but I unfortunately have not had the opportunity to follow up with my teachers.

**John:** That is not a problem, Mr. Cuthrell. I'll plan to touch base with you in a few weeks.

## THE REAL SALE

I'm sure you're probably asking yourself, "How can this be a great sales call? John didn't sell anything." Sure he did. John sold me a relationship. He did several key things your sales

## How one telephone salesman formed a lasting business relationship

## IDEAS

staff can do to build a relationship with customers.

First off, John pronounced my name correctly the first time and continued to call me Mr. Cuthrell.

Second, he did research on my company and figured out that his product would probably work for us. John also had a relaxed tone, wasn't pushy and was considerate of my time. If his life depended on making this sale, you wouldn't have known it. He had an easygoing demeanor that set me at ease.

**'I've stuck with them even after they moved on to other companies because they care about my business.'**

Third, John surprised me by sending a sample product and included a handwritten note thanking me again for my time. I got the feeling John believed his product was right for my company.

Lastly, John seemed more interested in developing a solid relationship and not making a quick sale. Relationships are important, and good salespeople protect them.

There are two sales reps that I've had a relationship with in this industry for more than 15 years, and it all started when they called me out of the blue. I've stuck with them even after they moved on to other companies because they care about my business. They introduce products that they think will work for my shop, not a long list of products that are priced outside of what sells in my stores. They listen when I tell them what's happening with our customers and respond by showing me the appropriate products.

John had the same qualities that I've seen in the other two sales reps that I'm friends with. I think as long as John continues to call on me, I might be ordering products from him in another 15 years. **MI**

Billy Cuthrell owns and operates Progressive Music Center. Contact him at [billy@raleighmusiclessons.com](mailto:billy@raleighmusiclessons.com).

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FROM THE TRENCHES | BY MYRNA SISLEN

# The Singapore Scam

It all started innocently enough on Oct. 5, 2011, with an e-mail from a Joe Smith. He wanted to purchase a Buffet Crampon E11 France Performance Bb clarinet.

The e-mail read as follows:

“I want to buy this for my son if you have this product available (Buffet Crampon E11 France Performance Bb clarinet) and I want to know if you accept international credit card and ship to Houston.”



I was a little suspicious, but no alarms went off. It was going to be shipped to Texas, after all. We wrote back that we did have the instrument in stock and that we did accept credit cards.

“Thanks for the message,” he wrote back. “Can I send my credit card information’s by e-mail here so that you can run my card manually for the payments? Also let me know how much is the shipping cost to Texas. Hope to hear from you.”

Yes, the language is awkward, but again, it was being shipped to Texas.

He sent full credit card information with the name Courtney Stevens and a shipping address in Houston. In my defense, I did go to whitepages.com and check the address for Courtney Stevens. It was

listed. I thought it might be a surprise for his son, so I didn’t call to check the phone number. I did call Visa before I charged the card and was told that if the card goes through, then everything is fine. This turned out to be false.

At the time, everything seemed OK, so we charged the card and sent the E11 to Texas.

On Oct. 8, we received a request from a Michael Robert in Australia for a used Selmer saxophone to be shipped to Oregon. Again, e-mails were sent, and credit cards were processed. Correspondence went back and forth, and in due course, the instrument was sent

on its way. Then on Nov. 5, I received another e-mail from Joe Smith, this time asking for a Buffet R-13, Tosca and Festival to be shipped again to Courtney Stevens at the same address. We ordered the instrument, but thankfully, Buffet took a while to ship it.

On Nov. 4, we received an e-mail from Ivana Lee asking for 150 sets of Thomastik Dominant 4/4 violin string sets to be sent

to Singapore.

When I called Connolly — Thomastik’s U.S. distributor — to ask about ordering 150 sets of strings, they told me, “This sounds like the Singapore Scam. Don’t send anything!”

## THE DISCOVERY

To be sure, I contacted Sandra Collazo, senior international trade specialist for the U.S. Export Assistance Center at the U.S. Department of Commerce. She said it looked very suspicious and sent it to Sherry Ng, a commercial assistant at the U.S. Embassy for Singapore. Ng said the information, company name and phone number were false, and it was in fact a scam. (I’ve listed their names as a reference for anyone who experiences similar issues.)

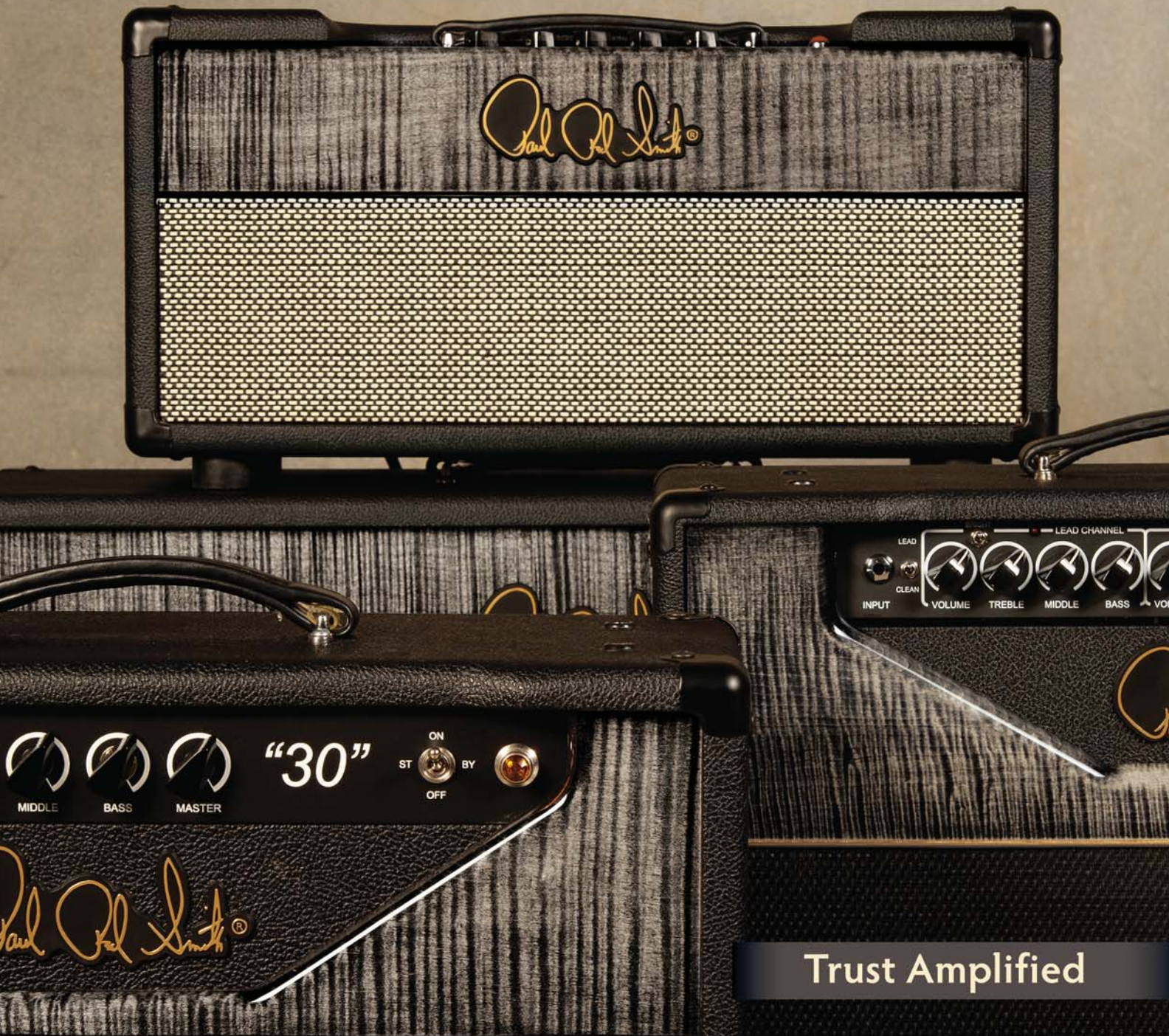
We all know the endgame here. On Nov. 15, I got charge-backs on the two shipped instruments. Fortunately, I had not shipped the R-13, so my loss was less than it could have been.

So what was the lesson learned from all this? If you have a question about a charge, call your credit card processor, not Visa. The processor is the only one that can check to see if the card is legitimate. Also, don’t accept any foreign credit cards unless you are familiar with the person or company. **MI**

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

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# STAFF-EMPOWERED

**DURING THE DOWNTURN, MUSIC & ARTS EMPLOYEES RESTORED \$1.7 MILLION TO THE BOTTOM LINE. THE OUTCOME? THE COMPANY'S BEST YEAR EVER**

**BY ZACH PHILLIPS**  
PHOTO BY JAMIE TURNER

At the height of the recession, a cleaning woman poked her head into Ken O'Brien's office. She had an idea to help the president of Music & Arts improve his business. Technically, she wasn't even an employee, but O'Brien, who heads up the 110-store MI retail chain, was all ears.

"Our organization is that flat," said Allan Greenberg, Music & Arts' executive vice president, with a laugh. "While it's a cliché, we're as flat as we can be for our size."



