

# THE EXCELLENCE ISSUE

FOR SUCCESSFUL MUSIC RETAILERS

DECEMBER 2016  
MUSICINC.MAG.COM

# music inc

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SWEETWATER  
WASHINGTON MUSIC CENTER  
WILDWOOD GUITARS  
EVOLA MUSIC  
KEN STANTON MUSIC  
CHOPS PERCUSSION  
WOODWIND & BRASSWIND  
MUSIC VILLA

ROLAND U.S. | ST. LOUIS MUSIC |  
YAMAHA | KHS MUSIC |  
D'ADDARIO | CANNONBALL |  
PRS GUITARS | SABIAN |  
MAPLE LEAF STRINGS | EASTMAN

**PLUS:**  
Product Excellence  
Awards

# REVERB

Music Inc.'s 2016 Company of the Year  
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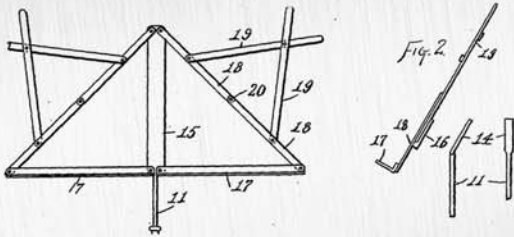
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# ■ PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY KATIE KAILUS

## BUILD YOUR LOCAL MUSIC COMMUNITY

For all the frustrations that retailers feel thanks to the internet, it's an integral part of today's business climate. Instead of sparring about the World Wide Web, retailers must use it as a tool to add value to their business. A few examples of retailers who have done just this are highlighted in this month's Excellence Awards coverage — beginning on page 31.

Voted on by their manufacturing peers, these retailers went above and beyond in 2016. *Music Inc.*'s Company of the Year, online gear marketplace Reverb.com, is one of the biggest online successes of 2016. Growing steadily since its founding in 2013, Reverb sees more than eight million monthly

visitors with its projected sales expected to reach \$245 million for 2016. But it's not just a user-friendly and dealer-friendly interface that keeps gear junkies coming back for more. The site also gives them the tools they need to become successful musicians, including a lessons marketplace, a "Learn to Play" video page and a comprehensive music news feed.

Fellow 2016 Excellence winner Music Villa also offers its online customer base more than just listings of its for-sale acoustics. The Bozeman, Montana, retailer's website features a local music news page called "Montana Music Life" as well as a band directory for local musicians to connect with one another.

"It's also great if someone is looking to book a band, they can go and find all this great local talent," said Paul Decker, owner of Music Villa.

Also an Excellence winner this year, Louisville, Colorado-based Wildwood Guitars gives its online shoppers as close of an experience to buying in-store, from their computer, as possible. Each guitar listing includes detailed photos, the instrument's weight, sound bites and oftentimes videos.

"We wanted to explore the possibility of having sound bites and a video of the guitars that we were selling so customers could hear the specific instrument they were interested in buying," said owner Steve Mesple. "We are all musicians at Wildwood. We sell the greatness of music as much as we sell guitars."

Thanks in part to its detailed listings, Wildwood Guitars does 90 percent of its business online.

"There are some days, every once in a while, where we won't sell a pick in store but we'll sell a ton of guitars online," Mesple said. "And their purchases encourage people to stop by from all over the world. We recently had a couple of guitar players fly all the way from Belgium to check us out."

If there is one take away from this year's Excellence winners, it's to be involved in your online community. Offer your customers more than just a website with your current gear listings. Start a local band directory. Cultivate a news feed for musical happenings around your store. Become a one-stop source for all things music in your community. **MI**





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# LETTERS

## Outstanding Cover

I just had to send a note to congratulate the staff on an outstanding cover design of the October 2016 issue of *Music Inc.* I enjoyed the recognition of the repair folks on page 74. As a dealer with a strong focus on band and orchestra, I can tell you that technicians save the day, every day, and help us all maintain a good reputation with band directors. Looking forward to seeing the *Music Inc.* folks soon!

Mike Guillot  
Purchasing Director  
Mississippi Music  
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

## Better Together

Thank you for the coverage of the White House of Music in your November 2016 issue. We appreciate you capturing the passion and drive the White House of Music staff has toward serving our customers and creating music for life, and are honored to have been featured.

It's incredible to look back on our 60-plus-year history and see how far we've come — from a single store location in downtown Waukesha — to six locations throughout southeast Wisconsin.

We'd like to take this opportunity to give special thanks to our staff for their commitment, hard work and positive contributions.

We are proud to have many staff members still with us on our sales and repair teams who began their careers in our old Waukesha location. For these "veterans" we are immensely grateful. You're not only a part of our history, but you've been crucial in helping us build our future. We would not be where we are today without you.

Thank you to our newer staff members for bringing energy



and new ideas to our business. Some of you joined us through acquisitions and mergers; others are just starting their careers fresh out of school.

We thank our phenomenal private lesson teaching staff for inspiring "music for life" in thousands of students. You are our "music for life" mission in action, and we are honored that you've chosen to teach with us. Behind the scenes, we thank our administrative staff and warehouse team for the indescribably hard work they do.

Any business can attempt mergers, acquisitions and restructuring, but they won't be successful if the business doesn't have great people. We have great people. Many things have changed throughout White

House of Music's long history, but the one constant has always been our incredibly dedicated and passionate staff. We are fortunate to have this team and cannot thank them enough for all that they do. The credit really belongs to them for the company we have built!

Chris White  
President & CEO  
White House of Music  
Waukesha, Wisconsin

## Call for Accepting Old Instruments

Every instrument has a story. Instruments in the Attic is a way for any instrument to keep its story alive. Instruments in the Attic, founded in 2008, has collected and given a second life to over 700 instruments. They have been sent around the United States and other

countries, including Haiti, Rwanda and El Salvador.

Instruments in the Attic is overseen by the Potomac Arts Academy — a fine and visual arts school associated with George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. All instruments donated are either given to musicians or turned into art projects by the students at Potomac.

Donations are always being accepted at the Potomac Arts Academy. Donations that have the potential to be played again are refurbished by Day Violins in Chantilly, Virginia; services rendered are done at cost or provided free.

Instruments in the Attic continues to gain momentum and appreciation as music budgets continue to be challenged. By donating instruments and monetary donations for repairs, Instruments in the Attic is able to coordinate a successful network of outreach to fulfill a real need.

For more information, contact the Potomac Arts Academy at [potomac@gmu.edu](mailto:potomac@gmu.edu) or Jenna Day at [jenna@dayviolins.com](mailto:jenna@dayviolins.com).

Jenna Day  
Owner  
Day Violins  
Chantilly, Virginia

## Correction:

In the October 2016 "Gear" section, the photo that should have run with Vandoren's V21 write-up on page 70 is adjacent. *Music Inc.* regrets the error.



EDITOR'S NOTE: MUSIC INC. ENCOURAGES LETTERS AND RESPONSES TO ITS STORIES. E-MAIL LETTERS TO [EDITOR@MUSICINCMAG.COM](mailto:EDITOR@MUSICINCMAG.COM); OR WRITE TO 102 N. HAVEN RD. ELMHURST, IL 60126; 630-941-2030; FAX: 630-941-3210.

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> **Blues Angel Music**

Raises thousands for its music foundation  
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> **Robbins Music Center**

Closes after 60-plus years  
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> **Sam Ash Music**

Wins local award for the third year in a row  
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# RETAIL

ANDY'S MUSIC | BY ALEX HARRELL

## LEADING BY DESIGN

Jim Andrews opened Andy's Music in April of 1977 in Mobile, Alabama. That's just under 40 years of business — which, for Andrews, translates into about 200 different holiday decorations, 70 remerchandised displays, and around two dozen major design renovations. Andrews believes a smart design decision can make or break sales; his store *is* the product display.

"Some people say that a nice store will turn away the rockers, but it hasn't," he laughed. "They like to shop in nice places, too."

Andy's Music has been named a NAMM's Top 100 Dealer five times in the past six years. The *Mobile Register's Readers Choice Digest* named Andy's Music the town's favorite music store for 14 consecutive years; up until they ceased publication. Granted, it's the only full-line music retail store that offers lessons, rentals and instrument repairs in Mobile. But that doesn't stop Andrews from putting on a show.

"It's funny, people will come in after we re-arrange and think we got new gear, [but] we just moved it around," he said. Andrews regularly gets comments from customers regarding how they "love to come" in because it's "one of the nicest stores around" and "everything is easy to find."



Andy's Music's showroom  
Inset: Jim Andrews

### Andy's Music uses smart design decisions to boost its sales

Andy's Music began in 1977 as a one-man shop. The store was about 800 square feet, Andrews recalled. Nine months later, they relocated to a 4,000-square-foot space — nearly five times the size of the original shop.

After several years of leasing at the new location, Andrews made the decision to buy the building. He wanted the shop to be the music retail equivalent to what Nordstrom is to department stores. The building was designed

and renovated as a music retail store; the interior designer was a female clarinetist who worked closely with the architect to construct the store exactly as envisioned by Andrews and his team.

"If a building's exterior is attractive, it will be inviting to customers," he said. "I don't know anyone who is drawn to an unattractive, disordered shop."

For fellow retailers relying on displays to rack in revenue,

Andrews offers the following tips:

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK.** "Our thorough planning and preparation enabled us to include almost everything we wanted," Andrews admitted. This included five soundproof lesson studios, customized showcase counters, a second floor balcony for choir performances — even corrugated, steel shutter window protectors.

**KEEP IT CLEAN.** "The building was completed in 1995, and we still get customer comments about the attractiveness," said Andrews. To maintain appearances, a local company comes by twice a month for heavy-duty cleaning.

**MAINTAIN STRATEGIC PLACEMENT.** When you go to a grocery store, the milk is in the back. "They make you go to the back for the everyday items, so we do that kind of thing [here]," he explained. By keeping accessories along the walk to the shop's studios, students pass products every day.

"A well designed store sends a positive message, creates expectations, and motivates [customers] to make unplanned purchases," Andrews said. "A business can have the most unique product displays, but if the retail space is uninviting, who wants to visit?" **MI**

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Crowned Jewelz performing at the Blues on the Bay summer concert series.

BLUES ANGEL MUSIC | EVENT

# Blues Angel Concert Raises Thousands

On Sept. 26, Blues Angel Music’s ‘Blues on the Bay’ summer concert series raised roughly \$4,500 for the Blues Angel Music Foundation. The money was raised mostly through sales of raffle tickets for the foundation’s Grand Raffle, but also through T-shirt and concession sales during each of the eight concerts. An additional \$1,000 was raised and donated by George and Suzi VanDyke at their annual God Bless America Music Lover’s Jam on Sept. 11.

The concert series — a showcase of

Gulf Coast talent which just concluded its third season — began on May 1 with a performance by the band Modern Eldorados. Other shows in the series included sets by Petty Cash, Still Standing, Robert Wayne, Crowned Jewelz, Boukou Groove, The Reunion Band and Not Quite Fab.

Held at the Hunter Amphitheater at Community Maritime Park in Pensacola, Florida, the concert series was free and open to the public thanks to sponsorships from title sponsor Blues Angel Music, City of

Pensacola Parks and Recreation, Community Maritime Park Associates, WSRE Studio Amped, Jet 100.7 FM, Soft Rock 94.1 FM, Magic 106.1 FM, Nash 102.7 FM, News Talk 1370 AM, Cox Media, Cat Country 98.7 FM and News Radio 1620 AM.

The Blues Angel Music Foundation is a nonprofit dedicated to seeking out opportunities to support music education and music therapy for people of all ages in the Greater Pensacola area.

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

BACH TO ROCK | OPENING

# BACH TO ROCK EXPANDS TO GEORGIA

Bach to Rock’s (B2R) first Georgia location is now open in Alpharetta. To celebrate B2R’s grand opening, the school hosted an open house on Oct. 29. The community was invited to tour the school, enjoy free music lessons, check out the recording studio, and more.

“With B2R, students get to play the music they love and they also get to play in groups so it’s supportive and team-oriented,” said Brian Gross, president of B2R. “The enjoyment factor is much higher, the students are inspired by music, and the learning [process] is more meaningful.”

Spearheading the Alpharetta venture is the husband-and-wife team of Carmen and

Nancy Guinto, who became B2R franchisees in March. Nancy is a classically trained pianist and educator, and Carmen is an IT professional and business owner. Their B2R school is one of 16 franchises.

“We are thrilled to expand B2R to the southeast,” Carmen Guinto said. “The B2R method encourages students to explore the kinds of music they love and play that music with other students. They can become proficient and build their confidence in a very short time.”

B2R Alpharetta offers a variety of programs for students of all ages, including summer camps and birthday parties.

[b2rmusic.com](http://b2rmusic.com)



Franchisee Carmen Guinto (left) with director Jennifer Gross



NATIONAL PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION, GUITAR CENTER | PHILANTHROPY

# NATIONAL PTA, GUITAR CENTER TEAM UP

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Guitar Center have teamed up to bring resources to families and educators across the country to inspire students' creativity through the National PTA Reflections arts in education program.

"Participation in the arts enables students to explore their talents and express themselves while building their confidence and sense of accomplishment," said Laura Bay, National PTA president. "National PTA is thrilled to team up with Guitar Center to provide more students the opportunity to experience the joy and benefits that come from the arts."

As part of the collaboration, Guitar Center will donate musical instruments to a number of PTAs across the country to support arts education efforts. Participating PTAs can tap into a wide range of support from Guitar Centers nearby, such as having instructors serve as judges for their Reflections programs. With studios in nearly 100 stores, Guitar Center's Lessons provide a world-class music education in many genres for musicians of all ages and skill levels.

"Learning to play music can be an amazing, life-changing experience that can help improve a student's self-confidence [and] boost their academic performance over time," said Krista Shue, national director of Guitar Center's Lessons program. "We're excited about the opportunity to collaborate with National PTA to introduce more children to learning music and fostering the skills necessary to think creatively."

National PTA Reflections is a recognition program through which students are encouraged to explore their creativity and be involved in the arts — both in the classroom and at home. National PTA urges students from preschool through grade 12 to create and submit original works of art in the medium of their choice that reflects on an annual theme. The 2016-2017 National PTA Reflections

theme is "What is Your Story?"

Submissions are reviewed by visual, literary and performing art experts. Students are recognized at the local, state and national levels. Guitar Center will make it possible for a National PTA Reflections award recipient to travel to the nation's capital in January to participate in a special ceremony at the U.S. Department of Education.

"The National PTA Reflections program has inspired millions of students for nearly 50 years," said Nathan Monell, National PTA executive director. "National PTA and Guitar Center share a commitment to ensuring all students have the opportunity to experience the arts, as it is essential to helping them reach their full potential and prepare them for long-term success." [pta.org](http://pta.org); [guitarcenter.com](http://guitarcenter.com)



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THE MUSIC ROOM | ACQUISITION

# Palatine Music Center to Continue its Legacy

The Music Room announced that it's joining forces with Palatine Music Center— located in Palatine, Illinois — enabling the continuation of the 32-year legacy of Palatine Music Center, as owner Steve Achenbach retires.

“We’re pleased to welcome all of Palatine Music Center’s teachers to our staff so that their students can continue their studies without interruption,” said Carol Cook, owner of The Music Room. “We’re making every effort to ensure a smooth transition for students, teachers and customers.”

Palatine Music Store was the village’s oldest music store, in operation since 1984. It was important to Achenbach that his legacy continue with an independent, locally owned music store.

“I’ve known Carol for many years and we share many of the same philosophies about teaching music,” Achenbach said. “I feel confident that my staff and students will find a good home at The Music Room.”

The Music Room employs more than 30



Steve Achenbach and Carol Cook  
IMAGE CREDIT: Marco Vidor / VMP

instructors who teach individual lessons in a variety of instruments and voice, utilizing 10 state-of-the-art sound proof studios.

Group classes are also held in the store’s expansive 4,000-square-foot ground-floor retail space.

“A knowledgeable staff and customer service set us apart from the big-box music stores,” Cook said. “We’re committed to helping our community achieve personal growth through music.”

[the-music-room.net](http://the-music-room.net)

ROBBINS MUSIC CENTER | CLOSING

# Robbins Music Center Closes After 61 Years

After 61 years of business, Robbins Music Center closed its doors on Sept. 30. The Huntsville, Alabama, music shop opened in 1955 and was owned by three generations.

Berlin Jackson Robbins opened and successfully ran the music store until his son Jack took over, according to Jim Nelson, manager of Robbins Music Center.

“I admire Jack so much because, even though his dad started the business, Jack took it to the next level,” Nelson said. “He was bringing in huge sound systems and took that risk to spend the big money.”

But after the second owner passed away in 2015, keeping the store open was difficult. “He was always very generous — a lot of times I would get annoyed with him because he was too generous,”

Nelson said. Although Robbins was always willing to help others on his own dime, that wasn’t necessarily what led to the shop’s demise.

“People tend to forget about mom-and-pop stores. It’s sad that when a corporation moves in, the conglomerates come in; it’s hard to compete with that,” Nelson explained. He also attributed the store’s closing to the increasing popularity of online shopping, cheaper instruments made outside of the United States, and an overall decline in instrument quality.

“Business was falling drastically because of that,” he said. “Sadly it’s too late for us now, but I hope younger readers will heed this warning: When you ignore the mom-and-pop shops — no matter what the business is — eventually, there’s going to be no one left.”



Norma Jean and Robert Trombino  
IMAGE CREDIT: Joy DeFerrari

TROMBINO MUSIC CENTER | CLOSING

# Trombino Music Center Closes

After serving the Western Pennsylvania area for 53 years, Norma Jean and Robert Trombino closed their last Trombino Music Center location in February 2016. “We got so many letters saying how we were instrumental in how [our customer’s] lives turned out with music,” Norma Jean said.

The couple still has two teachers on staff who offer piano and voice lessons four days a week.