From left: Ken O'Brien, Ron Beaudoin, Paul Martinson, David Fuhr and Allan Greenberg



# PROFITS





She wasn't an anomaly. Starting five years ago, cost management became everyone's business at the Frederick, Md.-based full-line dealership, which specializes in school music and lessons. The company needed to retrench after its 2005 acquisition by Guitar Center, as well as 13 acquisitions and a frenzied land grab in Texas in 2006. And everyone, from senior management down to store-level salespeople to the for-hire cleaning crew, pitched in. "We told everybody, 'It's time to batten down the hatches to prepare for growth,'" O'Brien said.

During this period, Music & Arts looked to be in hibernation. Annual revenues stayed flat at roughly \$175 million through 2009, and until recently, the

company opened very few new stores. But behind the scenes, Music & Arts was being reshaped from within.

"In 2011, we had our best year ever from a bottom-line standpoint," said Ron Beaudoin, executive vice president of sales and marketing, who added that employees helped slash costs to the tune of \$1.7 million.

"Our employees really double-downed on helping the organization cut costs," said Paul Martinson, vice president of finance. "In 2011, we experienced our best financial operating results in company history."

These days, as Music & Arts celebrates its 60th anniversary, it emerges as a much tighter, more profitable, expanding op-

eration. Recent store openings and acquisitions in Southern California, St. Louis, Texas and Maryland mark the retailer's first growth spurt in five years. Music & Arts is also delving into new territories, namely the West Coast, along with untapped businesses, including school bids. And in retrospect, this could not have happened without O'Brien's open-door policy.

"It's really the people and the culture that have given us this success," Beaudoin said. "We wouldn't have taken our shrink number from four or five percentage points down to less than half a percent if we weren't able to convince everybody that we're in this together. We want to maintain an environment

where everybody has a say and participates in the profits."

#### THE CULTURE CLASH

Ironically, maintaining that culture turned out to be one of Music & Arts' biggest challenges during the last decade.

The most obvious effect of Guitar Center's 2005 purchase was it made Music & Arts big. Really big. When the deal closed, in fact, the company essentially grew from 60 to 90 retail locations overnight. On top of that, Music & Arts was charged with absorbing GC's school music division, American Music Group (AMG) — a chain of 30 stores set up as instrument rental hubs, not built for the multifaceted business that is full-line retail. And both companies had stores that overlapped in several markets, forcing them to combine resources. "It was like preparing for the battle of Normandy," Beaudoin said.

"Think about it: We absorbed a decentralized operation, centralized it, and it was a company half our size," Greenberg said. "We had 60 stores. They had 30 stores. That's a lot of business to absorb. So it was a big deal and a tough time, and it rocked us to our core."

According to Beaudoin, road reps were especially resistant to change. "Their tools changed immediately, and they were held to a higher degree of accountability than ever before," he said. "We had a much tighter inventory-management process in place than [AMG] did. We had a much tighter pricing-management strategy than they did."

Like that, Music & Arts' culture had fractured. The first solution, while labor-intensive, was for the executive team to fly market by market and seek unfiltered feedback from the

## IN HIS OWN WORDS

### KEN O'BRIEN

PRESIDENT, MUSIC & ARTS

- **When you enter a new market, you have to make sure your defense is good.** When you make an acquisition, it may seem offensive, but the first step is defense — battening down the hatches, keeping good people, making sure the customers are happy.
- **It was tough to make this one American Music Group store profitable after the Guitar Center acquisition.** All the competitors just took advantage of it. They beat up on us for years and years. And small retailers are more nimble than we are. That was tough.
- **Our music lesson business draws tremendous traffic, but in and of itself, it's also tremendously profitable.** Everybody out there should be teaching lessons. It's a pain, but so what? If you're going to operate a retail store — and we've figured out how to do it in 2,500 square feet or less — then why not include four studios or more, depending on the market and size of the store? We keep about a third of whatever's charged.
- **The biggest challenge of my career has been getting people to get along.** I'm not saying it's been an ongoing problem, but when you have really strong, confident people, it's not easy. That's one of my strengths, getting people to work together and listen and settle down. And that helps culturally.  
One of the reasons I sold the business is I needed to mix up leadership. I needed to make changes at the top. My brother was looking to retire. Neither of us had kids to take over. And, of course, Guitar Center came calling. It enabled my brother to retire. It forced change in some of the friction that existed.
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# MUSIC ED OUTREACH

Music & Arts does well by doing good. At any given point, the company has its hands in multiple outreach activities. Here are a few recent highlights.

➤ **School music aid.** Music & Arts donated roughly 45 instruments to Roosevelt Elementary School in Allentown, Pa., last November. The outreach was hosted by El Sistema Lehigh Valley, a free music education program made possible through the Allentown Symphony Association in coordination with the Allentown School District. That same month, the company refurbished 20 instruments for Old Court Middle School in Baltimore County. Additionally, the retailer partnered with The Association of Music Parents earlier this year.

➤ **Creative donation.** Music & Arts supported last October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month by donating 20–25 percent of sales of pink musical items to the cause. To drive participation, the retailer held a raffle at all of its stores for a Squier Bullet Stratocaster signed by Michelle Branch.

➤ **Advocacy.** The company recently hired music educator, conductor and speaker Dr. Milt Allen as a consultant. He'll spearhead local and national efforts to advocate for music education. Give a Note Foundation also added Music & Arts Senior Vice President of Sales and Marketing Ron Beaudoin to its board in June.

field. The discussions continued long after this initial meet and greet via face-to-face meetings, conference calls and written correspondence. Beaudoin mentioned that these meetings were as much a fact-finding mission for the executive team as they were a culture-building exercise.

"They could give us direct feedback about what the teacher [in that market] liked or didn't like about what we were doing," said Beaudoin, noting that road reps remained part of the dialogue. "We wanted that unfiltered feedback, and we wanted, frankly, for those salespeople who are our voice to those teachers to feel confident that they had a voice."

Each AMG rep also got paired up with a Music & Arts rep, who served as a mentor and speed-dial contact. And, most importantly, the executive team tried to stay as accessible as possible.

"That was probably the most effective strategy," Beaudoin said. "After things calmed down, we

got feedback that they had never been listened to before. That's how you do it. I think it's even the fastest way to do it, even though it's time-intensive."

The result? Very little turnover, according to Greenberg.

"My motto was, 'Change is bad, but improvement is good, so I'm going to show you how this is eventually going to be an improvement,'" Beaudoin added. "And now, I'm sure if you asked any of those ed reps, they'd tell you they're much better off with our platform than they were with the previous one."

## THE MILLION DOLLAR CHALLENGE

Music & Arts has a moratorium on buying paperclips. As Greenberg pointed out, the little suckers reproduce on their own. "We haven't bought paperclips in years," he said.

It's one expense — albeit a smaller one — among many that the company slashed during The Million Dollar Challenge. Held 2007–'09, this cost-containment

program began after the GC buy-out and hectic Texas expansion. (In a six-month period, Music & Arts opened 15 stores in the Lone Star State following southern retail giant Brook Mays Music's 2006 bankruptcy.) Any selling, general and administrative expense was fair game. All employees participated, and the department with the best cost-savings idea received 10 percent of the shared savings. One department earned \$14,000.

"It was a suggestion box, basically, with a pot of gold for the best one," Beaudoin said.

Small cuts at the store level added up to big numbers. For instance, a regional hub manager discovered an unnecessary \$90-a-month telephone line, saving the company \$1,000 a year. Stores reduced heating from 74 to 72 degrees. There was the paperclip clampdown, and as Greenberg put it, folks who used "18 different colors of markers" were asked to "live with just three." Senior management pitched in

to reduce larger expenses, calling landlords and telephone providers to negotiate better terms. "We even renegotiated the contract for the paper towels," Greenberg said. Store managers were nudged to hit a payroll utilization rate of five, or \$5 in sales for every dollar spent on labor.

"We'd say, 'Do you need two people on when you only need one from the hours of, say, 10–12:00?'" Greenberg explained. "And do you need six part-timers working overtime at night when you may be able to do it with four?"

"One of the years, the finance team won the challenge because they found savings around credit card processing," Beaudoin said. "One year, marketing won it because we made the switch from traditional media to digital — we got more aggressive flexing out of *Yellow Pages*. And I believe one year the logistics folks got it because of a cost-savings initiative they came up with, which was renegotiating the freight contract with our outbound carrier."

All told, The Million Dollar Challenge added \$1.7 million to Music & Arts' bottom line — no small number, even for a \$175 million organization. And informally, the program continues to this day.

"It's the Music & Arts culture," Greenberg said. "It's one of the reasons that Music & Arts grew up and, I think, grew up profitably. We've always said that nickels and dimes matter. We're in a nickel-and-dime business."

Additional cost-cutting measures at the corporate level saved a hefty pile of nickels and dimes. Instruments shelved in the Frederick warehouse got boxed in stacks of large Unipak containers to consolidate space — an idea Greenberg said Music & Arts appropriated from FEMA. All

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## {MUSIC&ARTS}

raises became merit-based, as opposed to cost-of-living bumps. School percussion kits were kept in each market for cleaning between rental seasons instead of being shipped back to Frederick. “With percussion, the rule is: Let it lie,” Greenberg said. “Don’t ship it. It’s too expensive.”

David Fuhr, the company’s vice president of sales, focused on increasing private music lessons across all locations. “We went from giving 18,000 lessons a week to 25,000 lessons a week,” Fuhr said. “So we’re doing over a million lessons a year.”