SAM ASH MUSIC | AWARD

## SAM ASH WINS

For the third year in a row, the Indianapolis publication *Nuvo* has named Sam Ash Music's Indianapolis location the Best Instrument/Gear Shop — as part of its Best of Indy 2016 awards.

"After winning the first two [years], I just assumed that someone would show some pride and try to outdo us," said COO Sammy Ash. "Maybe it's [because] we keep upping the ante."

Nominees and winners of the Best of Indy awards were selected and voted by *Nuvo* readers. [samash.com](http://samash.com)

CHERRY STREET | CLOSING

## Cherry Street Guitar Closes

After 19 years in business, Cherry Street Guitar has closed its doors, according to *The Register-Mail*. Owner Bruce Nelson stated he would become store manager of the Quad Cities location of the Coralville, Iowa-based shop, West Music, by November. Nelson owned the Galesburg, Illinois, music store since he opened it in 1997.

"I'm excited to be joining forces with the West Music team in my new role as the store manager," Nelson said in a news release.

Ryan West, vice president of West Music, said, "Bruce brings years of knowledge and expertise to our Quad Cities location. We are delighted to have his leadership on our team and welcome the customers of Cherry Street Guitars." [westmusic.com](http://westmusic.com)

PENSADO'S PLACE, VINTAGE KING | EVENT

## GEAR EXPO HELD IN TENNESSEE

Pensado's Place along with Vintage King Audio and leaders from the Nashville recording community held the fourth annual Gear Expo on Oct. 22 at Vintage King Audio's campus in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Gear Expo is a gear and music-making exposition, with resources for

anyone involved with professional audio, home recording, or simply those interested in making music. Attendees were able to demo gear, talk directly with manufacturer reps, watch live interviews, mingle with celebrity guests, listen to live music and win prizes. [pensadosplace.tv](http://pensadosplace.tv); [vintageking.com](http://vintageking.com)

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Donovan Bankhead - VP, Springfield Music, Springfield, MO

*"Diamonds for the price of Chocolates"*  
David Pugh - Owner, Frisco Music Center, Frisco, TX

*"No question about it, Vintage is largely responsible for our turning a profit."*  
John Bujak - Owner, Lessons N' More, Tucson, AZ

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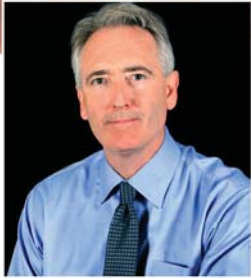
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## Note from Joe

ADVERTORIAL • DECEMBER 2016 • NAMM.ORG

# The Case for Making a Gift to The NAMM Foundation Believe in Music Fund

During this holiday season as we look back and count our blessings that this wonderful industry has brought to our families, our communities and to the world, I would like to take a moment to share some news on The NAMM Foundation and why we'd like you to consider making a gift that would help bring musical opportunities to more children.

Since its inception just a few short years ago, The NAMM Foundation has been funded by NAMM and our 'Circle of Benefits' business model. This has given the Foundation a strong start and has helped achieve our vision of a more musical world, with particular success in building greater support for music education. We expect this will always be the bedrock of The NAMM Foundation's funding. But it was always our goal to create a fund where industry participants and all who believe and support our cause could donate, sort of like an 'industry community chest,' where gifts would be leveraged by NAMM's giving, thus multiplying the impact of every dollar.

This past year we launched the Believe in Music Fund and for the first time asked for support from our membership for The NAMM Foundation. The response exceeded our expectations and we achieved our goal and then some. I would like to personally give a special thanks to our Board of Directors, Executive Committee and past Chairman. They gave generously and we had 100% participation! The NAMM staff also got involved, as did many members who had heard about the fund.

You too have contributed by your membership and your support of The NAMM Show. But if you would like to make a charitable gift to the Believe in Music Fund, you will be demonstrating a particularly effective form of generosity, knowing that your donation will be multiplied many times over with NAMM's support and will be used 100% towards achieving our mission. So if you Believe in Music like we do, please consider making a gift through your business or individually. It is also a meaningful way to honor a loved one who shared our vision of a world where everyone has the chance to make music. The NAMM Foundation website has all the details; you can even call me personally! I'd welcome the opportunity to tell you more about the great work the Foundation is doing and see how it might fit into your charitable plans.

Thank you for your continued support, on behalf of our Board and staff we wish you and your families a very happy holiday. See you in Anaheim!

  
Joe Lamond  
NAMM PRESIDENT AND CEO

## The NAMM Foundation

The NAMM Foundation advances active participation in music making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs. Since 2007, through the support of NAMM members, The NAMM Foundation has contributed nearly \$15 million to fund programs impacting people across a broad range of musical segments, genres and age demographics.



*"Before I had music, I was having trouble; I didn't see the point in doing homework or paying attention at school. Now music has changed my life. It has given me a lot more confidence and also gives me hope that if I really want something, it can be done."*

**Bruno Bello**  
Participant in the San Diego Youth Symphony's Community Opus Project  
funded by The NAMM Foundation

# Thank you to our donors

We are honored and deeply grateful for the generous donations given to The NAMM Foundation in 2016.

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#NAMMSHOW

> **Percussion Marketing Council**

Wraps up 'Roadie For the Day'  
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> **The Music Link**

Names new director of marketing  
PAGE 24

> **Vandoren**

Opens Musician's Advisory studio in Chicago  
PAGE 26

# SUPPLY

SOURCE AUDIO | BY KASIA FEJKLOWICZ

## ONE STEP AHEAD

For nearly 20 years, Roger Smith was director of all audio and video products at one of the world's largest semiconductor companies — Analog Devices. His fellow colleague and friend, Jesse Remignanti, was the top inventor and engineer in the audio division, as well as a talented guitar player. Between the two of them, they saw an opportunity in the upcoming innovations in Analog Device microchips that could enable exciting new innovations in effects pedals for electric guitars and basses.

Looking back, Remignanti admits that they were “two crazy people who left [their] steady jobs to chase down the dream.”

**FROM EXECS TO CLIENTS**

Once Smith and Remignanti recruited the chief scientist from the electronic musical instruments company, Kurzweil, they were ready to go from being executives of Analog Devices to buyers — purchasing parts for their new endeavor.

At the 2006 NAMM Show, Source Audio made its debut with the introduction of Hot Hand.

Just like they originally planned, the company's first product contained technology that was co-developed with



### How a strategic partnership allowed Massachusetts-based Source Audio to succeed

Analog Devices.

“I don't think there are any effects company that have a close relationship with a big semiconductor company like we do,” Smith noted.

Before Analog Devices releases its new microchip technology, the company works with Source Audio — which is located two miles away in Wilmington, Massachusetts — to design, program and fix software coding errors. In return for Source Audio's feedback and effort, Analog Devices

incorporates features in the new versions of the technology to help support Source Audio's needs.

“Some of the big players have the ability to develop their own chips,” Smith said. “Most others buy standard products off the shelf. The [partnership with Analog Devices] allows our company to translate chip innovations into pedal innovations in ways that our competition is limited.”

To date, Source Audio buys all of its key processing chips from Analog Devices, and the

technology is inside all of Source Audio's products.

**OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

Although Source Audio has Analog Devices on its side, the journey hasn't been an easy one. It wasn't until Source Audio realized that the pedal industry is different than the microchip industry that it could focus on designing pedals that were powerful yet simple.

“Having the most bells and whistles doesn't necessarily [mean that you] win the race,” Smith noted. “It's a more complicated world.”

Now, Source Audio is having its best year in sales and it's continuing to innovate powerful and flexible products without overwhelming its users.

At the 2017 Winter NAMM Show, Source Audio plans to launch a new reverb pedal based on the Nemesis Delay. Similar to the One Series pedals, the unnamed reverb pedal will be enabled with the Neuro mobile app, which lets users create configurations and presets they can share through the app.

“It's a world of more 'me-too' pedals than one could have ever imagined, and we are truly doing things differently and creating compelling, customer-driven products that are winning awards and selling,” Smith concluded. **MI**

GIBSON, JHS | LEGAL

# \$8 Million Guitar Counterfeit Claim Against JHS Dismissed

On Sept. 29, U.K. guitar company John Hornby Skewes (JHS) was granted summary judgment, dismissing an \$8 million guitar counterfeiting claim brought against it by Gibson Guitars.

Gibson sued JHS in early 2014 on account of trademark infringement, alleging that Gibson owned trademarks in certain two-dimensional body and headstock shapes, and that JHS had violated them.

The District Court found that the “guitars in question cannot be deemed identical or substantially indistinguishable from each other.” JHS argued that it should be granted judgement as a matter of law on the counterfeiting count, since all its guitars prominently display the brand name “Vintage,” and all advertising and packaging

state that the guitars came from JHS. Thus, JHS moved for summary judgement and was approved by the court; which, in turn, eliminated Gibson’s ability to collect \$8 million in statutory damages.

The court concluded that “no reasonable jury could find that [Skewes]’s guitars were counterfeits of Gibson’s guitars,” and explained that “counterfeiting is the ‘hard core’ or ‘first degree’ of trademark infringement that seeks to trick the consumer into believing he or she is getting the genuine article.”

The remaining claims, set for trial in February 2017, limit damages to profits on the sale of about 300 guitars, according to the court.

{jhs.co.uk; gibson.com}



Left: Gibson SG  
Right: JHS Vintage VS6

PERCUSSION MARKETING COUNCIL | EVENT

# PMC WRAPS UP ‘ROADIE FOR THE DAY’ PROMOTION

The Percussion Marketing Council’s (PMC) 2016 International Drum Month (IDM) promotion culminated on Sept. 30 when 11-year-old Henry Saad met his drum hero, Rich Redmond, prior to a Jason Aldean concert in Raleigh, North Carolina. Henry’s father, Michael Saad, entered the IDM “Drum Roadie for a Day” (an all-access backstage experience contest) on behalf of his son.

The 2016 IDM contest connects to participating percussion retailers across the country during PMC’s month-long May campaign. Using social media, banner ads and Google AdWords, PMC targets young, diverse audiences interested in drumming and draws them to PMC’s website where they can enter the contest. From there, drummers are directed to participating music stores in their area.

“PMC’s mission is to instill excitement about playing drums and to put sticks in

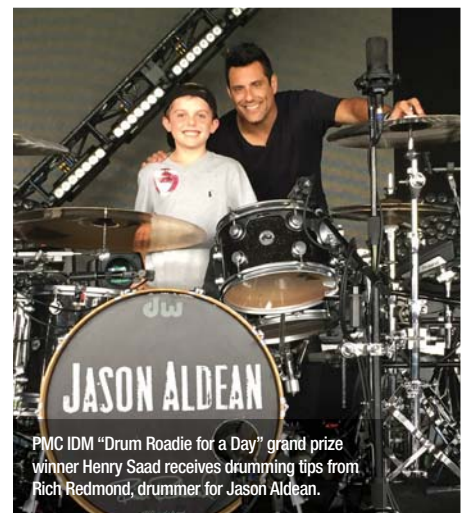
kids’ hands,” said Karl Dustman, executive director at PMC. “This promotion is one of our best vehicles to help build the drumming community and raise awareness of the fun of playing drums.”

Saad’s entry was selected from more than 370 entries, making this year’s most successful contest to date. “Henry described the experience as the best day of his life,” Michael Saad said. “These memories will last a lifetime.”

Henry’s day began at PMC member Billy Cuthrell’s Progressive Music Center in Raleigh. Before the event, Rich Redmond — drummer for Jason Aldean — gave Henry a 30-minute private lesson.

“Henry got to see the inner workings of a major tour, including how a professional drummer works and what it takes to reach and stay at that level,” Cuthrell said.

“At every turn, Rich welcomed [our] son into his daily routine and shared his



PMC IDM “Drum Roadie for a Day” grand prize winner Henry Saad receives drumming tips from Rich Redmond, drummer for Jason Aldean.

acquired wisdom to help guide Henry in his pursuit of a career in drums,” said his father. “Henry’s passion for drumming is apparent to anyone who knows him.”

{playdrums.com}



Line 6's Spider V 60

HAL LEONARD, LINE 6 | DISTRIBUTION

## Hal Leonard, Line 6 Strike Deal

Hal Leonard is now the exclusive distributor of all Line 6 products in the United States. The company previously had been a non-exclusive distributor of Line 6 since 2011. The new deal coincides with the release of Line 6's new Spider Amp V.

Line 6 has designed a slew of technologically advanced products, from the world's first digital modeling amp, to Variax digital modeling guitars, to a myriad of wireless accessories. The company's new Spider V series features a large collection of upgraded amp and effects models as well as a modern design and specialized full-range speaker system.

"It's an exciting time to become the exclusive U.S. distributor for Line 6," said Brad Smith, senior sales and marketing manager of Hal Leonard. "Simply put, Line 6 and Hal Leonard can expand the guitar-playing market. We are eager to work with retailers who share this vision."

"Hal Leonard continues to be such an important extension of the greater Line 6 sales efforts," said Steve Bartkoski, Line 6 vice president of sales for North America. "Both Line 6 and Hal Leonard are committed to strong partnerships with dealers that result in exemplary retail experiences. Hal Leonard is a perfect distributor partner for us because they excel in providing retailers with the knowledge necessary to be successful in selling product."

{[halleonard.com](http://halleonard.com); [line6.com](http://line6.com)}

ADAM HALL GROUP, NICOLAUDIE GROUP | PARTNERSHIP

## Adam Hall Expands Cameo With Interface From Nicolaudie Group

Cameo DV 4 Powered by Daslight is a new DMX interface and is the first product launched from the partnership between the Adam Hall Group and software developer company, the Nicolaudie Group.

"With Nicolaudie, we have found a reliable product development partner whose innovative and user-friendly technology suits our needs," said Alexander Pietschmann, CEO of the Adam Hall Group. He went on to say that the collaboration with Nicolaudie highlights a fundamental part of Adam Hall's product strategy.

"One of our company goals is increased collaboration with product developers," he said.

The Cameo DVC4 lets users control the lighting via a computer. The Cameo Interface offers 512 DMX channels and the accompanying software for light shows is available as a free download.

Included in the software is a newly developed engine which allows the lighting to be controlled via smartphones and tablets as well, and a library of over 15,000 products. Further, the XEEL Effect

Engine — designed by Daslight — offers hundreds of different effects that can be combined with one another to put on a complex light show.

"We've been in the entertainment industry alongside the Adam Hall Group for over 25 years and share a passion for high-quality products," said Simon Bennett, Daslight product manager at Nicolaudie.

"It's exciting to be joining forces, and I'm very much looking forward to our future journey together."

{[adamhall.com](http://adamhall.com); [nicolaudie.com](http://nicolaudie.com)}



Cameo DVC4

## APPOINTMENT

### TML NAMES LAPLACA DIRECTOR OF MARKETING



Jim LaPlaca

The Music Link (TML) has promoted Jim LaPlaca to director of marketing for all of the Music Link's brands, including Recording King and The Loar. The 17-year industry veteran has extensive social media expertise as well as experience in art, photography, design and business management. Since 2008, LaPlaca has held positions at TML in sales, quality control and product development.

"The field of marketing has been changing as rapidly as technology itself," said Steve Patrino, TML president. "Jim has the rare understanding of how to combine our unique product information

and customers' needs with technology's current tools. He's the ideal fit for our company culture and these changing times."

In addition to his marketing responsibilities, LaPlaca will also handle artist relations for TML's expanding roster. {[themusiclink.net](http://themusiclink.net)}





The KMC Music distribution center in South Haven, Mississippi.

KMC MUSIC, MICHAEL KELLY GUITARS | PARTNERSHIP

# KMC MUSIC LAUNCHES PROGRAM FOR MICHAEL KELLY GUITARS

KMC Music introduced its KMC Third Party Logistics Support program and announced that it entered into a strategic partnership with Michael Kelly Guitars (MKG) to provide the manufacturer with a host of third-party inventory management, logistics and distribution services.

“This marks another major expansion in the kinds of programs we can offer

manufacturers who are challenged daily to meet the demands of an ever-changing industry,” said Mark Terry, KMC Music’s president. One of KMC’s strengths, he explained, is its large distribution center in South Haven, Mississippi — it has the ability to provide a wide range of services to manufacturers.

“MKG is a good case in point,” Terry

said. “This manufacturer wants to invest more resources in its consumer and dealer facing sales and marketing programs and less in back-end operations.”

According to MKG’s founder and CEO Tracy Hoeft, “This relationship meets an immediate need and offers the possibility of an expanded relationship in the future.”

{[kmcmusic.com](http://kmcmusic.com); [michaelkellyguitars.com](http://michaelkellyguitars.com)}

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KORG, TANGLEWOOD | PARTNERSHIP

## Korg, Tanglewood Strike Partnership

Korg has announced it will be the exclusive Canadian distributor of Tanglewood Acoustic Guitars. Tanglewood is Britain's No. 1 selling acoustic guitar brand that has built a viable reputation globally, with both retailers and consumers, for its clean craftsmanship, reliability and superior quality.

"We are excited to drive Tanglewood Acoustic Guitars into the Canadian market," said Brian Piccolo, director of guitar brands for Korg USA. "It's a great brand with competitive pricing and features that consumers will be impressed with. We're looking forward to watching the brand thrive."

Tanglewood's Managing Director, Tony Flatt, described the Korg partnership as a "milestone" event for Tanglewood's brand progression. "The strategic advantage of working with such a valued and respected company will ensure that Canadian retailers — large and small — will have full access to our product range and can benefit from the logistics and trade experience that only a blue chip partner like Korg can offer," Flatt said. "It can only be of benefit to stores and guitarists alike."

{[tanglewoodguitars.co.uk](http://tanglewoodguitars.co.uk); [korgusa.com](http://korgusa.com)}

VANDOREN | OPENING

## VANDOREN OPENS CHICAGO STUDIO

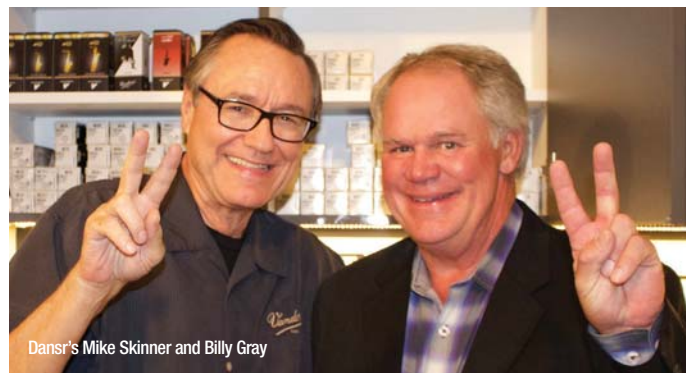
Vandoren has officially opened doors to Vandoren Musician's Advisory studio at 818 W. Evergreen Ave. in Chicago. The grand opening was on Sept. 20 with numerous local artists and teachers in attendance, including John Yeh, Teresa Reilly, Ernest Dawkins, Rose Sperrazza, David Tuttle, Michael Holmes, and more.

After years of success at the New York studio and a successful launch of the Los Angeles studio in January of this year, Vandoren is excited to provide Chicago-area musicians with a space to rehearse, hang out, and try out all that Vandoren has to offer.

"This is simply an extension of the Vandoren philosophy," said Michael Skinner, president of Dansr. "Staying close to the musician has always been our principal objective. Not only can these studios be used by any clarinetist or saxophonist for trial purposes, but it serves as a great research base for us. Some of our best products have come from the hundreds of musicians we see at our studios."

Stocked with the complete line of Vandoren products, the studio — located in Chicago's Goose Island neighborhood — is open to all players, teachers, and students who are interested in finding an ideal setup.

{[dansr.com/vandoren](http://dansr.com/vandoren)}



Dansr's Mike Skinner and Billy Gray

JOHN LENNON EDUCATIONAL TOUR BUS | ANNIVERSARY

## John Lennon Educational Tour Bus Marks 20 Years

The John Lennon Educational Tour Bus will celebrate its 20th anniversary during the 2017 NAMM Show this coming January.

The milestone not only marks over 13 countries, five million students, 2,000 schools, and numerous celebrated musicians that have worked with the bus, but it also marks 20 years of technology integrated into the mobile studio.

Brands such as Audio-Technica, Epiphone, Securematics, Apple, Canon U.S.A., Neutrik, and Yamaha have supplied the best products for the Lennon bus to use in order to provide students with opportunities to explore their creativity.

{[lennonbus.org](http://lennonbus.org)}





From left: Conquest Sound's Sue Woolum, Nick Kutzko and Michelle Shunk.

CONQUEST SOUND | ANNIVERSARY

## Conquest Honors 40th Anniversary

Conquest Sound celebrated its 40th anniversary this year. The Monee, Illinois, company has been designing and manufacturing audio, video, and data cabling since 1977.

Conquest Sound originally began as a touring sound company in the early 1970s. At that time, finding rugged tour-quality cabling was difficult. By 1977, the company formed a business that could build cabling products for both the music retail and live sound industries. Today, over 4,000 products are hand built in the plant.

Conquest Sound stated that it was the first company of its kind to offer a lifetime warranty on every product it manufactured. As a result, company representatives said that many of their clients have been with them for over 30 years.

As of November 2016, Conquest Sound will relocate to a manufacturing facility in Manteno, Illinois. The new location will enable the company to improve and expand production to further accommodate current and future growth.

"We've been around for 40 years, and many of our employees have been here for 30 of them," said Nick Kutzko, co-owner and vice president of Conquest Sound. "We've got a dedicated team of employees, and we are just trying to keep rocking with it."

The company prides itself on building U.S.A.-made products. "It's a difficult world out there and it's changed a lot," Kutzko said. "But, we're doing good and rolling with that." [conquestsound.com](http://conquestsound.com)

YAMAHA | AWARD

## Yamaha Wins Tech Award

On Oct. 19, Yamaha Corp. of America announced that *Popular Science* has named the company's YSP-5600 Dolby Atmos and DTS:X Sound Bar as well as the TransAcoustic Guitar as the 2016 'Best of What's New Award' winners. These awards validate the strong dedication Yamaha puts toward the reproduction of authentic sound through innovation and craftsmanship.

"The *Popular Science* 'Best of What's New' award is among the most respected and affirming accolades in the world," said Roger Eaton, chief marketing director of Yamaha Corp. of America.

"We're grateful that the editors of this highly-respected publication have selected two of our products this year."

Each year, *Popular Science's* editors review thousands of products in search

of the top 100 tech innovations — breakthrough products and technologies that represent a significant leap in their categories. The Yamaha YSP-5600 is the world's first sound bar to feature Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, featuring object based three-dimensional sound technologies. The Yamaha TransAcoustic guitar features an entirely new concept in acoustic guitar technology in the form of an actuator — a little metal device hidden inside the guitar.

"The 'Best of What's New' award honors the innovations that shape the future," said Kevin Gray, executive editor of *Popular Science*. "From life-saving technology to incredible space engineering to gadgets that are just breathtakingly cool, this is the best of what's new."

[usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com); [popsci.com](http://popsci.com)

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Shure's 50th anniversary edition of the SM58 microphone

SHURE | AWARD

## Shure Recognized by Crain's Chicago Business

Shure has been recognized by *Crain's Chicago Business* as one of the top 10 most innovative companies in the Chicago area. The publication's annual "Eureka! Chicago's Most Innovative Companies" leverages Ocean Tomo — a local merchant bank specializing in intellectual property — to evaluate the uniqueness of patents owned by Illinois companies.

The Niles, Illinois-based company, Shure, was listed at No. 10 out of the full list of 25 companies.

"This recognition is an honor and particularly meaningful this year, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our iconic SM58 microphone," said Christine

Schyvinck, president and CEO of Shure.

"For 91 years, our associates have worked tirelessly to drive innovation and build our position as an audio electronics leader."

Last year Shure launched several new products, including the KSM8 dual-diaphragm dynamic handheld microphone and the KSE1500 electrostatic earphone system, among other equipment.

"This recognition is a testament to their hard work and steadfast commitment to manufacture products of unmatched quality, reliability and durability," Schyvinck said.

{shure.com}

GHS STRINGS | LAUNCH

## GHS DEBUTS NEW CAMPAIGN

On Oct. 10, GHS Strings launched a global advertising campaign highlighting the benefits of its new Nitro-Pack string packages.

The campaign features a series of images of instruments using GHS strings with slogans that emphasize key messages about the Nitro-Pack. Within the overall campaign there are advertisements for banjo, bluegrass, electric and acoustic guitar players.

"We are delighted with the new

adverts, which will really stand out and make a statement," said Russ McFee, president of GHS Strings. "They are lighthearted, and that is what we want for our customers — fun in the knowledge [that] their strings will be factory fresh when they open them."

GHS Strings has joined forces with a new advertising agency to produce the campaign, which will roll out worldwide over the next few months.

{ghsstrings.com}





D'Addario CEO Jim D'Addario (left) with New York Sen. Charles Schumer.

D'ADDARIO | COMPANY

## Senator Schumer Films Commercial at D'Addario

D'Addario was selected as a featured New York company for one of the handful of commercials running for New York Sen. Charles Schumer's re-election bid during the recent election.

The 30-second ad, on behalf of Sen. Schumer's re-election campaign, focuses on his successful efforts to support D'Addario from Chinese counterfeiters that were undercutting the company by manufacturing and selling phony D'Addario strings online.

At Sen. Schumer's urging, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice and the office of the U.S. Trade Representative launched a coordinated effort to crack down on manufacturers and distributors of the counterfeit strings; which helped to save 800 D'Addario jobs in Long Island, New York.

The ad, which was filmed at D'Addario's headquarters in Farmingdale, New York, features Sen. Schumer and D'Addario CEO Jim D'Addario highlighting this achievement.

D'Addario's spot was one of a series of commercials that ran in October in the downstate New York region (NYC and Long Island) for two weeks, with tentative plans to air statewide. [daddario.com](http://daddario.com)

SCHIMMEL PIANOS | AWARD

## Schimmel Awards Top U.S. Dealers

Top Schimmel Piano dealers were taken on a tour of Germany from Sept. 16–24, hosted by Hannes Schimmel-Vogel and Viola Schimmel. Qualifying dealers toured the city of Braunschweig — the home of Schimmel — followed by a factory tour and dinner with honored guests Nikolaus and Christine Schimmel.

Special recognition this year went to the top two Schimmel dealers. Robert Lowrey Piano Experts of Toronto received the No.1 North American Dealer Award for 2015 and Classic Pianos of Portland, Oregon, received the No. 1 U.S. Dealer Award. [schimmel-pianos.de](http://schimmel-pianos.de)

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## THE 2016 EXCELLENCE AWARDS

*Music Inc.'s 2016 Excellence Awards honor 10 retailers, 10 suppliers and 20 products that transcended music retail standards over the last year. Voted on by their peers, these winners used innovative ideas and tried-and-true customer service to boost their business and help the MI industry grow.*

By Ed Enright, Kasia Fejklowicz, Alex Harrell, Katie Kailus & Jon Ross

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EXCELLENCE  
AWARDS

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Reverb



Wildwood Guitars



Evola Music

**P** PRODUCT  
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Antelope Audio



LefreQue



Ernie Ball

**S** SUPPLIER  
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AWARDS

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St. Louis  
Music



Sabian



Maple Leaf  
Strings



MUSIC INC. 2016  
COMPANY OF THE YEAR

# COMMUNITY



CEO and founder of Reverb.com David Kalt (center) with the executive team at the company's headquarters located in Chicago.  
From left: Chrissy Hansen, Justin DeLay, Yan Pritzker, Dan Orkin, Chris Miller, Dan Melnick, Kevin Drost, Gina Contella and Jim Tuerk.



# BUILDERS

By Kasia Fejklowicz | Photos by Cory Dewald

*Reverb.com strives to connect retailers and buyers across the nation and around the globe*



It's 5:55 a.m. and David Kalt prepares a smoothie and espresso before going for a run. Two hours later, he bounces around Reverb's headquarters attending up to 10 meetings during the day and managing one of the fastest growing organizations in the music gear industry. He leaves the company headquarters on Chicago's North Side around 5 p.m., heading home in time for family dinner, then spends another two hours working on the online platform. If he's lucky, he can squeeze in a half hour of guitar playing; what Kalt refers to as a nice reminder of how fortunate he is to work in this business.

The last time *Music Inc.* caught up with Kalt, founder and CEO of Reverb, was August 2015. In the span of 16 months, Reverb's sales and staff have nearly doubled, and the company has been busy crossing borders — literally and figuratively.

The company's business model and success haven't gone unnoticed. *Music Inc.*'s editorial staff received an overwhelming number of votes nominating Reverb as the Retailer of the Year for 2016 even though it's not technically a retailer.



In 2016, Reverb doubled its headcount and expanded internationally, with team members located across five countries and three continents.

That being said, suppliers wanted to give the company kudos for being the biggest story of the year in musical products retailing — an innovative online community that connects buyers and sellers of musical instruments.

Given these special circumstances, for the first time in the 26-year history of the Excellence Awards, *Music Inc.* is proud to name Reverb the Company of the Year.

“We have listened intently to our community of musicians, dealers and manufacturers, and have built a platform that honors the authenticity of discovering quality gear to make great music,” Kalt said. “It’s the power of this industry and individual users that enable Reverb to learn and constantly improve our offering, which, in turn, helps grow the overall industry.”

### **A Golden Opportunity**

Great entrepreneurial vision often results from a problem that needs to be solved. And that’s exactly how the concept for Reverb was born.

When Kalt purchased Chicago Music Exchange (CME) — a trendy MI shop in the Windy City — in 2010, he discovered that it was taxing to buy and sell gear.

“You should never launch a business unless you feel pain, and I felt real pain in the market as the owner of CME,” Kalt said. “I really felt there was an opportunity to build a community online where people could [buy and sell gear] with a high degree of trust, quality images, quality descriptions, a price guide, and a support team to back you up — that’s when I said, ‘I have to do this.’”

Three years later, Kalt launched Reverb as an easy-to-use platform where anyone — from the world’s largest music retailers to the guy with a few guitars or horns — could sell their gear. The website was clean. The user interface was easy-to-use. The playing field was level, and pricing was fair and transparent.

It’s a formula that’s worked. The company has become one of the most popular gear websites in the industry, with \$245 million projected sales for 2016, half a million listings at any given time, over 115,000 sellers, and more than eight million monthly visitors.

In fact, the business has grown at such a rapid pace that the 9,000-square-foot office space in Chicago’s Lakeview neighborhood is proving to be too small.

For meetings, roughly 42 marketing

and sales professionals, 40 developers and 35 customer engagement representatives fill the basement — the only place in the three-story structure where all 120 team members can fit.

To make room for more growth, Kalt already has his eye on a property next door to Reverb, so he can keep the company on the North Side of Chicago.

And, to satisfy the needs of his booming business, Kalt continuously thinks of ways Reverb can evolve.

### **Across The Pond**

Three years after launching, Reverb has secured its place on a national scale, but now has its sights set on a bigger stage — going global to connect buyers and sellers from all corners of the world, allowing instruments to circulate — from Houston to Hong Kong.

“Reverb has a huge opportunity to be a global leader in the music space, and we want to seize that,” Kalt said.

“We want to make a platform where Germans, French, Australians, Japanese and Chinese can really buy with confidence, comfort and authenticity,” he added.

Up until 2015, Reverb wasn’t aggressively



pursuing international business. Kevin Drost was hired as the director of international strategy in August of that year to help expand the market globally.

Reverb started with English-speaking nations, including Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Today, Reverb has team members located in Australia, the U.K., France and the Netherlands. The company has seen 700-percent growth in new users outside the United States and 150-percent growth in international sales over the last year.

“When you’re building a marketplace, it actually requires a lot of focus to try and get buyers and sellers interacting with each other to the point that you have enough volume going on and it picks up a life of its own,” Drost said.

“It’s almost like starting over,” Kalt admitted.

Before joining Reverb, Drost was the founder and president of Zealous Records, a record label focused on international licensing. Throughout his career, he learned that growing globally is a complex process. Not only because import and export laws and regulations vary from country to country, but because each market is so different —



Reverb’s headquarters are housed in a 9,000-square-foot, three-story building.

what works in Germany won’t necessarily work in Italy.

Additionally, Reverb is working to expand its business in Asia and non-English speaking

European countries. The company’s success encouraged Reverb to hire German and Japanese territory managers by the end of 2016.

## 3 REASONS OLDIES ARE (STILL) GOODIES

**A**n overwhelming percentage of Reverb’s business — 65 percent — is in used gear. Used gear might not make up most of your business, but David Kalt gave three reasons why you should consider stocking more used instruments:

**1. You have the ability to update your inventory more frequently.** “New products typically come out once a year, but participating in the used market allows you to entice customers

with new inventory all year-round.” Good dealers see the same customers twice a month — essentially, when new gear arrives. But, when retailers incorporate used instruments into the mix, they aren’t relying on delivery dates for foot traffic.

**2. It opens you up to a new audience of musicians.** “Used gear is also a strong customer acquisition tool. If you purchase an instrument from a musician — whether in-store

or online — that customer now knows your brand and, assuming the transaction was pleasant, they are more likely to purchase from you again.”

**3. A strong used market is beneficial for the entire industry.** “If customers feel confident about their ability to sell their used gear, they’re more likely to resell their instruments rather than simply return it or —what’s worse — keep it hanging unused on a hook at home.” **MI**

In keeping up with technological trends around the world, Reverb debuted a mobile app for users outside of the United States over the summer. All major Reverb.com features are available via Android and iOS mobile devices.

“Investing big in the mobile experience is another one of our priorities,” Kalt said in discussing the company’s future.

Reverb also intends to simplify the shipping process by the end of 2016. Instead of trying to figure out shipping rates, Reverb will do all the calculations for you. Sellers will simply print out a shipping label from the convenience of their home and send the item off to anywhere in the world — without worrying about fees, Customs or mandatory forms.

### Exploring All Avenues

To bolster its presence domestically, Reverb is adding services that cater to the music community, like its lessons marketplace, and eventually, a service that connects players with prospective bandmates.

“We are starting to look beyond selling gear — helping connect the dots between the livelihoods of musicians,” Kalt said.

To propel this strategy, Reverb Lessons were introduced in 2015. Similar to Craigslist, Reverb Lessons lets music instructors and students find each other.

The company puts all teachers through a four-step onboarding process, including running a background check and interviewing all potential instructors before listing them on its sister site, Reverblessons.com.



Nearly 85 percent of Reverb’s employees are musicians, and there’s always plenty of gear for an impromptu jam session.

**“We are starting to look beyond selling gear — helping connect the dots between the livelihoods of musicians.” - David Kalt**

To date, the site has close to 2,000 instructors scattered across 42 states, including Hawaii.

“We’re extremely proud of that coverage, and we’re actively pursuing the remaining states,” Kalt said.

Naturally, the next step after learning how to play the guitar is to look for someone to jam with — and Reverb hopes to help there, too.

The company plans to roll out an online

platform where musicians can find potential bandmates.

By implementing all of these concepts and broadening the company’s presence globally, Reverb

expects to reach \$1 billion in sales by 2019. And yes, Kalt has dreams of taking the company public.

“I’m really proud of the team we have here and the culture,” Kalt said. “We have real dedicated musicians who love gear and want to help people make great music.”

It seems to be working.

As one Excellence voter said: “[Reverb] is simple and effective. You can tell it’s designed by musicians, for musicians.” **MI**



Reverb’s office space adds a modern flair that reflects the site’s vibe.