“After we capitalized on the void in Texas, we cleaned up the business,” O’Brien said. “We were kind of geared up for austerity before the recession, so the recession wasn’t that big a deal for us.”

### GO WEST

Cleaning up the business proved to Guitar Center and its parent company, Bain Capital, that Music & Arts was “a very profitable little brother,” as O’Brien put it. This opened the door for its recent westward expansion. “We had fun cleaning up the business, but it’s more fun to grow,” O’Brien said.

In late March, the company acquired Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.-based Alta Loma Music, run by Pete and Genett Gamber. The two-store full-line dealership, which specializes in music lessons, gave Music & Arts what O’Brien called “a great foothold” in Southern California. And Greenberg acknowledged that the acquisition could mark the first of many Music & Arts openings in the market. “We wouldn’t

have come to the West Coast for just two stores,” he said.

It’s a cutthroat market, but Music & Arts’ executive team isn’t daunted. The way O’Brien sees it, the city’s large enough to accommodate more stores, as long as they’re strategically located. This coming rental season, 22 Los Angeles-area Guitar Center stores, along with nine others in various markets, will even rent B&O instruments as Music & Arts affiliates.

“Southern California lends itself to convenience because traffic is so terrible,” O’Brien said. “We think there are relatively few exclusive relationships, unlike the way we do business in, say, Philadelphia.”

“A store’s trade area is defined as 18 minutes travel time because of the lessons and the

proliferation of mom-and-pop music stores,” Beaudoin added. “There are still lots of places to put stores that are 18 minutes away from Guitar Center. And both Alta Loma Music stores are more than 18 minutes away from GC locations.”

Not surprisingly, Music & Arts’ open-door culture played into the expansion. Pete Gamber, an outspoken champion of independent music retail, said he sold to a chain, in large part, because it happened to be Music & Arts. (See “Why We Sold In” on the opposite page.)

“Music & Arts wasn’t a stranger to Genett and me,” he said. “Over the last 12-plus years, many on the Music & Arts team had become industry friends to us. We knew who they were, and they knew us.” **MI**

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The advertisement features a background of a tropical beach scene with a large, faint image of a woman in a bikini. In the top left, the Eddy Finn logo is displayed. The main headline 'All Things Uke!' is in large, blue, 3D-style letters. Below it, 'Instruments - Cases - Accessories' is written in a smaller, blue font. Three groups of instruments are shown: 'Exotic Woods' (three ukuleles), 'Classics' (three ukuleles), and 'Banjolele' (three banjoles). A small inset image in the top right shows a woman in a bikini holding a ukulele, with the text 'Eddy Finn' and 'PRODUCT GUIDE' below it. At the bottom, there is a Facebook icon, a QR code, the website 'EddyFinnUkes.com', the phone number '800.475.7686', and the text 'A division of SHS International'.

# WHY WE SOLD IN

‘WE WANTED TO REMAIN ACTIVE IN THE BUSINESS THAT WE LOVE PASSIONATELY.’

BY PETE GAMBER

So here’s the big question: Why did we sell our music store, Alta Loma Music? We all have those days — your store is either paradise or ... well, the other place. You wonder if going into business was the best decision you ever made or the worst.

But this decision was different. My wife, Genett, and I wanted to sell in, not out, of the industry. We wanted to remain active in the business that we love passionately. After 34-plus years, we’re still fired up about what we do. Right before selling, we were working late into the night on social media posts and ideas to make our music lessons program and store better, even after we got home at 11 p.m. Every day we were excited to go to work. This never changed.

**Sell in.** Music & Arts provided the opportunity to sell in, not sell out. Our store focused on lessons, B&O instrument rentals, repairs and retail sales — combo, print music and B&O. Music & Arts has the same focus. We wanted to keep what we did in our community going. This fit with Music & Arts was important in our decision. Music & Arts would provide what our community needs. We started in 1978 doing many of the same things that Music & Arts started doing in 1952. Ben O’Brien had a passion for performing and teaching and developed a retail model on servicing music educators, kids and parents. Music & Arts wasn’t a stranger to Genett and me. Over the last 12-plus years, many on the Music & Arts team had become industry friends to us. We knew who they were, and they knew us.

**Promote our passion.** The most important factor was finding a way to keep doing what we love most: turning kids



onto music through lesson programs. Music & Arts has that same passion. This would let us keep promoting our passion in our communities and maybe even nationwide.

**Exit plan.** *Music Inc.* columnist and music retail financial guru Alan Friedman has talked for years about having an exit strategy. Genett and I are both at that age and had no exit plan. Selling provided both an exit and an entrance plan.

**New birth for our store.** There were many things we wanted to improve at our company, but resources were always an issue. We didn’t have extra cash to do a remodeling or pick up multiple new product lines. Becoming a member of the Music &

Arts team has changed that.

**Protect our teachers.** The future of our music lesson teachers was also a concern. Many of them helped create the DNA that made Alta Loma Music’s program one of the best in the United States, maybe the world. Our teachers had sweat equity in the business. We needed to make sure they had a future here. Once again, Music & Arts had a dedication to music education.

**Stability.** We could sell to someone who could go out of business in three years, or we could sell to a stable industry company. Being in business for 34-plus years, we’ve seen the industry go through lots of changes. During this time, two elements have kept our business stable: B&O rentals and lessons. What has kept Music & Arts growing? B&O rentals and lessons.

I hope that I’ve shed some light on why Genett and I became a part of the Music & Arts team. All of us need to be creators of new musicians in our communities. **MI**



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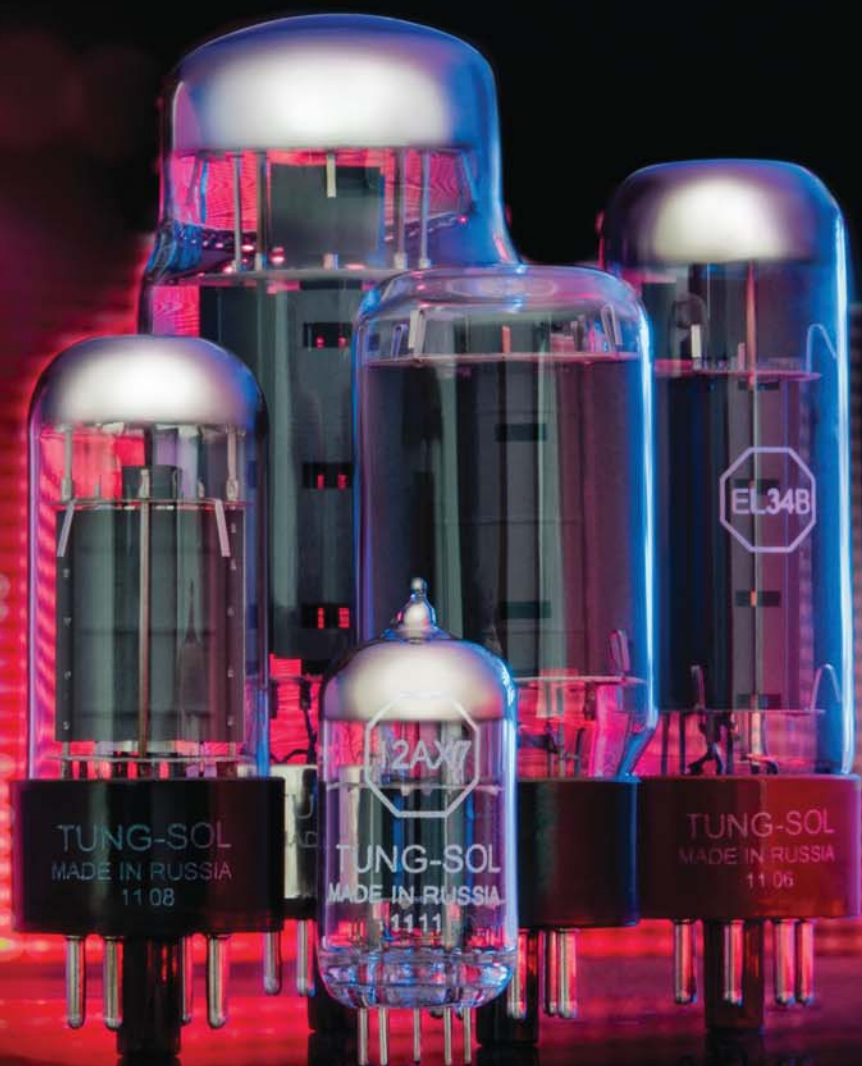
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## BACK-OFFICE CLEANUP

- ~~X~~ SIMPLIFY PURCHASING
- ~~X~~ UPDATE BUSINESS SOFTWARE
- ~~X~~ MAXIMIZE TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENT
- ~~X~~ COMPUTERIZE LESSON SCHEDULING
- ~~X~~ REDUCE BACK-OFFICE EXPENSES

WANT TO KNOW HOW?

READ ON...



# ONE-STOP WEB SHOP

## Pro-Active's iBuy lets dealers purchase from one spot online

Something always seemed to come up when Lisa Kirkwood, co-owner of Discount Music in Jacksonville, Fla., placed a vendor order — be it a customer needing help or a delivery requiring attention. Recently, iBuy changed that.