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| BY ALEX HARRELL |

# KEEPING IT SIMPLE

*Chicago Music Exchange isn't reinventing the wheel, just reshaping it to fit consumers' ever-changing demands*

It's no secret that Chicago Music Exchange (CME) is one of the hottest retailers in the Windy City. Musicians and tourists alike flock to the 30,000-square-foot shop on Chicago's North Side to gawk at the beautiful display of guitars and basses lining the overgrown walls.

"The store is still the coolest music shop I've visited in the U.S.," said one voting retailer. "People shop at CME for the atmosphere and the experience as much as the product."

What's not so obvious, however, is the totally simple reason behind the shop's massive success: passion.

"Everyone here loves what we have created together and are passionate about reaching new people," said CEO Andrew Yonke.

CME was founded just over 25 years ago, and since day one the company's priority has been to provide quality service to customers no matter who they are — "rock stars and beginners alike." Yonke, who took over CME in January of 2016, oversees all day-to-day operations. "The work of the team here is what has made it into the destination that it is today," he said.

And keeping CME a destination shop isn't as effortless as customers may think. "We're always watching the floor layout," Yonke explained. By keeping certain displays static — such as the Rickenbacker wall and the Gibson Les Paul wall — the team can have and take more creative liberties with the ever-changing product lines.

"In general, we have so many product lines — especially with guitars and basses — that we need to rotate it to keep it fresh and draw attention to new collections," Yonke said. CME's sales team is responsible for keeping inventory moving and coordinating the window displays that are changed quarterly and seasonally.

Voters continue to nominate CME for Retail Excellence — some selecting it for the second or third year in a row.

"The quality of the original content is second to none," said one voter. "Their knowledge of product

and passion for the industry is so clear to the consumer that it automatically give them credibility, and has made them the go-to music store from all corners of the country."

## **K.I.S.S. & Go**

What is the secret to said success? K.I.S.S., according to Yonke, which stands for: Keep It Simple, Stupid.

"You don't need to recreate the wheel," he said. "We have a store full of amazing and unique instruments with an equally as amazing and unique team; capture any combination of that properly and release it out there to the world."

Utilizing the correct social media platforms doesn't hurt, either. Social media has changed significantly and will continue to do so, Yonke said. "Instagram is a really great platform for us, and our

YouTube channel is great for full features of products and the personalities of our sales staff," he explained. "Facebook is an old institution, and that user will continue to evolve and change — it's an older demographic right now."

Several suppliers attribute their boom in business to working with CME.

"They've brought us a lot of business, and we're grateful," said one supplier. Another voter stated that their company's growth with CME has been "very steady and healthy," and reports that business is up 10 percent in the year to date.

CME has no future plans to stop the success or fix what isn't broken. "There's no bullshit in us," Yonke said. "Whether it's five years or 10, we'll [always] be here, kicking ass and taking names." **MI**

## **Chicago Music Exchange Chicago**

**Principal:** Andrew Yonke, CEO

**Founded:** 1990

**Employees:** 74

**Locations:** 1

**Annual Revenue:** \$39 million



Dan Bordonaro, Andrew Yonke and George Coutretsis

| BY KATIE KAILUS |

# MASTERING THE PERSONAL TOUCH

*Despite being an online retailer, Sweetwater's sales engineers continue to set customer service standards*

If you ask Chuck Surack, owner and founder of Sweetwater Sound, what's driving his company's business right now, he'll answer simply, "Everything we do" — with a serious emphasis on "we." The personal touch that the online retailer's sales engineers — or sales team — offers its customers rivals that of in-store sales staffs.

"Our goal at Sweetwater is to create an unparalleled shopping experience for every customer," Surack said. "It's a combination of the most innovative digital online technology balanced with the one-to-one connection of developing a relationship with a personal sales engineer — there is always contact with a sales engineer, even with an online purchase."

And with a mission statement that reads, "always do the right thing," Sweetwater assures its customers that they will receive the highest level of customer service regardless if they are shopping online. Sweetwater's sales engineers undergo a 13-week classroom training at Sweetwater University before they start at the company. The training focuses on four key areas: a deep understanding of the gear, thorough training on the company's systems, instruction on building customer relationships, and a series the company calls "life classes" that cover topics such as pro-activity and personal financial management. During the three-month initial training period, a sales engineer completes about 350 classes, taught by 85 different instructors, who range from vendor partners as well as veteran Sweetwater employees and managers.

"The goal is to have a new sales engineer be as prepared as they possibly can be when they 'roll out' and begin to interface with our customers," Surack said. "We like to say that once a sales engineer 'opens their store' they become the face of Sweetwater to every customer they interact with. Given that, we want them to be as prepared as possible in product knowledge, how the company and its systems

function, and how to form long-term relationships."

## Selecting the Right Engineer

When it comes to hiring new engineers, Sweetwater looks for pro-active, results-oriented people. "Our senior vice president of human resources likes to say that he has two hiring rules: one, don't hire children and two, hire smart people," Surack said. "It seems obvious, but following those rules means that we get to treat our team as smart adults, which sadly isn't the case in some companies today."

Surack said that Sweetwater spends a large majority of time up front talking to its new hires about the company's

philosophy and culture.

"We give tremendous autonomy to our staff and allow them to become experts at their jobs," he said. "It's fair to say that we hate micromanagement in our culture. To paraphrase the old proverb, we teach our people how to fish instead of just feeding them with orders and tasks."

Surack said that there isn't one "silver bullet" that makes a sales engineer effective, but over the years, they have learned the characteristics and training that result in success.

"Most retailers just focus on price, which is only one part of the equation," he said. "Our emphasis is on building long-term relationships that result in customers for life." **MI**

**Sweetwater Sound**  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

**Principals:** Chuck Surack, John Hopkins, Jeff Radke, Marc Leveridge & David Stewart

**Founded:** 1979

**Employees:** 1,100

**Locations:** 1

**Annual Revenue:** \$515 million





Chuck Surack

| BY JON ROSS |

# FACING CHANGE

*Adapting quickly and competing with driving changes has helped Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center grow*



From left: Adam Levin, Alan Levin and Abbe Levin.

It all started with a pawn shop. In the late 1950s, Chuck and Marge Levin grew their family owned shop from these humble roots into a full-service music store, Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center, which provided products to regional musicians that had been lacking an outlet.

"No one was stocking what we now would consider to be a 'music store' inventory — the breadth of products and brands," said Adam Levin, nephew of Alan Levin, the store's current owner. "The store became a destination for any musician in D.C. or passing through."

After growing the business for a decade, tragedy struck. As Adam tells it, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., riots broke out. Washington Music Center was burned to the ground. It took Chuck and Marge six months to reopen the store, and during that time, product shipments were sent to their home, along with supportive letters from suppliers and manufacturers.

"The family still has all the letters," Adam said. "One from Martin Guitars said, 'Tell me what you need to open, and pay for it when you can.'"

Adam said that in today's market, stores have to compete on price and stock. But it's the sense of community and the unerring dedication to customer service that sets the store apart from competitors.

“Chuck Levin’s was built on the word of the man himself,” Adam said. “If he said he would get something done, or you had a deal, that was that. And it’s that mentality that persists. Honest, reliable service above all else. Competing on price is a necessary component of the omnichannel environment, and having inventory in stock is essential to closing a sale when it’s too easy for a customer to look elsewhere, but it’s service that sets us apart from the pure, faceless online retailers. There’s a soul that people connect to.”

Adam said that his customers truly understand that the Washington Music Center team “doesn’t disappear after the sale.”

“If there are warranty issues or tech support issues, we always strive to accommodate the customer the way we see fit, even if it’s outside the manufacturers’ written warranty,” Adam added.

### Adapting Through the Years

Through the years, though, the Washington Music Center has been forced to change with the shifting winds of consumer demand.

While Adam called change “scary,” he also noted that it’s an essential part of remaining relevant in the MI industry. In the end, he said customer service will help the store handle any consumer shifts, however large.

“It’s not about the biggest sale, or the most expensive guitar or flute,” he said. “It’s about trying to have every customer leave happy and excited about what’s next.”

Adam said his store is small enough that it can adapt quickly to the changing times without disrupting things, yet big enough to compete with those driving the changes.

“We still believe that one-on-one communication is essential in this business, no matter the age or generation,” Adam said. “We email, live chat and use the phones the same way we engage with a customer in our store. It’s about real dialogue with knowledgeable sales people. Customers can read all they want online, but often times a real conversation is better than any online description of a product.” **MI**

## Chuck Levin’s Washington Music Center Wheaton, Maryland

**Principal:** Adam Levin, Alan Levin & Abbe Levin

**Founded:** 1958

**Employees:** 100+

**Locations:** 1

**Annual Revenue:** Undisclosed

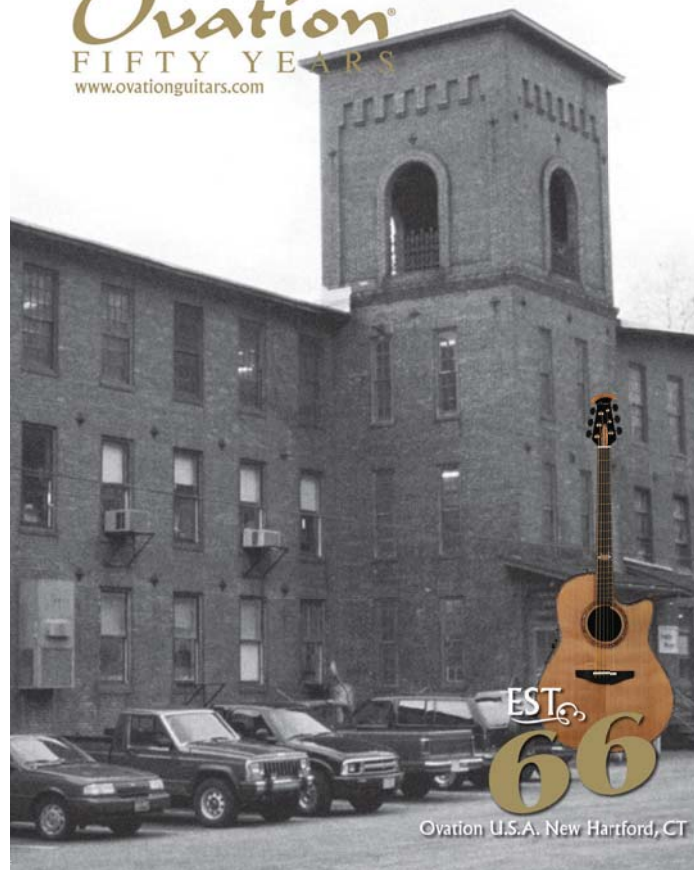


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| BY KATIE KAILUS |

# THE ULTIMATE GUITAR EXPERIENCE

*Wildwood Guitars partners with its suppliers to offer customers unique models and an exceptional YouTube experience*

**W**hen Steve Mesple started teaching guitar lessons in his living room 32 years ago, he didn't anticipate the business growing into a full-fledged guitar shop. But, with the help of his wife Marilyn, Mesple started Wildwood Guitars under the condition that he was only going to sell instruments he believed in and work with suppliers he respected.

"We don't sell a guitar just to turn a profit," Mesple said. "We carry a very finite selection of instruments that we, as players, believe in. Sometimes they are very unknown products, but if we like the ethics of the company, it's something we pursue."

And those partnerships have proved to be profitable in and of themselves. In addition to stocking boutique brands, such as Friedman guitars and Ventura County Vintage, Wildwood works with its larger suppliers, including Fender, Taylor, Gibson and Reverend, to create custom, exclusive models only available from Wildwood Guitars.

"It started out when one of our manufacturers asked how can we grow our mutual businesses," Mesple said. "I said, 'Make us some exclusive guitars.' So, we started with 16 models, and we sold them in minutes."

Wildwood now features its own line of Fender Custom Shop models called Wildwood "10s" — which boast a 10-inch fingerboard radius and pickups wound exclusively for the guitar shop. It also has its own line of Taylor Guitars called the Wildwood Adirondacks series and Gibson line called the Gibson Wildwood Specs.

"We know what our customers are looking for," Mesple said. "They would tell us, 'Oh, I love this guitar, but I wish it had a more robust midrange.' We designed these models with our customers in mind. That's the most spectacular part of what we have been able to do. It's a huge part of our inventory, and we like to think it

separates us from other dealers."

Adding to the online shopping experience, Wildwood measures, weighs and includes sound bites for all guitars on its site. The website is also equipped with a compare function that lets online shoppers listen to two similar guitars back to back to help them in their purchasing decision.

"What has been inspiring for us is how many people have called to say, 'I have listened to 10 guitars and could tell on my laptop which one is right for me,'" Mesple said. "That's one thing that has really built our brand. We are not commoditizing these guitars — each one has a unique spirit and voice with photographs and sound bites."

## Teaming Up Online

Taking its online presence one step further, the Louisville, Colorado-based guitar shop also partners with its manufacturers through its popular YouTube page. As a result, Taylor Guitars' Bob Taylor and PRS's Paul Reed Smith have both shot exclusive videos for Wildwood's YouTube channel. Additionally, the shop's short YouTube guitar lesson series, "Wildwood Minute," is hosted by renown guitarist Greg Koch — another connection Mesple has made through his suppliers.

"Our manufacturers are our friends as well as our business partners," Mesple said. "They are here to help us. All we've had to do is ask." **MI**

**Wildwood Guitars**  
Louisville, Colorado

**Principal:** Steve Mesple

**Founded:** 1984

**Employees:** 10

**Locations:** 1

**Annual Revenue:** Undisclosed



Steve Mesple

| BY JON ROSS |

# EDUCATION EXPERTS

*By offering customers multiple strong educational programs, Evola Music advocates that the ‘consumer is king’*

**F**or decades, the principals behind Evola Music in Detroit have focused on selling pianos and organs with the highest level of customer service. That’s what Jim Evola’s grandfather set out to do when he opened up shop in the midst of the Great Depression, and that’s how Jim’s father grew that legacy when he took over in the 1970s. When it was Jim’s turn to start running things, he hewed to the family line but added a wrinkle of his own.

“Today, we are also educational centers,” said Jim Evola, who has owned the eponymous stores since 2003. As far back as 1994, Jim began the process of purchasing the company, which has expanded to four physical stores, from his father. “We don’t believe we can ask anyone to purchase a piano or organ from us if we can’t teach them how to play,” he continued.

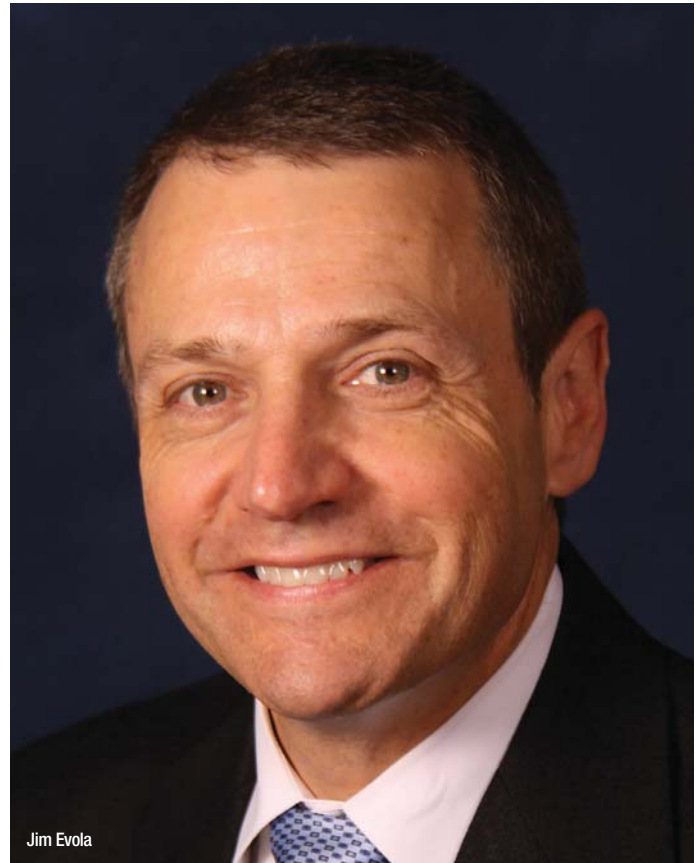
This education extends to all of Evola Music’s customers, but Jim said that with the amount of people leaving the workforce in the next decade, he is actively marketing the shop’s services to music lovers planning for retirement.

For Evola, music education doesn’t stop at one-on-one lessons. Evola Music counts local universities and a large area music camp as piano-rental customers, and he also loans pianos to local high schools for music competitions. Finally, Evola has created an in-store recital hall that he said is used by hundreds of music teachers for recitals throughout the year.

## **Time-tested Philosophy**

As for the future? Jim is planning on “more of the same,” keeping his stores running well by sticking to a time-tested business philosophy. He said employees must “believe the consumer is king,” and follow this rule every single day. Finally, successful businesses have to cultivate strong relationships with suppliers.

“You must represent vendors that are willing and able to back you up,” he said. **MI**



Jim Evola

## **Evola Music Detroit**

**Principal:** Jim Evola

**Founded:** 1931

**Employees:** 30 with 70 music teachers

**Locations:** 3

**Annual Revenue:** Undisclosed



| BY KASIA FEJKLOWICZ |

# CREATIVE RETAILING

*Ken Stanton's wide array of products, unique displays and knowledgeable staff create an exciting shopping experience*

Even after 32 years of running the business, the best part of Kenny Stanton's job is deciding what products to order for all five of Ken Stanton Music's (KSM) locations. The second-generation owner does it quite well. So well, in fact, that suppliers have praised the music retailer for providing a plethora of products.

"We're all about having the best selection and offering things that are not found in other stores," Stanton said.

To spruce up displays, Stanton chooses products that aren't always the "safest choices." As a result, unique finishes of instruments found in the guitar and drum departments attract customers.

Voting suppliers also mentioned that KSM not only has a great variety of products but does an excellent job of displaying them as well.

Initially, each store was designed by a marketing specialist. But, in order to keep up with trends and continuously create visually pleasing displays, Stanton adapts by using a little bit of imagination and innovation. And, that's why KSM doesn't always go with the banners and signage the suppliers provide. Instead, the KSM team takes it to the next level by grouping similar products together and strategically using accent lighting to highlight instruments that are displayed on the slatwalls.

"We try to change things up as much as possible," Stanton added.

And, with seven departments and thousands of SKUs, KSM's associates are there to help customers with selecting instruments and accessories. Its sale staff isn't commissioned-based; Stanton believes that this allows the associates to spend more time with each browsing customer.

"Their staff is very knowledgeable and many have been at the store for over 20 years," said one Excellence voter. "The experience you get — not only from a product selection — but from the staff is second to none. Every customer is greeted with a smile at the front counter, and if you call them on the phone you will get the same courteous response." **MI**



Kenny Stanton

**Ken Stanton Music**  
Marietta, Georgia

**Principal:** Ken Stanton, Matt Abott & Scott Cameron

**Founded:** 1949

**Employees:** 70

**Locations:** 5

**Annual Revenue:** \$12.6 million

| BY ED ENRIGHT |

# SPECIALTY CHOPS

*Chops Percussion's integration into its local school market is one of the main keys to the specialty shop's success*

**C**hops Percussion, a specialty shop located within Paige's Music in Indianapolis, is unlike the drum departments you'll find at most full-line music stores. Led by experienced percussion educators Jeff Huffman and Derek Felix, Chops Percussion is unique in that it focuses mainly on Indiana's music-education market — schools, students, parents, and teachers who participate in band and orchestra activities. In addition to their knowledge of percussion products and years of experience with school programs, Huffman and Felix rely on the full support of Paige's staff and facilities to keep things running efficiently.

"Derek and I have the knowledge and experience to be able to be advisors," Huffman said. "We're out in the field, so to speak. We're out at contests and shows on the weekends, interacting with educators and kids or actively teaching with student groups. So many of our customers are also our colleagues. When we pick up the phone and help answer questions that band directors of percussion educators might have, a lot of our answers are coming from personal experience because we've been right there where they are."

Discussing the rationale behind opening Chops Percussion in 2006, Paige's Music President Mark Goff said that he observed a trend of declining percussion sales combined with an increase in requests for a higher level of percussion inventory from educators in his market. "That business was obviously migrating to regional percussion specialty shops," Goff said. "So, we decided to pull the trigger and start our own."

Since forming Chops, Paige's has gone on to open two other specialty stores under its roof: Encore (for orchestral strings) and the Indie Flute Shop. Chops Percussion, meanwhile, has significantly extended its customer reach well beyond the central-Indiana market.

"The inventory is there now, so there's no need for a customer to call a retailer who's out of state just because they have it in stock," Huffman said. "That has helped us expand our regional base, and now we have customers all over the country. They come to us because of that experience, that background, and that trust." **MI**



Jeff Huffman



Derek Felix

## Chops Percussion Indianapolis

**Principal:** Jeff Huffman & Derek Felix

**Founded:** 2006

**Employees:** 2 full-time staffers  
(with support from Paige's  
Music's 50 employees)

**Locations:** 1

**Annual Revenue:** \$15 million  
(Paige's Music)





| BY ALEX HARRELL |

# SLOW AND STEADY

*Woodwind & Brasswind keeps customers coming back for more by implementing alterations when necessary*

**W**oodwind & Brasswind is no stranger to change. After closing its brick-and-mortar doors in 2011, it became a catalog retailer — implementing a “direct-to-customer” business model. In recent years, the company, which is owned by Guitar Center, has expanded its online presence. Now, the retailer has created a mobile-friendly website to further captivate consumers and simplify sales.

“Nearly every segment of our business can be analyzed, challenged and optimized,” said Kurt Witt, director and general manager of Woodwind & Brasswind. “Just doing the same things we’ve always done won’t grow the business.”

Although it seems counterintuitive, the ability to be flexible derives from hard, concrete numbers, Witt explained. “We use a lot of data to make decisions about which marketing tactics make the most sense,” he said. “Even when we have a ‘gut instinct’ for what is right, we’ll always look for a way to attach the data in order to make the best possible decisions.”

One voting retailer commended Woodwind & Brasswind for its “great job migrating from [being] a catalog retailer to an online retailer,” while another stated that the new, mobile-friendly site has been “much more intuitive and easy to navigate.”

“We knew it couldn’t be just about selling reeds and mouthpieces,” Witt said, regarding the website. “Customers need to find value in what we do; we need to support their music making with videos, articles, unique and hard-to-find products,” he explained.

The website’s Article Library houses resources on every instrument and even an “additional resources” section, which is full of links such as “How to Start a Band” and “Do I Really Need to Own a Tuner?”

By peppering the site with more than just products, Woodwind & Brasswind can be as inclusive as possible for the exclusive consumer.

“We can’t be everything to everybody,” Witt said. “But we can be everything to those customers in the school-music category.” **MI**

Kurt Witt



**Woodwind & Brasswind**  
Frederick, Maryland

**Principal:** Steve Zapf

**Founded:** 1978

**Employees:** 30

**Locations:** 1

**Annual Revenue:** Undisclosed

| BY KATIE KAILUS |

# PLAYER'S NETWORK

*Music Villa's online presence focuses on the music community*

**P**aul Decker, owner of Music Villa in Bozeman, Montana, uses his store's website as more than just a sales engine. He's created an outlet where the local music community can unite. By launching sites such as the Montana Band Directory ([montanabands.com](http://montanabands.com)), a database of Montana bands, and Montana Music Life, a feed devoted to the state's music news, Music Villa's site is a one-stop source for all things music related in Montana.

"There's a real sense of community here and that's what we have encouraged with these sites," Decker said, adding that customers used to regularly stop into the store asking if he knew any good bands or guitar players in the area.

In addition to the Montana Band Directory, Music Villa also helps facilitate Montana Musician Community, a site where local musicians can sign up if they are looking to join a band or play a gig.

"It's like Facebook, just for local Montana musicians," Decker said. "You don't have to pay to be on any of the sites. They are just a way to get people more involved in the process."

As an acoustic-centric full-line dealer, Music Villa has created The Acoustic Letter, a separate online store linked to Music Villa's acoustic sales page. In addition to shopping Music Villa's latest acoustic models, The Acoustic Letter offers subscribers video content.

"We send about three emails a week focusing on just our acoustic guitar sales and people love seeing the videos of the new models in store," Decker said, adding that the store is currently working on rolling out a new website in the next few months that will be more customizable and include online sales of electric guitars and pedals. "We are known for having the best selection of acoustic guitars, but with the new site we want to try to make everything more cohesive."

## International Attention

While Music Villa's web presence focuses on its local musician community, the website has helped draw musicians from across the world to its Montana location.

"We have a huge destination traffic that comes



Paul Decker

from our website," Decker said. "The community feel and the specializing that we do in acoustic guitars is a big draw from all around [the world]. People see some of the videos and want to check it out."

Located about 90 miles from

Yellowstone National Park, Decker said many making their way to the park swing by Music Villa first. "This summer was nuts," he said. "We had people in from Europe and Australia, and we saw people from almost every state." **MI**

## Music Villa Bozeman, Montana

**Principal:** Paul Decker

**Founded:** In Decker's family since 1980, but in business since the 1970s.

**Employees:** 30

**Locations:** 1

**Annual Revenue:** Undisclosed

# Whatever The Venue... Whatever The Occasion



Shown with optional designer stand and pedal lyre.

The new Kawai ES8 Portable Digital Piano is the ultimate portable digital piano. Whether you're playing on stage, accompanying the church choir, studying in the classroom or practicing at home, the ES8 is portable piano perfection.

Versatile and powerful, with class leading feel and sound, the Kawai ES8 is a compact, elegant and highly portable instrument perfect for any musical occasion... anytime, anywhere.

**KAWAI**  
Professional  
KAWAIUS.COM

**YAMAHA**  
**TRANSACOUSTICS**

Yamaha's TransAcoustic guitar technology lets players add both reverb and chorus to the natural sound of the instrument without having to plug in external effects or amplification. An SRT piezo pickup provides the guitar's plugged-in tones, and **a redesigned battery box is integrated with the guitar's endpin — reducing acoustic sound loss.** One voting retailer described the TransAcoustic as an "innovative" and "fairly priced" product. [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)

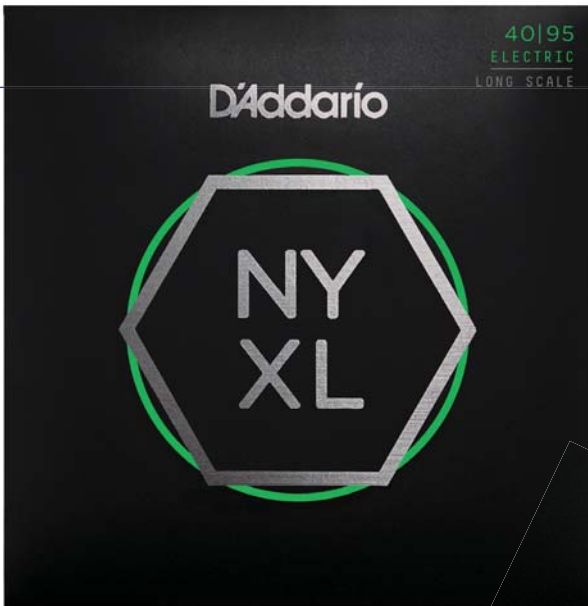
**TAYLOR**  
**GS MINI**

Although the GS Mini was released about five years ago, it still remains on the top of many dealer's list. Despite the scaled-down size, the single strum maintains the voice of a full-size guitar. This mix of portability and musicality creates interest among a vast variety of professionals and beginners, as the shorter scale length makes forming chords easier. **"I'm sure this is a common answer, but the GS Mini is truly our best-selling instrument,"** said one voter. "They turn consistently." [taylorguitars.com](http://taylorguitars.com)

**SIGMA**  
**SF15S**

Despite Sigma's SF15S traditional components — real bone nut and saddle — the modern construction of the guitar allows for a more designed sound and playability. Although the smaller-bodied guitar is tighter and higher than other dreadnoughts, **Sigma's scalloped, forward shifted X bracing system is powerful with projection.** The guitar is ideal for folk music and blues and can handle open-chord strumming as well. [sigma-guitars.com](http://sigma-guitars.com)





**D'ADDARIO  
NYXL STRINGS**

D'Addario applied the same innovations that power the globally acclaimed NYXL guitar strings to a premium new bass string. Developed with proprietary technology, NYXL Bass will give players access to D'Addario's most versatile bass string yet. **"These strings practically fly off the shelves for us. We can't keep them in stock,"** said one voter. The string's NY steel core increases durability and tuning stability. Together with the reformulated nickel-plated wrap wire, bass players can achieve more powerful lows, accentuated harmonics and focused punch. [\[daddario.com\]](http://daddario.com)

**ELECTRO-HARMONIX  
MEL9**

Electro-Harmonix uses the same technology that powers the B9 and C9 Organ Machines for the MEL9 tape replay machine, emulating classic Mellotron sounds. The MEL9 was designed to work on guitars without any modifications or special pickups. It also works with bass (down to the open A string) and keyboards. **A rotary switch allows the user to select the sound of their choice,** while the pedal includes independent effect and dry volume controls. One retailer described this product as a "unique, cool and hot-selling" item. [\[ehx.com\]](http://ehx.com)

**ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN  
JOHN PETRUCCI LINE**

Ernie Ball Music Man's Artist series John Petrucci JP16 guitar offers an ideal combination of the best features found in John Petrucci signature instruments. The JP16 features a basswood body with original JP6 arm scoop, black Floyd Rose Pro series Tremolo with matching black hardware, two DiMarzio Illuminator humbucking pickups with a 20dB boost and 17-inch radius roasted maple neck with ebony fingerboard.

Unlike with other signature instruments, **the Artist series guitars are ground-up designs created hand-in-hand with the players' input.** "The fit and finish is impeccable," said one voter. "They are well thought out in terms of design and features." [\[music-man.com\]](http://music-man.com)





**YAMAHA MONTAGE 8**

Yamaha's Montage 8 features the Motion Control Synthesizer Engine, a powerful and intuitive way to interact with and control sound. The engine controls two iconic sound engines: advanced wave memory 2 (AWM2) and FM-X. **"Yamaha Montage 8 is a totally new category of synth/workstation products,"** said one voter. Montage 8 also features a color touch-screen user interface, endless rotary encoders, and the Super Knob: a macro control that lets users to control multiple parameters simultaneously. [usa.yamaha.com](http://usa.yamaha.com)



**MOOG MINIMOOG MODEL D**

"Bringing the classics back!" one voter said. And it's true: Moog Music resumed production of the Minimoog Model D synthesizer after more than 30 years. Though no changes have been made to the original sound engine or audio signal path, **the Minimoog Model D now includes a series of functional modifications to expand the instrument's sonic capabilities beyond the factory specifications of the 1970's production unit.** [moogmusic.com](http://moogmusic.com)

**KORG MINILOGUE**

With its powerful and easy-to-understand signal flow, Korg's minilogue is designed to inspire musicians and analog enthusiasts everywhere. A new Voice Mode lets users choose how the four available voices are configured; from Polyphonic to Duophonic, Unison to one-note chords, and more. The OLED display features a real-time oscilloscope, providing functional and visual feedback for the sound being played. One retailer said, "It has been extremely popular among synthesizer buyers, and **the low price has made it a product that is sought after by musicians at all levels.**" [korg.com](http://korg.com)





**ROLAND  
FP-30 DIGITAL PIANO**

Roland's compact FP-30 digital piano combines **Bluetooth and wireless connectivity for mobile devices** and is small enough to take from practice space to band class. "In a very competitive landscape [for] 88-note digital pianos for under \$700, Roland found a way to raise the bar with great sound, strong speakers and stylish looks," one voting retailer said. [\[roland.com\]](http://roland.com)

**LEFREQUE  
LEFREQUE**

The lefreQue is a sound bridge that enhances sound on all wind instruments. It consists of a uniquely designed bridge that utilizes two metal elements. "It's the most innovative product in the band segment of the industry that truly has an impact on the sound quality and the playability of an instrument," said one voting retailer. [\[lefreque.com\]](http://lefreque.com)



**CASIO  
GRAND HYBRID**

Designed to combine the advantages of digital technology with the traditional sound and feel of acoustic pianos, Casio's Grand Hybrid pianos deliver an experience similar to that of a grand piano. The new models — GP-500BP and GP-300 — feature a Grand Acoustic system that represents the sound of a grand piano as it emanates from above and below the soundboard. **The multi-channel amplification system creates an immersive sound field** for both the player and audience. One voter described the Grand Hybrid as a "truly innovative" instrument. [\[casiomusicgear.com\]](http://casiomusicgear.com)

**SABIAN XSR CYMBALS**

Sabian's XSR budget-minded cymbals replace the Xs20 series with upgraded technology from professional series cymbals such as Evolution and X-Plosion. The XSR cymbals deliver unprecedented sound and performance at a price designed to fit consumer's budgets. The cymbals are hammered and feature enhanced profiles. **Bells have been reshaped and redesigned to accelerate the overall sound and results.** Several voters agreed that the XSR cymbals offer mature sound at a good price point. [sabian.com](http://sabian.com)



**ZILDJIAN LOW VOLUME CYMBAL PACKS**

Zildjian's L80 Low Volume cymbal is ideal for drummers looking for a quieter sound without losing the authentic feel of a Zildjian cymbal and is perfect for situations requiring reduced volumes. A specialized pattern was developed for the Low Volume Cymbal series to deliver the best of both worlds: musical sound and lower volume. This pattern is combined with a proprietary alloy and then given a unique matte finish — enabling the L80 Low Volume cymbals to be up to 80 percent quieter than a traditional cymbal. "I can't remember ever having such luck with a new cymbal product," said one voting retailer. "Parents love the idea of having quiet drums in the house." [zildjian.com](http://zildjian.com)

**DW ULTRALIGHT HARDWARE**

Weighing less than 20 pounds, the 6000 Series Ultralight Hardware from DW delivers heavyweight performance for gigging drummers everywhere. Ideal for bop kits, vintage sets and working drummers, the scaled-down version of the 6000 Series has a lighter gauge steel tubing and low mass tube joint for optimal portability. "It's a tremendous leap forward in getting drum gear for the gigging drummer at a reasonable weight," said one retailer. "They are some truly innovative features." [dwdrums.com](http://dwdrums.com)



**PEARL PERCUSSION SONIC BOOM BUZZ CAJON**

Pearl Percussion's Sonic Boom Buzz Cajon features a birch body, fixed Pearl snares, and an artisan walnut front plate. The ergonomic angled front plate puts the player in a comfortable playing position and eliminates the need to rock the cajon backwards, while the rich low end tone is the result of the cajon's deep inner resonance chamber and front-facing bass port. "We can't keep this in stock," said one voting retailer. **"In an extremely crowded and sometimes overwhelming category, it sells itself."** [pearldrums.com](http://pearldrums.com)







**PRESONUS  
STUDIOLIVE AR HYBRID MIXERS**

PreSonus StudioLive AR Hybrid Mixers make mixing and recording easier with a USB 2.0 audio interface that captures all input channels — plus the main — to a computer with 24-bit, 96 kHz quality. The hybrid features the PreSonus Super Channel, which lets users to connect four stereo analog and digital sources at once. Each AR mixer has an internal effect processor with 16 presets and provides an all-in-one solution for mixing and recording performances. **“PreSonus has hit another home run. Great price points and great solutions for everyday customers,”** said one retailer. [presonus.com](http://presonus.com)



**ROLAND  
CABLES AND ACCESSORIES**

“Roland, simply put, has the guts to create a high-margin product that is MAP-controlled and outpaces the quality of cable lines dramatically,” said one voter. **Available in two different levels, Roland’s instrument, microphone and MIDI cables deliver high-end performance for pro applications.** All Roland cables are guaranteed for life. [roland.com](http://roland.com)

**BOSE  
F1**

Designed to serve live music, DJ and general P.A. applications, **Bose’s F1 is the company’s first powered portable loudspeaker that lets users control its vertical coverage pattern.** “Its build quality, sound quality, portability and flexibility make it a category leader,” said one retailer. Engineered with an array of eight Bose proprietary 2.25-inch drivers, the F1 delivers high SPL performance while maintaining vocal and midrange clarity. [bose.com](http://bose.com)



**ANTELOPE AUDIO  
ZEN TOUR**

Antelope Audio’s professional portable audio interface, Zen Tour, features eight analog ins and 16 analogs outs and offers two balanced monitor output pairs, two independent stereo headphone outs and two mono Reamp outs. **The interface features Antelope’s new breed of FPGA-based audio effects, carrying the true sound of legendary studio gear.** [antelopeaudio.com](http://antelopeaudio.com)



| BY KATIE KAILUS |

# PRODUCT-CENTRIC GROWTH

*Hot off the launch of 32 new products in 24 hours, Roland attributes part of its company's growth to its innovative gear*



Jay Wanamaker and Brian Alli

**O**n Sept. 9, Roland rolled out 32 new products in eight cities during a 24-hour online music festival. Dubbed #909day “The Future. Redefined.” Roland U.S. President and CEO Jay Wanamaker said the release of the products in this format was designed to build excitement within the global end-user community and to show the scope of Roland’s product line and connection in the global music community.