The new ordering platform from Pro-Active connects vendors with members of the Independent Music Store Owners (iMSO) retail group. And now, Kirkwood can complete orders on her time, in one spot.

“We can start an order, and if we’re pulled away, we can always come back later and finish,” Kirkwood said. “Also, the vendors know that when an order comes through iBuy, it’s an order from an iMSO member, which helps to show the strength of the independent music store owner.”

Pro-Active offers websites and e-commerce solutions for music retailers, and its new service lets vendors upload product information directly to a retailer’s Web store. Customers can then place an order that can be fulfilled from the retailer’s inventory or pushed to the vendor’s system for drop-shipping.

Bill Walzak, president and CEO of Pro-Active, said the idea behind iBuy was to create a one-stop portal for dealers to view all the merchandise that they buy on a daily basis from



Pro-Active's Bill Walzak (left) and David Hall

all their different vendors. Using iBuy, iMSO retailers can log in and purchase all of their products from multiple vendors in one online location.

“There’s no other system like this in the music industry,” Walzak said. “There’s no better tool to save a dealer time and money and help them make a better buying decision.”

### CLICK & DONE

On top of the ability to order in one location, iBuy lets users take advantage of closeouts and special vendor offers that are only available to iBuy members. Kirkwood said using the system has streamlined her ordering process and lets her order at any time — day, night or weekend. She added that the system has helped her save money and take advantage of exclusive deals.

“It has freed us up to focus on the customer,” she said. “My husband will often place orders early in the morning before we open and before the vendors are open. He really likes logging into one site and ordering from many different vendors. As

he says, ‘Click, click, click and done.’”

Chris Basile, owner of South Jersey Music in Sewell, N.J., explained that using iBuy lets him order up to 70 percent of his daily product needs from multiple vendors at once. He echoed Kirkwood’s sentiment about having more time to deal with customers.

“I can order late at night or early in the morning without having to take away my valuable time on the sales floor or other important tasks I may have during the business day,” he said.

According to Walzak, the iBuy program also lets dealers band together to get better pricing and make better purchasing decisions. He added that the program’s as beneficial for vendors as it is for dealers, and although more than 250 brands are represented, there’s always room for more.

“Vendors need to get together and support independent retailers,” he said. “This is an ecosystem that we all need to live in, and it gives strength to the other. If we’re all working together for the common good of the industry, everyone is going to benefit.” — By Jeff Cagle



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# ONLINE STREAMLINED

## Tri-Tech offers its most seamless solution yet with AIMsi version 10

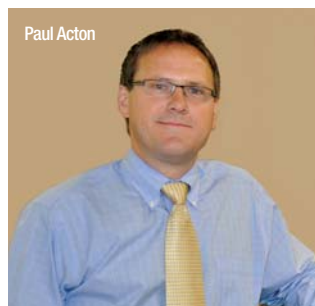
**T**ri-Tech Software Systems President Paul Acton keeps up with trends while he sets them.

After his company introduced its AIMsi software in 1984, the program became a back-office fixture at more than 1,500 music retailers. Since then, he's merged the features of his company's e-commerce platform, the Active-e

C2B rental module, with AIMsi version 10, creating Tri-Tech's most intuitive, seamless business solution yet.

"AIMsi is basically a complete point-of-sale, inventory management, accounting and business solution that was specifically filled for the music industry," Acton said. He added that the program can now be fully integrated into any retail environment, whether it's a two-computer mom-and-pop shop or a 300-computer, 16-store enterprise.

Dealers can personalize their AIMsi experience based on their services — adding on modules for instrument repairs, lessons



Paul Acton

and contracts. With AIMsi version 10, Tri-Tech has incorporated the four-year-old Active-e platform into the company's flagship business solution, which ultimately streamlines the online rental process. But more importantly, the union is indicative of customers'

21st century purchasing habits, and Acton said he's acknowledged many end-user suggestions in bettering the system.

"When a customer comes onto a retailer's website to initiate a rental contract, it's smooth, easy and quick," Acton said. "People are more likely to complete the process because it's a couple pages now,

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rather than three or four.”

Version 10 of AIMsi lets retailers simultaneously build an online account for customers, which they can use to log into the website and make lesson payments. Users can attach files, such as rental contracts, to e-mails within the customer service module, which, according to Acton, takes the guesswork out of scheduling lessons. The latest version also permits retailers to assign multiple e-mails to customer accounts, so dealers can send more than one copy of a rental receipt. Other new features include a reverse telephone look up database, which lets retailers search by phone number for more detailed customer contact information, as well as purchase and rental histories.

According to Acton, future plans include the addition of a mobile app, which is currently in development. “We’re constantly making changes. It’s all about inventory and making good buying decisions.”

— By Hilary Brown

## + MORE SOLUTION PROVIDERS

### EASY LESSON MANAGEMENT

**Jackrabbit** is a Web-based music school management system that features online registration, skill tracking, a staff time clock, an unlimited lead file and recurring billing. By making student, family, instructor and class data accessible, Jackrabbit aims to help retailers heighten their service levels and professionalism.

Recently, Jackrabbit debuted two free enhancements. Staff time clock is a new enhancement to the Jackrabbit system’s employee portal. It lets employees log in and track their time. Activities can be tracked separately to accommodate pay rates for various duties. Jackrabbit’s Online Getting Started Guide offers an interactive experience to help new users become proficient with the system. [jackrabbitschool.com](http://jackrabbitschool.com)

### SHIPPING SAVER

**PartnerShip** provides shipping solutions to small businesses and retailers nationwide. It has served NAMM since 1999 and has more than 20 years of experience developing and managing LTL freight, small package, trade show and specialized shipping programs for more than 100 associations and thousands of customers.

PartnerShip also continues to develop specialized solutions tailored to small retailers, including inbound vendor routing, inbound shipment management, invoice auditing and consolidation, easy-to-use online freight management tools, U-Pack moving service programs, low-cost shipping supplies, and marketing support services. [partnership.com/18namm](http://partnership.com/18namm)

### LOWER EXCHANGE RATES

**Tempus** offers corporate foreign exchange and international payment services. Music industry clients typically use Tempus to pay their overseas suppliers in their local currency, such as euro, British pound and Japanese yen. According to a company statement, Tempus exchange rates and transaction fees are significantly lower than banks.

Tempus has a Web-based system called Primus that enables clients to make international payments through the Internet. Primus users can add new beneficiary information or edit existing beneficiary information, purchase foreign currency, process outgoing foreign currency payment orders, and run a wide range of reports for easy transaction tracking. [tempus-us.com](http://tempus-us.com)



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# YOU'VE CHOSEN YOUR TECHNOLOGY. NOW WHAT?

BY GORDON O'HARA

## Simple steps for maximizing your software investment

**Y**ou've searched. You've watched demonstrations. You've finally purchased a point-of-sale, website or scheduling program. Now it's time to maximize its value and use it effectively. Here's how.

**Prioritize.** Retail is a very manage-it-now business. Implementing technology requires different skills — a consistent series of steps to reach long-term goals. Make sure these steps receive your attention as much as customer service, purchasing and other tasks do. Remember, the time you spend now will eventually reduce the time you spend on trying to increase sales and reduce operational costs. Not making progress? Ask your technology provider to offer staff assistance, or hire temporary staff.

**Plan.** A short plan does wonders in the long run. Include the following in your plan: what you want the technology to achieve; necessary steps for reaching these goals; how you will measure success; a schedule; the staff who will handle the work; and any new features or changes worth requesting.

Your technology provider has implemented your new technology services many times over.



The provider's experiences can help you avoid pitfalls. Ask the provider for an initial plan, then modify it for your store. Update this plan quarterly. This is important because your revised goal might require new software features that take time to develop.

**Staff.** The owner shouldn't do all the work. Designate one leader, and involve other staff members — users and non-users alike. Look for team members who embrace technology in their own lives. They are your best resource for keeping projects running smoothly. Why should you involve non-users, as well? They may be the users of tomorrow and often provide a fresh look at how a technology can offer new benefits.

**Train.** Avoid long training sessions. Try 30- to 45-minute meetings. Then, set up a test system where you can make mistakes. Also, appoint several in-house user experts. Allocate extra training time for them. These employees can provide support for other staffers as they learn the system.

**Practice.** Learning new technology is no

different than learning a musical instrument — it requires practice. Methodically review each feature. Practice each procedure several times. Repetition during training reduces frustration when you use a live system later.

**Unveil.** Inevitably, most software will affect everyone on staff, so a great kickoff is important. Make sure everyone understands the goals for the software, the benefits of reaching those goals, the system's basics, the user experts to consult for training and the person to contact for help. The most important themes are to set realistic expectations and encourage patience and constructive feedback.

**Support.** We have a rule: If you struggle for more than 10 minutes, stop! Ask staffers to get online help. Then, try the in-house support team at your software company. Most problems usually have fast solutions.

**Monitor and feedback.** As you use your new system, record comments on these three areas: usability, needed features and feedback from your customers (if the system

has a customer component). Track and share these comments with staff, so the technology company can develop improvements. Take screenshots or record comments, so you remember the issues later. Note when they are resolved.

**Evaluate.** Success can be defined in several ways. Did the software perform well? Were you able to implement it effectively? Did it achieve the results you'd anticipated? Be realistic. Here are a few typical examples for three common systems music stores use:

1. *Websites.* Sales are the first measurement that comes to mind. But far more customers will browse your site and contact you or come into your store. Track site traffic, calls and inquiries. Consider savings and customer outreach. For example, e-newsletter programs reduce advertising costs. Online rentals reduce staff time. Online payment can improve cash flow.

2. *Point of sale.* More accurate cash counting, reduced hours to close out each day, and less staff time spent on purchasing and receiving are a good start. Also, consider

the reduced cost of goods sold due to more precise ordering and sales tracking, fewer hours spent on bookkeeping, and greater speed of product access.

3. *Lessons scheduling.* Time saved on managing schedules, fewer overlapping schedules that result in more revenue, reduced time for performing billing and payroll, more accurate cancellation and renewal records — all of these can be quantified into savings or increased revenue.

**Improve.** Share feedback with your staff and the technology company on at least a semi-annual basis. Map out improvements that can be made, and develop a short plan to achieve them.

**Look ahead.** Consider how new technologies might help your store, and work with your provider to implement them. For example, smartphones, tablets and social media have emerged as formidable innovations. The pace is accelerating. Are you? **MI**

Gordon O'Hara is a managing partner at Retail Up! His company offers website, point-of-sale and lesson-management software solutions.

## LESSONS SCHEDULING SIMPLIFIED

**B**ee Bantug, a managing partner at Retail Up!, has noticed a trend: Lots of technologically savvy retailers still manage their music lesson programs the old-fashioned way — on paper. Retail Up! has launched It's About Time to change that.

According to Bantug, this music lesson management software is ideal for dealers who've dabbled in online calendars but want a more industry-specific solution. It's About Time has also been designed for the less tech-savvy.

"If they've been doing it all on paper, that logic has been transferred to [software] that is automated and can be easily understood by the least-techie person in the shop," Bantug said. "If they know how to use the keyboard, It's About Time is pretty self-explanatory. And once the software is installed, we always do a top-to-bottom training."

It's About Time offers all the time-saving efficiencies not found on more generic calendar apps. For example, dealers can track students from one

family together; manage the accounting and scheduling of missed classes, cancellations and makeup lessons; and produce teacher and classroom schedules, teacher payrolls, client invoices, and in-depth reports.

"We always say the relational impact of information is what's missing when dealers [are managing a lesson program] manually," Bantug said. "It's About Time is very personalized for each student, and you can create a good profile of each of the family members and can relate them as a group. Dealers can make notations about what level of learning they are at any given time and make adjustments as they go through the program year-by-year."

The program also lets dealers make notations to track whether students own or rent instruments. "It's all tied to how you can support a student's learning process and, at the same time, be able to support your own business in terms of retailing."

— By Jeff Cagle

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BY MARK MAHONEY

# DO MORE WITH LESS

## What to look for in business management software, especially if you offer music lessons

**H**ow is it possible to get ahead in this era of demanding customers and tougher competition? The answer is software.

Business management software enables you to do more at a lower operating cost and use your human resources where they're most valuable, especially if you have a music lessons program. That sounds simple, but there are a few points to consider before making an investment.

**1. Software must automate repetitive and people-intensive processes.** Automation can transform your business into an efficient, low-error-producing operation that requires little to no attention from you or your staff.

Automated billing will probably have the most visible and consistent impact on your operations. Software can easily perform recurring billing, auto-pay and invoicing processes after initial data is entered once. The days of processing credit cards one at a time over the phone are over. You can even get software that sends credit card decline alerts to your e-mail inbox.

Registration can be automated so that, upon registering, student data automatically goes into a

database and never has to be entered again. This eliminates errors in keying student, family and payment information and is a tremendous time-saver for staff and families.

Automated e-mails make it possible for owners to communicate with existing clients and to market to prospects without dedicating many hours to the effort. The resulting e-mail distributions present you in a professional, organized manner. Editing tools make these distributions easy for even non-techie users to use. Delivery can be targeted to certain segments of your list so that information can be pushed out to students and parents, instructors, and support staff with minimal effort.

**2. Software must be database-driven.** Database-driven software stores all of your information or data in a single source that feeds all of your software features. All users, regardless of where they are logged in, have access to up-to-date information without the need to sync computers or files. This eliminates errors and saves time. Once data is entered, it never needs to be entered again. This also means that changes, such as new addresses and phone numbers, only need to be made once in the database.

**3. Software must be Web-based, so you and your staff can access information even when you're not in the office.** With Web-based software, you and your people can be more knowledgeable and provide better service because answers are easily found. As owners, you can look at key performance indicators, such as enrollment and income figures, and see your daily business status



at a glance.

A Web-based solution enables you to benefit from Fortune 500-level security and maintenance to your software because you are part of a large, powerful group of customers. You're also protected from losing data if you have a computer disaster because your data is stored in a safe, secure off-site facility.

Finally, a Web-based solution enables you to provide online services, such as registration, directly on your website

or through a portal, enabling staff-consuming tasks to transition into self-service features.

**4. Software must provide a portal.** Through a portal, you can offer information to customers as a group or individually. Parents can manage their own accounts through a secure area, turning much of your employees' involvement with customer data into a self-serve process. Parents are thrilled with the convenience and the control it gives them over their own information. You like it because they take the maintenance of their accounts off your hands.

How much of an impact can business management software actually have? I've seen organizations eliminate the need for new hires; single-location music schools open second locations without increasing staff; schools that have been able to double and triple student count, instructor-to-student ratio, classes offered and depth of curriculum; and organizations that have made complete financial turnarounds by streamlining their operations with software. **MI**

Mark Mahoney is the co-founder and president of Jackrabbit Technologies, which offers management software for businesses with music education programs.



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# FALL PRODUCT PREVIEW

## 2012



TECH 21 | BOOST RVB

## Tech 21's Big Boost

Tech 21 has updated its Boost RVB analog reverb emulator pedal, changing the former rumble control to modulation. This modulates the pre-delay of the reverb for additional dimension. With the recent expansion of its Boost series pedals, Tech 21 has also changed the look of the Boost RVB to feature a clean boost function for up to 9 dB of added volume. [tech21nyc.com](http://tech21nyc.com)



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THE LOAR | THE LH-319

## Golden Age Model

The Loar recently unveiled the LH-319, a hand-carved archtop with two P-90 pickups, based on The Loar's LH-309 single-pickup model. The LH-319 is hand-assembled and features a solid hand-carved and hand-graduated spruce top, along with select maple back and sides and a rosewood fretboard.

{[theloar.com](http://theloar.com)}



MARTIN | OM JEFF DANIELS

## Daniels' Model

Martin has debuted the OM Jeff Daniels guitar. This model was designed in collaboration with Daniels, an award-winning film and stage actor. The guitar's back and sides are rare Madagascar rosewood, the top is Adirondack spruce reinforced with a quarter-inch scalloped Adirondack spruce bracing, and the modified V neck with long diamond volute is carved from genuine mahogany. The fingerboard and belly bridge are crafted from black ebony. {[martinguitar.com](http://martinguitar.com)}



BOUCHER GUITARS | 000 12 FRET-TO-BODY

## Shape Up

Boucher Guitars has added a new shape to its collection of hand-made acoustic guitars, the 000 12 Fret-To-Body (12FTB). The new model features a neck that meets the body at the 12th fret instead of the 14th.

The 000 12FTB's body is slightly larger than that of a traditional 000. The lower frequencies are enhanced as a result. Available models include the STU-IN-000-12FTB (pictured), AVT-IN-000-12FTB and AVT-BN-000-12FTB.

{[boucher guitars.com](http://boucher guitars.com)}





# GEAR >

## GUITARS, AMPS & ACCESSORIES

ELECTRO-HARMONIX I  
SUPEREGO

### Ego Boost

Electro-Harmonix recently launched the SuperEgo pedal, which can sample and freeze notes or chords, perform fluid glissandos and create oscillator-like synthesizer effects. The pedal enables the player to stack or layer sounds, create infinite sustain, and tweak attack and decay. The speed control adjusts the attack and decay rate. [ehx.com](http://ehx.com)



STRING SWING I STYLZ

### Stylin' Strings

String Swing has released Stylz guitar hangers. The six bold, customized hangers let players express their personality, while combining the strength and durability of String Swing's CC01K. [stringswing.com](http://stringswing.com)



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ELIXIR STRINGS | BASS STRINGS

## Candy-coated

Elixir's new bass strings provide a clearer, livelier tone and finger-friendly feel with the company's Nanoweb coating. The newly refined coating for bass gives the original nickel-plated strings a more inviting feel that's easier to grip, while the stainless-steel bass strings boast a softer feel than uncoated stainless-steel strings. [elixirstrings.com](http://elixirstrings.com)



LEVY'S LEATHERS | AMERICAN INDIAN STRAPS

## Levy's Goes Native

Levy's Leathers' new American Indian design guitar straps embody the spirit of aboriginal art using natural suede leather with leather appliqué, embroidery and a fringe border. The straps are available in six original designs. [levysleathers.com](http://levysleathers.com)

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# GEAR

GUITARS, AMPS & ACCESSORIES



SCHECTER | BLACKJACK SLS

## Back in Black

Schecter's new Black-Jack Slim Line series (SLS) was built with the prog-metal shredder player in mind. The ultra-slim, satin-finished 25.5-inch scale maple neck has a smooth 24-fret ebony fingerboard and is set-in with an extreme ultra-access neck joint. This allows for playing comfort and ease of access to

the upper frets.  
MSRP: \$1,119.