“No one’s done anything like this before, and the feedback has been outstanding,” Wanamaker said. “The format of ‘The Future. Redefined.’ product launch and 24-hour online streaming event gave us the ability to expand the reach of our fall product debuts beyond just the local grassroots events and the reach of a standard press campaign. Roland is committed to giving our retail partners and our user community the best musical and marketing tools possible to drive their businesses. That includes retailers as well as musicians making a living making the music they love.”

And retailers voting in this year’s Excellence Awards surely noticed, with one commenting, “It’s such a pleasure to work with a company that is always

innovating, always working to provide better service and always pushing to be the best.”

During the #909day, Roland rolled out many highly anticipated products, including the DJ-808 — Roland’s first DJ controller.

“Innovating is what makes Roland, Roland,” said Brian Alli, Roland U.S. vice president of sales. “The core of our existence has been based on innovation. The success of our latest products has a lot to do with our emphasis on simply listening to our customers and blending their requests with the new products being developed by Roland’s celebrated R&D teams. We are getting better at marrying innovation and market feedback in a timely fashion, and by doing so, Roland is providing valuable new music and business solutions when they are needed most. For musicians looking to break through their latest creative barriers and for Roland’s retail partners looking for new ways to please their customers, what Roland provides is invaluable.”

## Looking Ahead

In 2016 alone, Roland, and its sister company Boss, have released some 200 new products. After such a gear-focused year, it’s no surprise that Alli attributes Roland’s innovative products as a major force currently driving its business.

“We’re always striving for growth, innovation, and to build the best products and the best relationships in the industry,” he said. “One year, two years, five years [down the line], our goal remains the same.” **MI**

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| BY ALEX HARRELL |

# MAINTAINING CONSTANT GROWTH

*St. Louis Music's burgeoning business doesn't sacrifice service*

**S**t. Louis Music (SLM) continues to expand its brand and maintain healthy relationships with dealers, all while growing and pushing profit margins high. This year, SLM acquired nearly a dozen new lines — increasing revenue by 16 percent from 2015.

“We have grown by double digits for nine consecutive years, and the new lines have helped again this year; our sales are up from 2015, which was our record year,” said Mark Ragin, president, CEO and owner of SLM. “If we keep doing this well, the SLM brand will continue to grow, and we will become more important to more dealers.”

2016 has proven to be a busy year for SLM. “The past 12 months have been very special,” Ragin admitted. The company bought Alvarez Guitars, E.K. Blessing’s band instrument line, Hamilton Stands, and Compass Ligatures, landed a distribution deal with Elixir Strings, and extended its Sabian offerings after being named a distributor for both its marching and drum cymbals.

But these are just some of the highlights, according to Ragin. There’s more to come. “We will continue to obtain the best-distributed lines in the business and develop our instruments to be unparalleled in quality and value,” Ragin said.

## Expansion Without Forefeit

But these acquisitions and expansions aren’t out of the ordinary for SLM. St. Louis Music, a division of U.S. Band & Orchestra Supplies, was founded in 1922 by Bernard Kornblum, who built a successful distribution company on the back of importing violins from Europe. His son took over the company in the 1960s, and went on to develop Crate, Ampeg, Alvarez, Knilling, and SLM Market Place into worldwide brands.

In 2008, Ragin’s company — U.S. Band & Orchestra Supplies — bought the accessories division of SLM, Knilling violins and Austin Guitars. While the supplier has a long history of expanding, what makes it unique is its ability to expand rapidly without sacrificing service.

“SLM is our one-stop-shop for band and orchestra needs,” said one Excellence voter. “Great customer service, excellent prices, fantastic selection and fill

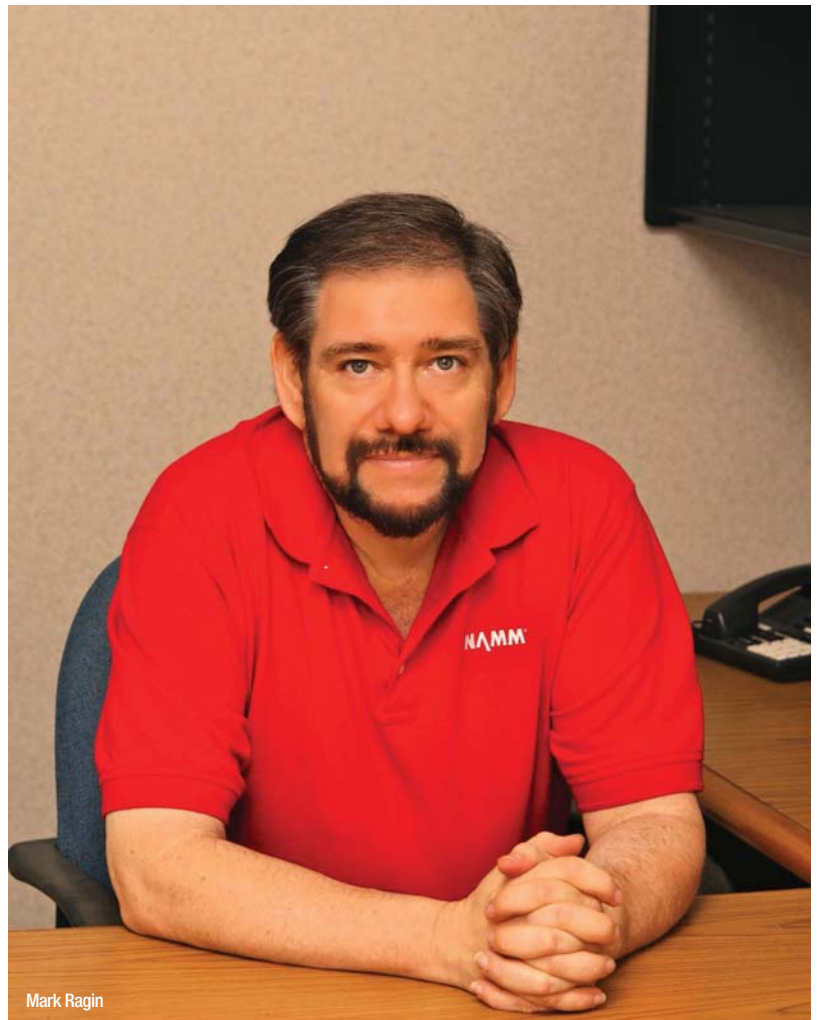
rates ... It’s all I can hope for.”

“Sincerely, looking after the dealer is at the very heart of SLM,” Ragin said. “We make sure we’re easy to deal with and easy to contact; we listen to our customers and — without a doubt — this communication [process] can help shape the way we do things or what we sell.”

The supplier has experienced “proactive sales activity” and as a result, this year has been full of innovations. SLM implemented a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to help keep the company organized, and its team continuously strives to improve internet-technology tools.

Despite its growth, Ragin still feels the “family vibe” in his company.

“We’re ambitious, but we’re also humble and thankful for the success we’ve seen,” he said. **MI**



Mark Ragin



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St Louis Music is a division of U.S. Band & Orchestra Supplies, Inc.

| BY KATIE KAILUS |

# SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION

*Regular dealer training helps Yamaha retailers better deliver the company's message to its customer base*

**M**ost voting dealers in this year's Supplier Excellence Awards selected manufacturers who partner with them to grow both businesses. But, few manufacturers take dealer partnerships quite to the same level as Yamaha. From its solid support staff to providing instruments to dealers' outreach programs to intense dealer training programs — Yamaha is truly a dealer's best friend.

"Dealers are an extension of us and an extension of our brand," said Tom Sumner, senior vice president at Yamaha Corp. of America.

As a result, Yamaha offers a wide array of dealer training that is integral in helping dealers communicate the company's message.

"[Some of Yamaha's staff] are lucky because we've visited a lot of the factories and seen the factory workers and the care they take in crafting Yamaha instruments as well as seen our support staff taking care of a customer after a dealer has sold them an instrument," Sumner said. "But, most of the dealers don't get that opportunity to go to the factory, so somehow we need to translate the care that Yamaha takes with every instrument to the retail salespeople because we want them to take that same care with every customer that we put into every instrument."

Roger Eaton, chief marketing director at Yamaha Corp. of America, said training helps its dealers "tell Yamaha's story."

"We're a passionate company and really believe in the power of music and how it changes people's lives," Eaton said. "If you go through the factory, you get to see that so the training helps us develop how to tell that story with our dealers."

From smaller-scale, in-store education sessions with Yamaha reps to extensive multiday training at Yamaha's headquarters in Buena Park, California, Yamaha ensures its dealers are up-to-date on everything the company is doing. This summer, Yamaha held its annual Piano Pros, three-day-long sessions of piano-focused training that took place during four separate sessions in July and August.

"We showed dealers a video from our factories and went into some real specifics on the products that

show what we do to make our pianos as good as they are," Sumner said. "The sessions also featured Yamaha history and a sneak peek at new products. At the end of each session, we held a Jeopardy[-esque] game where the dealers would play against each other to see what they remembered from the training. The attendees had an absolute blast doing that."

## The Shokunin Partnership

Earlier this year, Yamaha launched its Shokunin Select dealer program, which encompasses some of Yamaha's top high-end B&O dealers. Shokunin Select dealers guarantee the customer that they have generous inventory of Yamaha intermediate, professional, and custom-level brass and woodwind instruments at all times as well as a highly trained staff with an advanced product knowledge and technical skill to assist the higher-level player. Shokunin dealers underwent an advanced training session at Yamaha's headquarters in late October.

"We put together requirements on what we felt were needed in order to serve those customers, and they get added benefits, including access to inventory and sneak previews of new models," Eaton explained.

Whether it's B&O training at the company's headquarters, in-store guitar training at the dealer's shop or Succession Advantage —



the company's recently launched succession education program — Eaton said there isn't a day that goes by that some sort of Yamaha training isn't going on somewhere in the country.

"In today's world, it's all about the customer," Eaton said. "The dealer is an important part of that circle." **MI**



| BY ALEX HARRELL |

# BUILDING A CYCLE OF SUCCESS

*KHS partners with dealers to help them grow their businesses*

**T**his year marks Tabor Stamper's 10th year as president of KHS. And during the past decade, Stamper has focused on keeping dealer relationships strong. By implementing regular meetings with dealers and training representatives to putting the customer's experience first, KHS was nominated for a Supplier Excellence Award for the third time in the last four years.

"The relationship between reps and dealers is critical to the success of not only our business, but our dealers' businesses as well — we view our dealers as our process partners," Stamper said. "We can serve the musician and the music educator much more effectively when we work together, combining our efforts for the best possible customer experience."

KHS Music, headquartered in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, is able to preserve such strong relationships due to the training its representatives receive. The product management team is made up of individuals who are experts in their respective categories, according to Stamper. The sales and customer service team members receive regular product training from the product managers, which enables them to help dealers and consumers understand the benefits of using KHS's products.

"Our representatives, both inside and outside, are among the best in the business," Stamper said. "They truly care about our dealers."

KHS meets with its dealers on a regular basis to review their current business and discuss how KHS can help them fulfill their goals.

"We then offer them a number of cooperative programs customized to fit each dealer's needs in serving their customers," Stamper explained. "Our dealers recognize that we are not just there to sell them stuff but help them grow their business."

## Earning Customer Loyalty

Nominating retailers praised KHS Music's commitment to helping dealers succeed, with one voter saying, "We had a customer make a special order, and the product had a very tiny blemish upon arrival. KHS had a replacement at our doorstep within 24 hours at no [extra] charge and let the customer keep the blemished product to boot."



Tabor Stamper

"We recognize that earning customer loyalty doesn't necessarily come from getting it right the first time, every time," Stamper said. "It comes from handling these situations professionally and doing right by the customer, whether that's a dealer or an end user."

As for winning yet another Excellence Award this year, Stamper attributed the honor to the company's mission statement.

"We absolutely believe that music is an essential part of life for every individual and that it provides a positive contribution to society as well," he said. "Believing that, we do all we can every day to support our dealers as they connect with music makers of all levels. The growth will take care of itself, just as it has over the past number of years."

And, as one voting retailer put rather simply, "KHS has what you need, when you need it." **MI**

| BY KASIA FEJKLOWICZ |

## MAPPING IT OUT

*How D'Addario's expanding MAP program serves dealers*

From the beginning, D'Addario's mission was to serve the market with the best accessories possible. Although the company has spread its roots since 1974 to become one of the industry's largest manufacturers, its primary focus hasn't changed. D'Addario still strives to be a step ahead of its competition when it comes to products, and retailers have noticed.

"Every year we rely on new products to grow our business," said Peter D'Addario, U.S. sales manager.

Voting retailers agree that the company offers a plethora of quality products, with a few voting retailers mentioning that they sell more D'Addario products than anything else. "[D'Addario's] product offerings could outfit most of your accessory wall," said one retailer.

Because D'Addario doesn't use third-party manufacturers, it's "rarely out of stock and dealers love that," Peter added. Another benefit of conducting business "in-house" is the speedy shipping process. For example, if a retailer places an order before 4 p.m. EST, D'Addario's shipping warehouses can get the item(s) out the same day.

To help level the playing field (so dealers can compete equally in terms of price and to protect its own products), D'Addario started its minimum advertised pricing — or MAP — policy in 2014. Now more than 100 premium products have MAP pricing set. The company plans to continue to grow the program.

One voting retailer praised D'Addario for including MAP. "This has been a big plus," said one Excellence voter. "It's the wild, Wild West out there and with a MAP on small goods we can compete and don't have to constantly price check the competition." **MI**



Sheryl and Tevis Laukat

| BY ED ENRIGHT |

## FORGING RELATIONSHIPS

*Cannonball connects with clients through face-to-face visits*

Cannonball Music's dealer training program has one specific goal: to make everyone — dealers and company reps alike — feel involved and like one big, happy family.

Cannonball thrives on the personal touch of Tevis Laukat, who played saxophone professionally for 10 years, and his wife, Sheryl, a former band director. Since co-founding Cannonball in 1996, their tireless efforts to reach out to band-instrument retailers has paid off in the form of a well-informed and enthusiastic dealer network, serving thousands of wind players at the student and professional levels.

The Laukats visit their dealers on a regular basis, traveling to as many as 10–15 stores — some of them are chains with multiple locations — each year.

"We'll have training in the stores, and once in a while we'll go out and do things in the schools where I talk about our products," Tevis Laukat said. "I do a lot of traveling. We have many personal relationships in this industry, and we'll make a lot of personal calls and send emails with information on new products that our dealers need to know how to approach and sell. Little by little, piece by piece, store by store, we seem to get around."

Another way Cannonball keeps its retail salespeople happy is through its wide selection of instrument finishes. Giving customers the option to choose from 11 different instrument finishes piques their interest and boosts the fun factor of shopping for a new horn.

"Out motto here is to create a great experience for those who try our instruments," Tevis said. "We get emails from people saying, 'This instrument changed my life.' It's very gratifying. We're always working on new things to get excited about." **MI**





| BY JON ROSS |

# THOUGHTFUL CRAFTSMANSHIP

*PRS's carefully engineered guitars continue to catch the player's eye*

**W**hen Paul Reed Smith founded PRS Guitars in the mid-1980s, he set out to fill a void in the industry. He said he thought guitar players seemed content to buy what Smith personally saw as inferior instruments.

“Our industry had tripped,” he said. “Customers were buying popular, brand-name guitars with file marks on the frets and other crazy things.”

Smith realized there was a market for beautifully constructed, carefully engineered instruments. So, he started gathering feedback from artists on guitar preferences. But even with all this advice, Smith wasn't confident his guitars would be a hit.

“The scary part was seeing if the guitars would sell through and, if so, would the stores reorder?” he said.

Smith's success nearly ensured that copycat luthiers would pop up in the marketplace. While he knows cheaper guitar imitations are out there, rather than getting angry, he sees this as a form of flattery. “I'm cognizant about what is going on with the market,” he said. “We look for opportunities and work hard to support our dealers' needs.” **MI**



Paul Reed Smith

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| BY KATIE KAILUS |

# DISTRIBUTION OVERHAUL

*Sabian finds its stride with its new distribution model*

The distribution of Sabian's products has been a main focal point for the company over the last few years. Once under the KMC umbrella of distributed brands, Sabian was forced to reassess its distribution strategy when KMC was sold to Jam Industries in 2015.