{schecter  
guitars.com}



PEAVEY | MAX SERIES

## To the Max

Peavey recently debuted the Max series of bass amplifiers. The redesigned lineup of bass combos includes the Max 115, Max 112 and Max 110 bass combo amps. They deliver huge bass tone with exclusive Peavey designs, including unique psycho-acoustic low-end enhancement that adds bass without demanding anything extra from the speaker. The models also feature a built-in chromatic tuner with mute, a tuned and ported enclosure, and a 1/8-inch headphone output.

MSRP: \$99-\$399. {peavey.com}

REUNION BLUES | FENDER  
CUSTOM SHOP RB CONTINENTAL

## Fender Goes Blue

Reunion Blues and Fender have introduced the Fender Custom Shop RB Continental guitar case. Each electric guitar case is constructed with a water-resistant, two-tone black ballistic exterior, which surrounds a lightweight Flexoskeleton protection system. The interior is reinforced with high-density, dual-layer foam and EVA impact panels.

{reunionblues.com}





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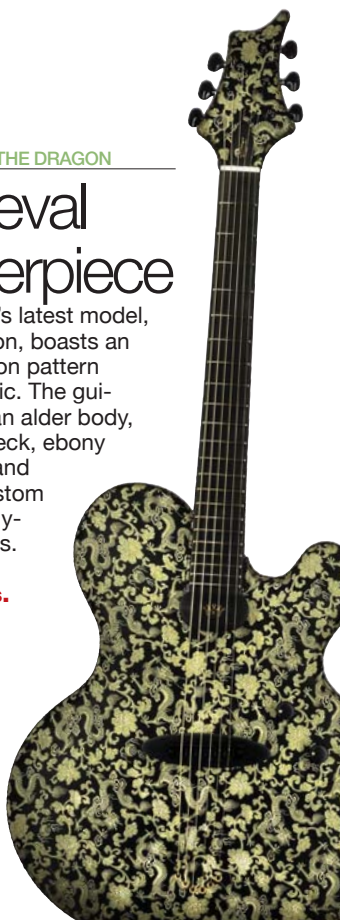
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JENS RITTER | THE DRAGON

## Medieval Masterpiece

Jens Ritter's latest model, The Dragon, boasts an original dragon pattern brocade fabric. The guitar features an alder body, mahogany neck, ebony fingerboard and Haeussel custom fat-jazz/ebony-cover pickups. [ritter-instruments.com](http://ritter-instruments.com)



TC ELECTRONIC | SPARK BOOSTER

## Sparks Fly

TC Electronic has rolled out the Spark Booster pedal. Featuring 26 dB of boost, the Spark Booster is the ideal tool for enhancing existing sounds and highlighting solo or rhythm parts. An active EQ consisting of a bass and treble knob provides precise tonal shaping, as well as extended lows and added top-end sparkle. MAP: \$129.

[tcelectronic.com](http://tcelectronic.com)



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[TetonGuitars.com](http://TetonGuitars.com)

photo: RH Miller



### PRESONUS | STUDIO LIVE UPDATES

## Updated & Upgraded

PreSonus has updated its StudioLive mixers with free features. Integrated Smart frequency analysis, new equalization and talkback features, and extensive iPad control are included in the PreSonus free Universal Control 1.6 and StudioLive Remote 1.3 for iPad updates. Virtual StudioLive now offers both Smart Spectra time-frequency spectrograph and real-time analyzer views.

**{presonus.com}**



### DYNAUDIO PROFESSIONAL | DBM50

## Dynamite Monitor

Dynaudio Professional recently released the DBM50, an active desktop monitor featuring a 7.1-inch woofer and a 1.1-inch soft dome tweeter. DBM50 comes with the option of adding a controller that puts the user at the helm of volume control in any situation. Every driver is hand-built in Denmark. **{dynaudioprofessional.com}**



### NATIVE INSTRUMENTS | TRAKTOR PRO 2.5

## Right on Trak

Native Instruments has rolled out Traktor Pro 2.5. This latest version introduces remix decks, providing access to a loop suite made up of 64 slots, each able to hold loops, one-shot samples or tracks. DJs can control up to four remix decks at once and save their work as an entire remix set.

**{native-instruments.com}**



THE LOOP LOFT | CHARLIE HUNTER: LOOPED, VOL. 1

# Charlie Gets Loopy

The Loop Loft recently released *Charlie Hunter: Looped, Vol. 1*, an 859-loop, 1.68 GB collection of the guitarist's seven-string jazzy, funky, soulful and original playing. The collection includes 14 separate and distinct sessions, recorded exclusively for The Loop Loft. It's offered in WAV, AIFF (Apple Loops) and REX2 formats or as a customized Reason ReFill or Ableton Live Pack. Users can also download it instantly from The Loop Loft website. [thelooploft.com](http://thelooploft.com)



COMMUNITY | ENTASYS 200

# Sleek Sound

Community's new Entasys 200 speakers define performance for small-format column line array loudspeakers. They achieve this by using a two-way design, complex frequency-shaded LF crossover networks and the proprietary Entasys convex-curve HF to provide consistent beamwidth up to 16 kHz. All four Entasys 200 models have well-controlled and consistent dispersion characteristics. [communitypro.com](http://communitypro.com)



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AKG | PERCEPTION HEADPHONES

## Tuned In

AKG has added the K44 Perception, K77 Perception and K99 Perception headphones to its Perception series. Both the K44 and K77 are over-ear, semi-closed headphones that include leatherette ear pads and a self-adjusting headband. The K99 over-ear, semi-open headphones feature 40-mm speakers that provide a natural, uncolored sound, ideal for the studio. **{akg.com}**



HEIL SOUND | PRO SET 3

## Tour-ready

Heil Sound's new Pro Set 3 headphones are designed for touring pros, musicians, and broadcast and recording studios. The Pro Set 3 features 40-mm neodymium magnets and voice coils; a lightweight, ergonomically designed, cushioned headband; and a detachable cable design. The headphones are also compact for convenient transport. MSRP: \$109. **{heilsound.com}**

ROTOSOUND | CABLES

## Plugged In

Rotosound recently repackaged its range of instrument cables, which now come in a choice of more than 30 specifications. Featuring pure copper for ideal signal transmission and audio quality with straight or angled jacks, these cables are precisely manufactured for consistency, strength and sound clarity. The range includes a choice of lengths up to 45 feet, straight or curly, as well as XLR, MIDI, patch, Speakon, extension and phono leads. **{rotosound.com}**





HERCULES | XPS 2.0 60

## Loud & Clear

Hercules has launched the XPS 2.0 60 DJ Set. Dubbed the company's first "bedroom studio," the speakers let users practice, prepare first mixes, study and select music tracks, and monitor and verify effects. The set also features two compact satellites, crafted entirely of wood. Each satellite includes a tweeter and a 3-inch woofer with a Kevlar membrane for strong bass response. MSRP: \$129.99. [hercules.com](http://hercules.com)



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PAHU INTERNATIONAL | BLACK WIDOW DRUM WEB

## Caught in the Webs

Pahu International has debuted the Black Widow Drum Web. The unit prevents any drum set from slipping, sliding or moving under even the most aggressive players. In addition to combining a net-like configuration of hook-and-loop material with a durable 600 denier nylon fabric, the Black Widow is anchored by gravity and the weight of the drummer on the throne. The mat folds into a compact 12- by 15-inch carrying case.

{[pahuinternational.com](http://pahuinternational.com)}



GROVER PRO | BOPMASTER

## Grover's Foxy Drumstick

Grover Pro Percussion recently added the Bopmaster model to its custom hickory line of SilverFox drumsticks. The new model measures 16.25 inches long with a 0.515-inch butt diameter and a 0.236-inch neck. This model, designed specifically for jazz players, features an elongated oval-shape tip, ideal for clarity of definition on ride cymbals. Made of hand-selected U.S. hickory, the Bopmaster is finished using SilverFox's proprietary Duracrylx finish.

{[groverpro.com](http://groverpro.com)}



SONOR | PERFECT BALANCE

## Jojo's Choice

Sonor has collaborated with Jojo Mayer to create the Perfect Balance pedal. The philosophy behind the bass drum pedal is to achieve harmony and interplay between the pedal's moving parts and the drummer's foot. Features include a low-mass drive system, ballistic fiber strap, elongated board, folding mechanism and self-mounting clamp.

{[sonor.com](http://sonor.com)}



MANUEL RODRIGUEZ AND SONS | CAJONS

## Handmade Beauties

Manuel Rodriguez and Sons has released hand-made cajons, including the Cajon Flamenco Sonacai (pictured). The instrument's body is made of fiber VLC in black, and the top is constructed of birch plywood with ebony or brown imbuia finishing. The back is made of birch plywood with beech finishing. MSRP: \$128.