"We had been working with distributors for years," said Andy Zildjian, Sabian's CEO. "Earlier on we worked with one company where we're also a part of the management team. We had real contact and close relationships with the reps and dealers. When we went to KMC, the relationships were still good, but they weren't as close because we had that company in between, which seemed to distract from the time we could spend with retailers."

Zildjian said Sabian experienced a bit of a communication breakdown with its retailers. So, after the sale of KMC, Sabian decided to directly distribute its products to dealers in the U.S. and Canada beginning on Jan. 22, 2015.

"The communication of not only who we are but our product training and program training came much easier," Zildjian said. "It simplified things. There were no longer two routes of communication. We were able to service our dealers broader and deeper."

Voting Excellence retailers have shown their approval of Sabian's new distribution model.

"I think Sabian has done a good job in the face of adversity to self distribute and to create a good team all the way around

— from the outside reps to the management at the mothership in Meductic, New Brunswick," said one voter.

"We have our core values, and passion to perform is a serious criteria to become a part of our team," Zildjian said. "We are genuine with people. If we don't have an answer for them, we will find one and look for help. Another core value is family. Not only do we have a family feel across our company, but we treat our employees like they are family." **MI**



Andy Zildjian



Jason Bartel

| BY KASIA FEJKLOWICZ |

# BRAND LOGIC

*Private label branding has helped Maple Leaf Strings grow*

Unlike most suppliers, Maple Leaf Strings doesn't focus too much on self promotion. Instead, the company concentrates on promoting and supporting its dealers by offering a complimentary private labeling service.

And for that reason, Maple Leaf Strings got high marks from voting retailers during this year's Excellence Awards.

Since day one, the company's business model has been to provide services that are similar to a specialty string shop to general music stores.

"Through our private labeling program, our customers are able to use their inventory investment and budgets as canvases for advertising to build brand awareness and promotion," explained Jason Bartel, CEO of Maple Leaf Strings.

Bartel said Maple Leaf understands when a person is passionate about what they're selling, and it can be contagious. So, Maple Leaf Strings invests time into helping retailers brand Maple Leaf's products with a name that means something to the dealers. According to Bartel, the process is "a positive experience, and it creates an emotional bond with the customer and [the] product."

The idea behind the program is that buying a handmade instrument is personal, and for string musicians, brand names aren't important, Bartel said. "The more obscure [the instrument] is, the more a string player is interested in it."

Voters not only applauded Maple Leaf for these services, but also for the company's attentiveness and family oriented business mentality.

"They always go the extra mile," said one voter. **MI**



| BY KATIE KAILUS |

# MAKING STRATEGIC MOVES

*Smart deals keep Eastman Music Company on the forefront*

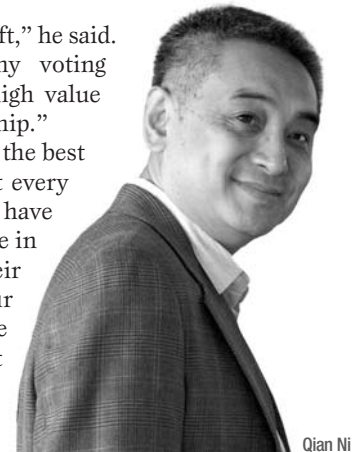
It's safe to say that Qian Ni and his business, Eastman Music Company, have come a long way since the early days. When Ni first started Eastman 24 years ago, he drove around to retailers across the country selling violins, violas and cellos out of the back of a truck. Today, the company has expanded by acquiring flute manufacturer Wm. S. Haynes Co. and brass manufacturer S.E. Shires Co. as well as signing its recent distribution deal with Backun clarinets. And that's just in the B&O segment — the company is also well known for its guitars.

When it comes to choosing which brands to acquire, Ni said the company tries to keep it simple. "We look for great products that we believe provide real value to musicians and [have] great people behind them who are

dedicated to being the best at their craft," he said.

And dealers have noticed. Many voting retailers selected Eastman for its "high value on the manufacturer/dealer partnership."

"Our goal as a company is to make the best musical instruments in the world, at every level," Ni said. "Haynes and Shires have some of the most talented craftspeople in our industry, and by combining their knowledge and experience with our teams throughout Eastman, we have been able to broaden our product lines to a larger market while improving the quality of all of our instruments." **MI**



Qian Ni



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# Reaching All MUSIC MAKERS



From left: Guitar Center's Michael Amkreutz, Wayne Colwell, Brian Berman, Frank Crowson and Darren Feldman.

## Guitar Center breaks down how it's identifying with a broader range of customers during its annual Media Day

**O**n Sept. 28, Guitar Center opened its doors to the media at its corporate headquarters in Westlake Village, California, for its 4th annual Guitar Center Media Day. GC executives gave reports on all aspects of the company, including the initiatives it has focused on over the past year, such as its warehouse reconfiguration, assortment rationalization and promotional diet. Management also provided an update on the one-year mark of its G.O.L.D. Standard initiative — an operational benchmark that ensures a “Grand Opening Look Daily.”

“I think we’ve been very successful in the G.O.L.D. initiative for the better part of this year,” said Michael Amkreutz, executive vice president of merchandising, marketing and e-commerce. “The whole reason behind it was to make the environment more inviting, to improve our customer satisfaction scores by being more open-minded about who shopped in our environment and to make it more conducive to music purchases and improving conversion in that retail environment.”

### Improving Product Knowledge Training

With most of the stores achieving the G.O.L.D. Standard, GC is now shifting its focus to the training of its sales associates to ensure a positive shopping experience across all Guitar Center locations.

“Last year, we were trying to create consistency and standards in the stores with the G.O.L.D. Standard,” said Wayne Colwell, executive vice president of stores for Guitar Center. “As we are moving forward, [we are focusing on] how we can create a solid sales team that is really knowledgeable about products and can help assist our customers along their musical journey. So, our real focus now is on our folks.”

Colwell said GC is working on developing a more robust training program so all employees have a strong product knowledge — especially when it comes to new gear.

“We are working on figuring out how to get 3,700 sales associates to wrap their mind around a new concept of a new product,” Colwell said. “We’re working on getting our sales force even more educated around the product itself.”

### Brand Repositioning

One of the largest initiatives for Guitar Center over the last year has been its brand repositioning, which focused on how the company could incorporate all the brands in the Guitar Center portfolio and build a suite of new tactics that are relevant to a broader audience.

“Last year, we [discussed] that our core customer was the iconic, rock loving, typically white male, and he was at the center of everything that Guitar Center did,” Amkreutz said. “We still romanticize that person and it’s still the bread and butter of the Guitar Center portfolio, but we recognize that just as retail is changing,

customers’ wants and needs and their ways of creating music are expanding, and it’s opening up music creation to a whole new generation of customers that we weren’t as relevant with as we would potentially like to be.”

Headed up by Frank Crowson, GC’s senior vice president of marketing, Guitar Center hired an outside company to survey a broad base of people, who identified as musicians, to get a better feel for how they should address their audience. As a result, GC has spent the better part of the last year figuring out how to be relevant across what it calls the “three G’s” — gender, generation and genre.

“We were sort of an older, ‘rock ’n’ roll dude’ sort of place and that is who our brand resonated with,” Crowson said. “Female customers and how they feel about Guitar Center are a huge priority for us. And so are different genres such as electronic music — pushing harder into that genre is important because it’s a huge part of the musician population and culture right now. We are highly focused on finding out how we can create a team that is more reflective of the musician base that we aspire to serve.”

Also through its research, GC discovered that not all the players it surveyed said they aspired to be rock stars. A majority stated they were just interested in creating their own music and enjoyed the music-creation process.

“When we went into this research, it was mind boggling how many people said, ‘Well no, actually I just want to be myself and play my own music. And I don’t necessarily want to be on stage. I just want to have fun,’” Amkreutz explained. “And, those reasons were overwhelmingly stronger than people wanting to be the next Jimmy Page. For some, being the next Page was absolutely relevant and true, but the overwhelming majority we found were those that were in it for the sheer creation of music.”

As a result, GC plans to incorporate some of the information it gleaned from the survey into future communication.

“We as a company and as a group believe that there is no such thing as too much music,” Crowson said. “We rally around the purpose to fill the world with music, and we’ll do that by helping people, inspiring people, and giving people whatever they need to play more. This will be the cornerstone and the building block of not only how we go to market as marketers and how we tell the stories that Guitar Center tells, but it will influence our team both digitally and physically, the products we carry, and the partnerships and the content that we create. It’s fundamentally important if



“We rally around the purpose to fill the world with music, and we’ll do that by helping people, inspiring people, and giving people whatever they need to play more.”

— Frank Crowson

we want to make a difference for our customers. You will see this reflected in the way we communicate and the way we show ourselves to the world. You will start to see a different Guitar Center in the near future.”

### Enhanced Web Operations

As part of its omnichannel strategy, Guitar Center has run many campaigns targeted to drive traffic to its website. Through these campaigns, however, the company found that the No. 1 price match competitor for Guitar Center stores was GuitarCenter.com. To fix this, all of Guitar Center’s outlets — in-store, mobile and web — now feature the same prices and campaigns.

“It was the highest price-match on the list, even ahead of Amazon,” Amkreutz said. “So, now we are offering our customers the same great experience no matter where or how they choose to interact with the brand.”

Beginning this holiday season, Guitar Center will add dropship capabilities by partnering up with several multibillion-dollar companies allowing the company to roll out hundreds of thousands of new and additional products for its customers.

“It will be seamless for the customer because it will still be on the site and they will be able to get it whereas in the past they used to have to wait a few weeks for a product to come back into stock,” said Jeff Wisot, GC’s vice president of marketing and e-commerce.

Also recently launched is GC’s first-ever mobile app — which will include push messaging, a bar code scanner and product alerts.

“What is most popular on GuitarCenter.com with our customers is the used inventory,” Wisot said. “Customers are constantly checking it. So, if they want a 1978 red Les Paul and one of these models comes back into the store, they are going to get a push notification via the app on their phone telling them that the guitar is stock and have all the information they need. This works for both new and used products.”

Guitar Center has also incorporated the popularity of its Instagram page into its mobile app.

“We’re going to be taking the images on Instagram that customers love most and put them on our app,” Wisot said. “Customers will then be able to click on the images they love and be brought to the product’s page where they can get prices, read reviews, engage and zoom into it. They will be able to seamlessly click once and are then able to look and purchase the product.”

Additionally, Guitar Center has partnered with Uber to offer its customers an easy way to get to their local GC location. All store pages will soon feature a “Catch a Ride With Uber” button that will link to the shoppers’ Uber account. GC will not pay for the Uber ride but will provide a convenient one-click way for customers to get to their local Guitar Center.

“A lot of our shoppers don’t have cars, and they need a larger car to bring their gear with them or pick it up,” Wisot said. “This is a first launch, so most retailers in any industry don’t have it. Right now consumers are really engaging with Uber, and we will be the first to launch [something] like this.” **MI**

### GC Gets ‘On Stage’

Following the Media Day presentation, Guitar Center hosted its first “On Stage With Vince Gill” competition at The Mint in Los Angeles. After thousands of online submissions, five finalists performed alongside country music legend Vince Gill for the opportunity to win \$10,000, studio time, top-of-the-line gear and an opening slot on one of Gill’s upcoming U.S. tour stops.

Taken by all five contestants, Gill announced that he would invite them all to join him on stage during his upcoming tour. “Choosing a winner was really difficult for me, not just because each finalist was so talented, but also because I truly believe that music should be about collaboration, not competition,” Gill said.

At the end of the night, Gill crowned Claudio Tristano the grand prize winner.

“I hope, and truly believe, that this could be a turning point in my career as a professional musician that will allow me to be recognized by the music industry,” Tristano said. **MI**



Contestant winner Claudio Tristano with Vince Gill.



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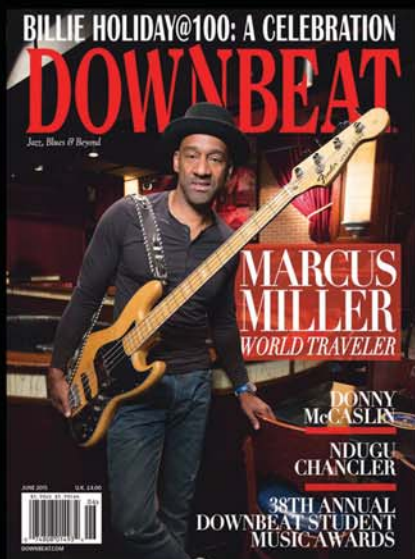
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# FROM THE TOP

INTERVIEWED BY MICHAEL GALLANT

## IAN ROBINSON | BLACKSTAR

### HOW DO YOU START YOUR DAY?

With a hearty breakfast and a cycle to work. I generally keep my [schedule] free from 8-10 a.m. because I like to walk around and talk to people from various departments in the office. Every day at 10 a.m., we have a directorial chat where I go through my [schedule] with key directors to touch base on the priorities for the day. Within the company, each team has an individual huddle in the morning to make sure everybody points in the right direction.

### HOW DID YOUR BACKGROUND LEAD YOU TOWARD CO-FOUNDING A GUITAR AMPLIFIER COMPANY?

I've played guitar since I was a kid and was also quite academic, so I studied electronics for my degree. The only reason I chose that field was actually because I had an interest in designing guitar amplifiers. I was very fortunate to get a job at Marshall Amplification after I finished my studies. In my time there, I met the other founders of Blackstar — Bruce Keir, Richard Frost and Paul Hayhoe — and we worked really well together. I was there for eight years before we decided to move on. We had a real passion for new product development and innovation and felt that, after the privilege of working at an established company like Marshall, it was time to go and do it alone.

### DID YOU FEEL PREPARED, JUMPING FROM A MAJOR MI BRAND TO STARTING YOUR OWN COMPANY?

The eight years at Marshall provided very good grounding for the business. Even though Marshall is an older, established business, it's still a small business in many ways. In a small business, if you're committed and dynamic and you put your hand up, you will get responsibility. We got involved in all aspects of the business, things like pricing, margins and marketing strategy. It was all really good schooling for us when we started Blackstar.

### WHAT WAS THE DYNAMIC LIKE BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR OTHER CO-FOUNDERS?

We were in a band together and never thought we'd make it as a band. But as a company, we thought we'd have a chance. [Laughs.] Individually, we had our key strengths when it came to technology and marketing and

had lots of ideas. I have other friends who run businesses and it was interesting contrasting my experience with theirs. When you start up something with a group, it's amazing how much more quickly you can get stuff done than when you start up something on your own.

### HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO GET YOUR AMPS READY FOR SALE?

We started the business in 2004 and it took us three-and-a-half years. Most of that time was spent trying to work out how to fund the business. In the end, we introduced the company at Frankfurt Musikmesse in 2007. Just a month before, we had managed to persuade two friends to help us fund going to the trade show. So, we did the trade show running on money from our friends and from ourselves. One month after the show, we were able to secure institutional funding from additional private individuals, a small development fund, and a bank.

### THAT SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF WORK LOOKING FOR INVESTMENT.

When you start up and are selling into a mature market like guitar amplification, even if your products are brilliant, it's quite niche-y; it can be a challenge for investors to understand why your company is different. It took time to get people on board and to believe in the plan. The funny thing is, we've learned that people are prepared to fund you when you've already got an order and a product, but getting an order and product without funding is the challenge! For the first three-and-a-half years, we developed prototypes in a garden shed, completely self funded in start-up mode.

### HOW DID YOU STAY SANE THROUGH THOSE FIRST LEAN YEARS?

You're making a massive assumption there! [Laughs.] With the support of a fantastic family, wife, friends, and the four of us, the team. We are very strong together. There's a massive advantage of starting a thing like this as a group. We go through the pain together. We still have very good camaraderie between us, as we did in those early days. It was us against the world. In the U.K., we call it "trench mentality." That's what kept us sane and focused.





## THE DETAILS

**IAN ROBINSON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, BLACKSTAR AMPLIFICATION**

**HQ:** Northampton, England

**Founded:** 2004

**Employees:** 40

**Best-selling Product:** In volume, Fly 3; in value, ID:Core 10

**Fun Fact:** A trained electrical engineer and longtime guitarist, Robinson is also an avid fisherman, active taekwondo practitioner and fan of the Manchester United soccer team.

**CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING THE RIGHT TEAM, BEYOND YOUR CO-FOUNDERS?**

Having the right people is very important, and it's not just Blackstar. We've got great partners worldwide, including Korg USA; they are close partners both from a product point of view and a commercial point of view. As far as the team here, I'm very lucky to be managing director for such a successful business, but I couldn't do it without everybody working bloody hard every day!

**WHEN TRYING TO ENLIST INVESTORS, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THAT BLACKSTAR IS DIFFERENT?**

We have key innovations within our products that allow guitarists greater flexibility to create a wider variety of sounds. We are all about people finding their own individual sounds, rather than creating a classic sound or a model thereof. We don't do modeling, and we don't have the 50-year heritage that we're benefitting from — or finding restrictive, for that matter. Our products just sound better than other guitar amplifiers. Sound quality can be a very subjective thing, but in terms of the way we approach design development, we are very careful and methodical.

**HOW SO?**

We benchmark all of our designs against the competition and are very clear on the direction we want to go. We have sonic reviews of our products and A/B them against reference benchmarks in the market. We run everything through a series of objective tests using a sonic committee of 10 or 15 skilled listeners to make sure that, when we say that we are offering a sonic benefit, we can prove that we are indeed doing that.

**DO YOU MANUFACTURE IN THE U.K. OR OVERSEAS?**

When we started the business, we made a conscious decision to build products within the U.K. but, at the time that we were looking for contract manufacturers, we surveyed the market here and couldn't find a supplier that we were satisfied with. We had great connections with manufacturers in Asia and the quality that we were able to achieve was at least as good as anything that we could find in the U.K. So, we made the decision — and it was a brave decision

in some ways for us, a game changer — to have everything made overseas. Everything that we do here in the U.K. is focused on design, development and business. Nowadays we have everything made in three great factories in China.