{[guitars-m-r-sons.com](http://guitars-m-r-sons.com)}



TRX CYMBALS | MALLETS

## Big Softy

TRX Cymbals' new cymbal mallets feature two-color, soft yarn heads that are individually hand-wound by mallet specialist Adam Argullin. The heads are attached to premium-grade, southern hickory drumstick handles that boast color graphics. The deluxe mallets feature yarn instead of felt to produce a fuller sound. MSRP: \$50. {[trxcymbals.com](http://trxcymbals.com)}

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ABLETON | 'ELECTRIC PIANOS'

## Electric Slide

Ableton, in conjunction with Soniccouture, has launched *Electric Pianos*, a software instrument consisting of two sampled classic electric pianos — the Rhodes Stage 73 and the Wurlitzer 200A. Their nuanced sounds and dynamics have been captured by Soniccouture, with every key being recorded at different velocity levels using vintage equipment. *Electric Pianos* features 70 instrument presets that have been tailored for ideal integration within Ableton Live. [ableton.com](http://ableton.com)



YAMAHA | PSR-E433

## Sound Sculptor

Yamaha has introduced the PSR-E433, a compact, portable keyboard ideal for first-time players. It boasts a DJ pattern mode, letting users experience DJ-style music making. In this mode, players can mute tracks, change sections and transpose in real time. Assignable live control knobs also let players sculpt their sounds on the fly by adding effects, changing filter settings or modifying the stereo image from pinpoint thin to wider than the speakers via the ultra-wide stereo effect. MSRP: \$429. [yamaha.com](http://yamaha.com)



ROLAND | HP500 SERIES

## Roland's New Rollout

Roland recently released the HP500 series, a lineup of cabinet-style digital pianos that are equipped with Roland's SuperNATURAL piano sound engine and the new Acoustic Projection sound system. All models offer an intuitive LCD panel layout for user-friendly operation, as well as on-board three-track recording and audio recording and playback with optional USB flash memory. The instrument also boasts Roland's ivory feel keyboard and a progressive damper action pedal. [rolandconnect.com](http://rolandconnect.com)

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# GEAR >

## BAND & ORCHESTRA

P. MAURIAT | PMXA-67RUL

### Retro & Modern

**P**. Mauriat recently debuted the PMXA-67RUL alto saxophone, a vintage instrument with modern mechanics. The alto features a rolled tone hole, which offers less resistance so it's easier to play, making the sax ideal for musicians looking for a step-up horn. The instrument also features a large bell that produces a full sound, a Super VI neck style and pads with seamless dome-metal resonators. MAP: \$2,949.99.

{[pmauriatmusic.com](http://pmauriatmusic.com)}



BARI | HYBRID STAINLESS STEEL

### Best of Both Worlds

**B**ari has added the Hybrid stainless-steel mouthpiece to its Hybrid alto and tenor saxophone mouthpiece line. The Hybrid features a best-of-both-worlds design: The hard rubber mouthpiece delivers greater projection, and the stainless-steel chamber adds audible mass, far beyond the abilities of traditional hard rubber. MSRP: alto, \$228.20; tenor, \$236.85. {[bariwoodwind.com](http://bariwoodwind.com)}



RS BERKELEY | GILLESPIE LEGENDS SERIES

### Dizzy's Selection

**R**S Berkeley's new Dizzy Gillespie Legends series trumpet mouthpiece is an exact reproduction of Gillespie's silver-plated model. Crafted by brass mouthpiece maker Greg Black, the unit features silver plating throughout, a round rim contour, medium-wide rim thickness and shallow-bowl cup depth. {[rsberkeley.com](http://rsberkeley.com)}





CONN-SELMER, VINCENT BACH | CASE

## Vintage Charm

Conn-Selmer and Vincent Bach have launched a new case design that features a vintage styling with modern features. The case boasts an elegant brown leather trim with complementing sturdy handles and gold hardware. The inside features a modern dark blue micro-fiber padded interior that includes the embroidered Vincent Bach insignia. [bachbrass.com](http://bachbrass.com)



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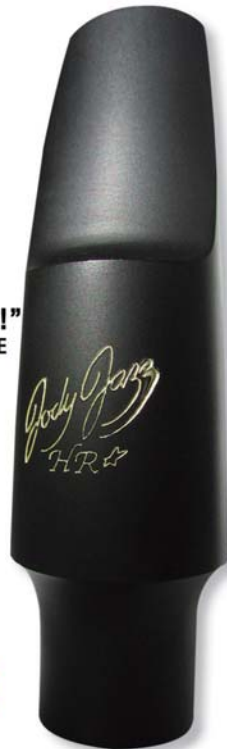


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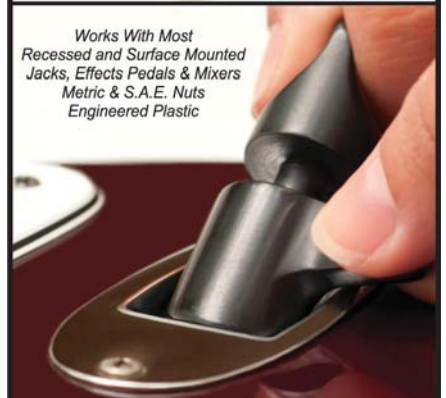


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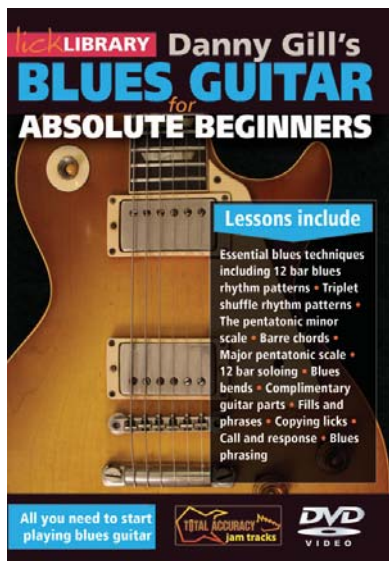
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### LICK LIBRARY I 'BLUES GUITAR FOR ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS'

## Lick Sings the Blues

Lick Library has rolled out *Blues Guitar For Absolute Beginners*. The DVD is presented by top guitar teacher Danny Gill and provides users with the essential basics for playing the blues via step-by-step lessons and two professionally recorded guitar jam tracks. The lessons introduce players to the basic rhythm involved with playing 12-bar blues. [licklibrary.com](http://licklibrary.com)

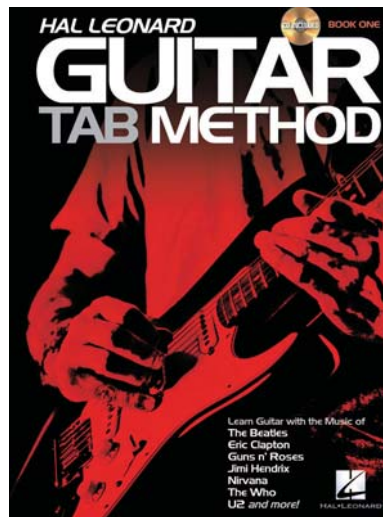


### HAL LEONARD I 'GUITAR TAB METHOD'

## Tab 101

Hal Leonard has debuted *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](http://halleonard.com)



### HUDSON MUSIC I DJEMBE, CAJON TITLES

## Hands-on Hudson

Hudson Music recently teamed up with percussionist Michael Wimberly to create two packages for beginning percussionists. *Getting Started On Djembe* and *Getting Started On Cajon* will each be released as individual DVDs and book/DVD combo packages. Each contains a brief historical overview, an introduction to basic use of the instrument, a complete approach to basic sound production techniques, and a complete series of traditional and contemporary rhythms that can be learned at one's own pace. [hudsonmusic.com](http://hudsonmusic.com)

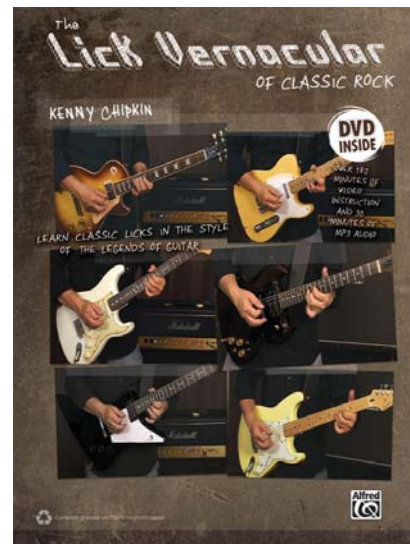


Each contains a brief historical overview, an introduction to basic use of the instrument, a complete approach to basic sound production techniques, and a complete series of traditional and contemporary rhythms that can be learned at one's own pace. [hudsonmusic.com](http://hudsonmusic.com)

### ALFRED I 'THE LICK VERNACULAR OF CLASSIC ROCK'

## Lick Language

Alfred's new release, *The Lick Vernacular of Classic Rock*, is a show-and-tell guitar method for learning licks in the style of 16 legendary players. The book, written by guitarist and songwriter Kenny Chipkin, features examples illustrated only in tab for quick study. The companion DVD boasts more than 180 minutes of video instruction and includes Chipkin performing every lick with a rhythm section. MSRP: \$19.99. [alfred.com](http://alfred.com)



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RELOOP | TERMINAL MIX 4

## Reloop's Release

Reloop has launched the Terminal Mix 4 (TM4), the company's first digital mixing controller designed especially for Serato. The TM4 sports ultra-slim 6-inch aluminum platters with non-slip vinyl coating and a 100-mm pitch fader. Features include three-band EQ with intelligent kill and a filter on each channel.

{[mixware.net](http://mixware.net)}



VESTAX | VCI-380

## Free Download

Vestax recently debuted the VCI-380. The two-channel DJ controller features a built-in DJ mixer and FSR pads and comes bundled with Serato Itch. To celebrate the release, Vestax has put together a free 500 MB content pack suitable for the VCI-380. The unit includes a download ticket that grants access to the free 500 MB pack.

{[vestax.com](http://vestax.com)}



CHAUVET | INTIMIDATOR 250, 350

## Chauvet Shows True Colors

Chauvet's new Intimidator 250 and Intimidator 350 are ideal for enhancing mobile rigs. Eight colors and seven gobos produce an array of effects. The selectable pan-and-tilt ranges give users control of the beam's position, and an electronic dimmer allows for smooth LED fading.

{[chauvetlighting.com](http://chauvetlighting.com)}

ELEKTRALITE | EYE KANDY

## Sweet & Bright

Elektralite has added the eye Kandy to its professional line of LEDs. The unit has seven interchangeable gobos that can rotate in both directions. Sixteen tricolor 3-watt LEDs are arranged in a circle around the outside edge of the front lens and can be controlled in quadrants. These tricolor LEDs have a 25-degree beam angle and can produce color washes around the center pencil-beam of light, creating a double effect when the eye Kandy is used as an image-projection fixture against a wall or other surface.



{[myelektralite.com](http://myelektralite.com)}

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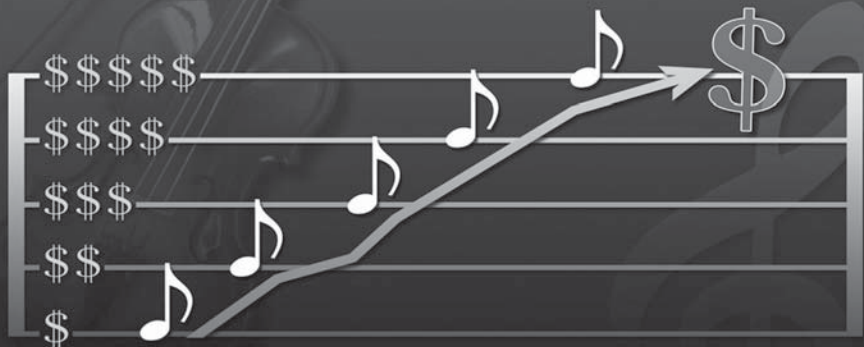
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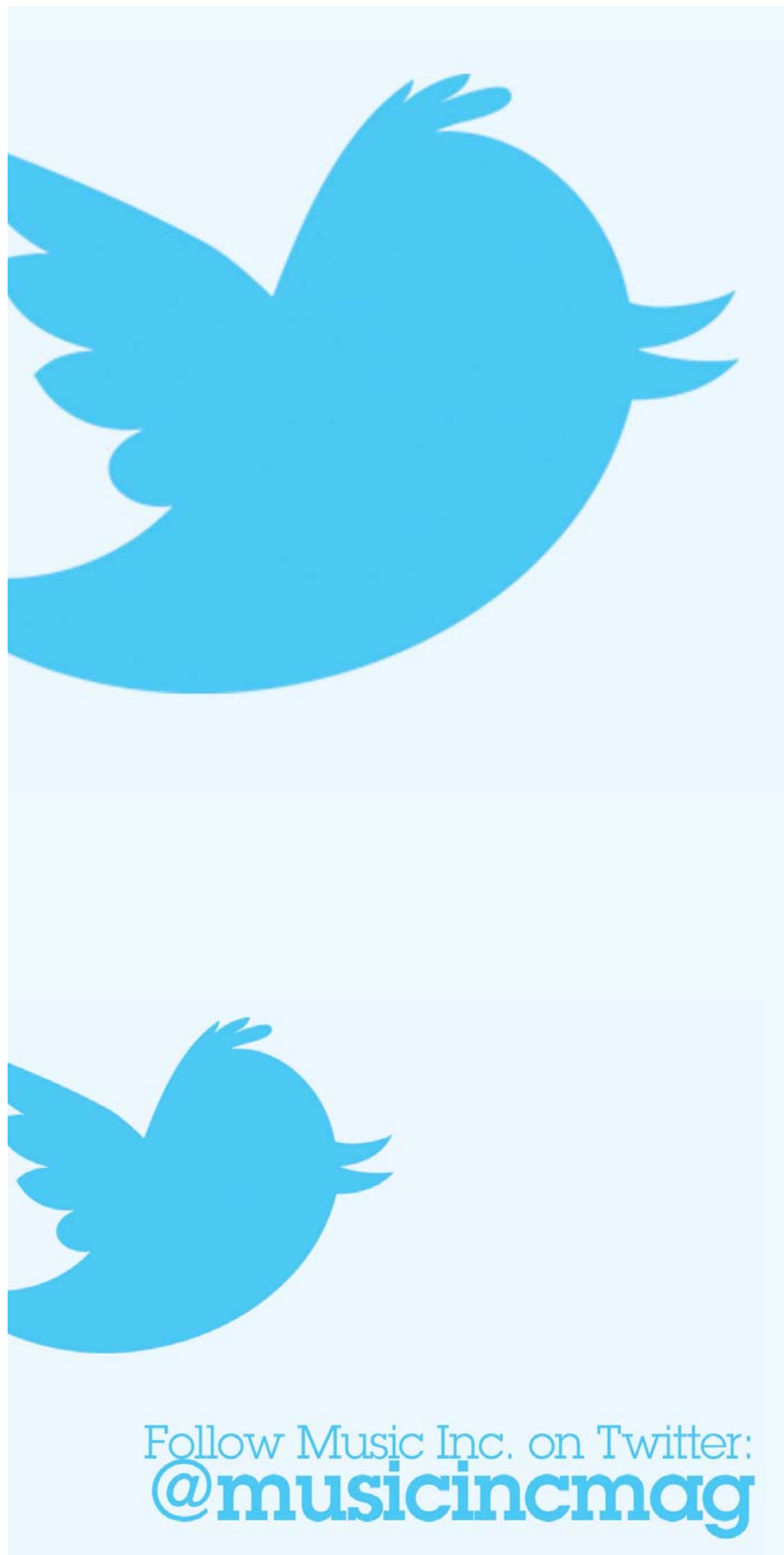
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**Rich Welker**

**Bronstein Music**

**South San Francisco, Calif.**

We changed banks in June to fulfill our rental pool. It saved our business. If we stayed with our old bank, which changed management, we would have had to close down. The Federal Reserve System clamped down on banks and doesn't want them lending to small businesses. The new bank put together a very good package and relieved us of between \$15,000-\$20,000 a month in cash flow. We always had three notes due on our rental instruments over a three-year period.

We also changed our business plan to make half the store into studios, reduce the retail space by about 50 percent and get our inventory down during the crash. Our rentals are very strong, and our studios are doing well, but we were struggling due to retail sales. As of the switch, we've created an open-to-buy system and hold our purchases for rolling inventory to \$20,000 per month to buy exactly what we need.

>>>

**Dave Strohauer**

**Earthshaking Music**

**Atlanta**

Two months ago, we upgraded our POS software to the long-awaited new, evolved version. We paid more than \$2,000 and waited two years for all the bugs to be worked out. After converting the database, installing new computers and conducting multiple training sessions, the new version will not work without repeated crashes and, in general, is a giant step back in workflow and usability.

In the past, my wife could enter two weeks' worth of daily transaction data into Quickbooks in about an hour. The new version takes five hours, and she's not done because the numbers provided do not balance when posted.

After a rather non-committal response from the developer, we are forced to revert back to the prior version, assuming it can be done.

I hate that we are wasting our limited resources, both cash and manpower, to just get back to the level of performance we had five years ago, but at least that version is stable and bug-free, and it provides the transaction speed, the level of reporting and ease of look-up we need.



>>>

**Jen Burleigh-Bentz**

**Brickhouse Music  
River Falls, Wis.**

## What **business-solutions** or **back-office upgrades** have you made this year?

We are in the thick of rebuilding a portion in the back of our store to attain space for an ensemble classroom, two additional lesson rooms, a spray booth for instrument repairs and an employee lounge. Our lesson schedule runs at about 300-350 students a week, and we want to be able to offer additional classes for combos, as well as Golden Year band and Kindermusik-style classes.

We also wanted to utilize that space for more clinics and showcases. We're going to have to hire some more staff to be able to control that whole section. The bookkeeping is already a lot of work. It'd be another job that we'd

like to offer to someone with a creative mind. Then, we'll be able to offer more events without having to move our inventory.

We are also working with a new IT guy on upgrading our database and website inventory and building an eBay store. We carry so many eclectic products that many music stores do not. There is a market on the Internet that would jump at the chance to purchase some of what we have on the floor that might be turning slowly due to its specialized nature. Reaching folks at home has become so much more important than it used to be, and instead of trying to beat out big-box prices, we offer our

online customers amazing products at MAP and give them knowledgeable, individual attention. One of our employees has been creating an inventory database that will work with our current MYOB software but also offer additional options.

You can't have a database that does not talk to your website. Our IT guys are going to bridge the two, and we'll actually be putting inventory on there. We've had to pare down our employees in the past, which means that we don't have someone who can do data entry. We also have inventory coming from our satellite Eau Claire, Wis., location, so it's going to be very interesting.

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