**WHAT WAS THE SPECIFIC MOTIVATION TO MANUFACTURE IN CHINA?**

First, to stay competitive and second, factories in China can have brilliant quality control on their end. As long as you define the standard, you can get 100-percent repeatability on products. We visit China at least a couple times a month, so there's somebody on the ground all the time to keep an eye on things. And in the early stages of product development, we go over there and discuss the manufacturing with our partners in China. Then our operations and production leaders go out to oversee initial production. We never do production or pre-production without our U.K. people out there testing things from a sonic point of view. They sign off on the golden benchmark and then, once we have that gold standard, the manufacturers are very good at repeating the same thing, over and over, at a very high level of quality.

**WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR BLACKSTAR?**

We want to continue to develop superior products that keep us at the forefront of amplifier design.

Our real drive and passion is for creating the best possible sound, and we will never take our eye from that goal. The market is challenging, and we're always looking for new opportunities to grow our business, so in the future, we will be looking for diversification to help us open more of an addressable market. But first and foremost, our passion is to design the best guitar amplifiers that allow guitarists to be creative and express themselves.

**IF NOT MUSIC, WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?**

Running another business of some description. I enjoy what I do in terms of being managing director. The entrepreneurial aspects attract me and the other members of the Blackstar team. We love the guitar amp business, but we love being in business, period. The exciting thing about running a business is being able to be creative. Anything that satisfies that need to be creative would be of interest to us as a team.

'WE ARE ALL ABOUT PEOPLE FINDING THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS, RATHER THAN CREATING A CLASSIC SOUND OR MODEL THEREOF.'

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## MARKET DRIVEN

Expect records to fall this morning as The NAMM Show 2016 kicks off. "We're seeing a record number of exhibiting companies, especially in the growth areas of technology and boutique handcrafted instruments," said Joe Lamond, NAMM president and CEO. The UpBeat Daily crew will be catching up with many of these record setters during the show. Here are a few we visited before the show started!

**BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS**

- Joe Lamond's Joe Lamond and a host of game-changers for this year's opening NAMM U Sessions this morning. **Page 118**
- CADLine Delists. **Page 32**
- Spyllor's Alien Legacy? **Page 54**
- Recording King's Beauty **Page 68**
- Dream's Tolar **Page 94**

The Official NAMM Show Publication

# UpBeat

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## GAME CHANGERS

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# GEAR



## FENDER DELUXE SERIES

Fender has launched the Deluxe series of electric guitars, designed for seasoned and experienced players looking for superior quality and enhanced performance at an accessible price point. The Fender Deluxe series adds 10 innovative new models based on classic guitar and bass designs, infused with modern advancements and spec upgrades, to the family of Fender electrics. Marrying the timelessly elegant style and authentic Fender tone, the Deluxe series offers high-quality instruments that deliver crisp and articulate sound, and includes the Deluxe Strat, Deluxe Strat HSS, Deluxe Roadhouse Strat, Deluxe Nashville Tele, Deluxe Tele Thinline, Deluxe Active Precision Bass Special, Deluxe Active Jazz Bass, Deluxe Active Jazz Bass V, Deluxe Active Dimension Bass and Deluxe Active Dimension Bass V models.

{fender.com}

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### PRESTIGE ZEBRAWOOD

The latest addition to Prestige Guitars' Premier series is the ZebraWood, which features a solid mahogany body with a 3/4-inch solid carved ZebraWood top. The neck is comprised of three pieces of solid mahogany, with the center piece reverse-grained for greater stability. Each ZebraWood features a set of Seymour Duncan Pearly Gates pickups, which are an Alnico 2 humbucker that packs focused midrange with unique sizzle and growl.

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

### CHARVEL GUTHRIE GOVAN SIGNATURE MODEL

Charvel is now offering a limited run of the Guthrie Govan Signature model that shares many of the unique features of his original model, but in a Britannica Red finish trimmed with a black burst. The San Dimas body has a bird's eye maple top with a thin, clear matte finish and a specially contoured heel (sans neck plate) for easy access to the upper reaches of the fingerboard. The bolt-on neck is quartersawn flame maple with a "caramelized" heat and drying treatment that makes it sound and feel much older, with graphite reinforcement, hand-rubbed urethane gel on the back of the neck, and a convenient truss rod adjustment wheel at the body end. Most unusually for a San Dimas model, the compound-radius (12 to 16 inches) flame-maple fingerboard spans two octaves, with the same caramelized treatment as the neck, 24 jumbo stainless steel frets, and special maple dot inlays with ebony borders.

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

### LAKA BASS UKULELES

Laka has released its very first bass ukuleles, the VUB60EA and VUB90EA. Made using a combination of mahogany and sapele and featuring a mahogany neck and fretless rosewood fingerboard, the VUB60EA bass ukulele is easy to play and provides impressive tone both acoustically and through the onboard Fishman Clasica II preamp system. The VUB90EA's acacia koa body is elegantly set off with black binding and abalone rosette. Its fretless rosewood fingerboard is easy to play thanks to the Aquilla bass uke strings, providing an almost 'double bass' feel. The Fishman Clasica II preamp system perfectly captures its unique tones.

{[jhs.co.uk/brands/laka](http://jhs.co.uk/brands/laka)}



**PEAVEY  
MINIMEGA**

Peavey has debuted the MiniMEGA 1000 Watt bass amplifier head. Delivering classic Peavey tone, the MiniMEGA produces a full and rich sound in a compact package that weighs in at only 9 pounds. Using technology not found in other bass amps, the MiniMEGA represents a new level of compact bass amplifier performance. Peavey's proprietary Kosmos enhancement provides increased bass impact, while the exclusive psychoacoustic low-end enhancement adds bass without overburdening speakers. The MiniMEGA contains additional modern features such as a built-in compression with defeat switch, a 4-band EQ with Punch and Bright switches, and semi-parametric mid controls with narrow Q controls. [\[peavey.com\]](http://peavey.com)




**LIZARD SPIT  
V.I.P. VINTAGE  
GUITAR POLISH**

Lizard Spit's V.I.P. vintage guitar polish has become an essential item for owners of older guitars and is specially formulated to protect and nourish nitrocellulose lacquer finishes found on most vintage-stringed instruments. [\[playersmusic.com/lizard-spit-products.html\]](http://playersmusic.com/lizard-spit-products.html)

**TWO-ROCK  
CARDIFF**

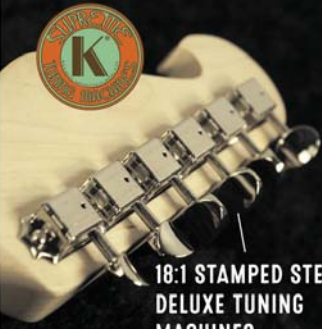
Two-Rock's Cardiff is a 15-watt EL84 amp with less compression, fuller/fatter midrange and stout low-end. The front panel of the Cardiff features a single input jack, bass, treble and volume control. A Contour Control provides an active band sweep for maintaining pre-amp tone control settings. This allows for global adjustment to compensate for differences in room acoustics, speaker cabinets or bright-to-dark guitars. The Cardiff lets you feel, control and shape your tone. [\[two-rock.com\]](http://two-rock.com)



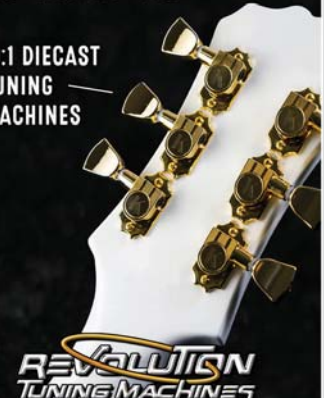


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### FISHMAN

#### TOWNSEND, CARPENTER FLUENCE SIGNATURE PICKUP SETS

Fishman is now shipping the Devin Townsend and Stephen Carpenter Fluence Signature pickup sets. New Fluence technology allows leading artists, such as Townsend and Carpenter, to create and shape multiple voices that evoke the unique tones and voices in their musical imaginations. A set of Fluence Signature pickups incorporates two voices each player had been searching for and might have achieved across multiple instruments but are now instantly available at the flick of a switch.

{fishman.com}



### SUPRO

#### 1600 SUPREME

An all-tube tribute to rock guitar icon Keith Richards, Supro's 1600 Supreme is a historic "Classic Series" replica of the Chicago-made 1- by 10-inch amplifier used extensively by the Rolling Stones' guitarist. The Supreme projects loud, clear and punchy tone with unrivalled clarity, touch dynamics and low noise floor — even when pushed into glorious 6V6 power-tube overdrive.

{suprousa.com}



### W-MUSIC

#### ROCKCASE SUPERIOR DELUXE LINE

W-Music's Superior Deluxe line cases are high-quality, curved-shape wood cases available for various acoustic guitar models. The line was specially designed for the measurements of the Framus Legacy acoustic guitars, however, they also fit a wide variety of other manufacturer's guitars. Featuring an arched lid with foam-rubber padding and an inner lining of long hair plush, instruments are cushioned and protected on all sides. Each model is available with brown or black outer artificial leather lining.

{w-distribution.de}





**D'ADDARIO  
UKULELE HUMIDIFIER PRO**

D'Addario's Ukulele Humidifier Pro is designed to fit in the soundhole of a ukulele. Based on the design of the company's Guitar Humidifier Pro, this version contains an easy-to-remove rubber cap and a hydrophilic sponge in a smaller size that's ideal for a ukulele. The humidifier's stopper provides a tight seal when in place and lets you check the sponge status without removal of the unit. The specialized sponge holds 12 times its dry weight in water, far more than an ordinary sponge, which allows for longer periods between refills, as well as increases protection in drier environments. Suspended by the strings, the humidifier releases moisture evenly and slowly inside the ukulele yet never touches the instrument's body.

{daddario.com}



**RECORDING KING  
EZ TONE SERIES**

Recording King's EZ Tone series guitars are now available in a satin Brownburst finish. The satin Brownburst color accentuates the guitars' body shapes, especially when combined with the ivory bound soundhole, all using the EZ Tone series' ultra thin finish. All EZ Tone guitars feature a solid spruce top and one of the thinnest open-pore poly finishes ever, married with finely tuned action for instruments that resonate freely and deliver classic acoustic tone with excellent projection. The full-line EZ Tone series is available in two configurations, EZ Tone Plus and EZ Tone - EZ Tone Plus all-solid guitars are available in dreadnought, 12-fret 000 and 0 versions.

{recordingking.com}



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## YAMAHA TF-RACK

Yamaha has introduced the TF-Rack, a powerful, compact rack-mount version of the company's acclaimed TF series digital mixing consoles. TF-Rack offers all of the features found in TF series desktop models released in 2015 and is intended for smaller or more portable venues, particularly when a proper mix position may not be available. Like its desktop counterparts, TF-Rack is compatible with TF StageMix for wireless Wi-Fi remote mixing via iPad and the MonitorMix app for aux send mixing via most smartphones or tablet PCs. [yamahacommercialaudiosystems.com](http://yamahacommercialaudiosystems.com)



## QSC TOUCHMIX-30 PRO

With 32 mixing channels (24 mic/line, 6 line, stereo USB) and 16 outputs, QSC's TouchMix-30 Pro offers signal management flexibility for a wide range of applications. Ideal for musicians, production professionals, and bands as well as live performance venues, TouchMix-30 Pro sets a new standard for performance in a compact digital mixer with features and functionality that will satisfy the most demanding professional, while also providing an intuitive workflow that delivers great results, quickly and easily, to users at every experience level. [qsc.com](http://qsc.com)



## THE MUSIC LINK KLOTZ

The Music Link has added two additional colors to its KIK cable offerings from Klotz. Green and yellow color options have been added to a roster that already includes black, red, blue and pink. KIK by Klotz are professional-grade cables that are hand soldered and assembled at the Klotz factory in Germany. KIK cables feature Klotz's in-house developed connectors that offer durability and strain relief. Klotz cables are exclusively distributed in the United States by The Music Link. [store.themusiclink.net](http://store.themusiclink.net)

## ZOOM

### F4

Zoom has unveiled the F4, a six-input/eight-track field recorder that offers creators quality sound at an affordable price. The F4 has four low-noise mic preamps, precise time code and a solid metal build. The F4 is equipped with high-quality mic preamps, offering pristine recording and playback at resolutions up to 24-bit/192 kHz. For precise syncing, the F4 uses a Temperature Compensated Crystal Oscillator (TCXO) that generates time code at 0.2 ppm accuracy — a first at this price point.

{[zoom-na.com](http://zoom-na.com)}



## DBTECHNOLOGIES

### VIO

dBTechnologies' VIO is a large-format, active line array platform with new technology. Equipped with polyurea-coated 18-mm multiplex wood enclosures and amplifier rain covers, VIO's line array modules are sturdy, lightweight and ready for all types of events including outdoor festivals and concerts.

An integrated three-point rigging system offers precise adjustments and fast, one-person setup while VIO's specially designed transport carts speed system load-in/load-out.

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

## BLUE MICROPHONES

### ENCORE 100, ENCORE 200

Blue Microphones introduced an all-black design for the enCORE 100 and enCORE 200 live microphones to complement the full enCORE lineup. The newly restyled enCORE 100 and enCORE 200 provide a dark, sleek aesthetic. Artists can further customize their microphone with included grille color options to match the character of their performance or stage setup. Both microphones include two grilles: the new matte black option, plus the original chrome grille for enCORE 100 and original rose gold grille for enCORE 200. Bringing studio sound to the stage, Blue's enCORE line of live mics continues to deliver performances from up-and-coming artists to live performance veterans.

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



## SHURE

### MXA910, MXA310

Shure's Microflex Advance Ceiling (MXA910) and Table Array (MXA310) microphones are now shipping. This portfolio of networked ceiling and table array microphones, audio interfaces, and control software for enhanced A/V conferencing integrate seamlessly into meeting space aesthetics. With the ability to flush-mount the MXA910 alongside standard ceiling tiles and the innovative "toroid" polar pattern in the MXA310, these microphones offer a dynamic experience.

{[shure.com/americas](http://shure.com/americas)}



### TOONTRACK EZKEYS LINE

Toontrack announced the release of two products in the EZkeys line: the EZkeys String Machine and the Dream Pop EZkeys MIDI pack. The String Machine sound library is based around sampled mid-1970s Solina String Ensemble synthesizer and a collection of sounds sampled from several other classic machines as well; close to 70 mix-ready presets are included. The Dream Pop EZkeys MIDI pack was influenced by the genre of dream pop but is loosely based around the EZkeys String Machine instrument. [\[toontrack.com\]](http://toontrack.com)



### AIM GIFTS GLOVES

Keep musician's hands warm this winter with functional and music-themed gloves from AIM Gifts. The three best-selling gloves are fingerless, stretch and touch screen. [\[aimgifts.com\]](http://aimgifts.com)



### ROLAND SYSTEM-8 PLUG-OUT

Roland has released the System-8 plug-out synthesizer, an advanced performance instrument that features the latest generation of the Analog Circuit Behavior (ACB) technology. The System-8 delivers a wide range of sounds inspired by over four decades of legendary Roland synths. The synth's intuitive panel is filled with knobs, buttons and sliders for hands-on sound creation and performance expression. First developed by Roland for the AIRA series, ACB technology powers eight voices of polyphony, three oscillators, high-resolution filters and versatile LFOs. [\[roland.com\]](http://roland.com)



### MANHASSET STANDS LED LAMP II

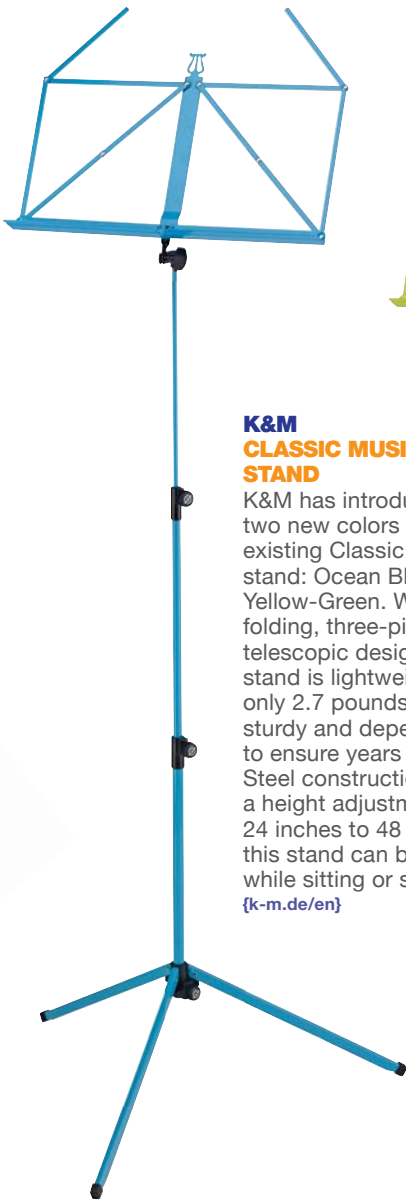
Manhasset Stands has introduced the LED Lamp II, which features 15 LED bulbs that are built into the construction for glare-free, full-width, audience shielded illumination in an attractive design. The LED Lamp II has three settings — high, low and off. The two settings of illumination allow more flexibility for the individual needs of musicians when reading their music or for the amount of light needed as required for the venue where they are performing. The new lamps fit easily and securely onto Manhasset stands and many other models, with ample clearance for taller music scores.

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

### K&M CLASSIC MUSIC STAND

K&M has introduced two new colors to the existing Classic music stand: Ocean Blue and Yellow-Green. With a folding, three-piece telescopic design, this stand is lightweight at only 2.7 pounds yet sturdy and dependable to ensure years of use. Steel construction with a height adjustment of 24 inches to 48 inches, this stand can be used while sitting or standing.

{[k-m.de/en](http://k-m.de/en)}

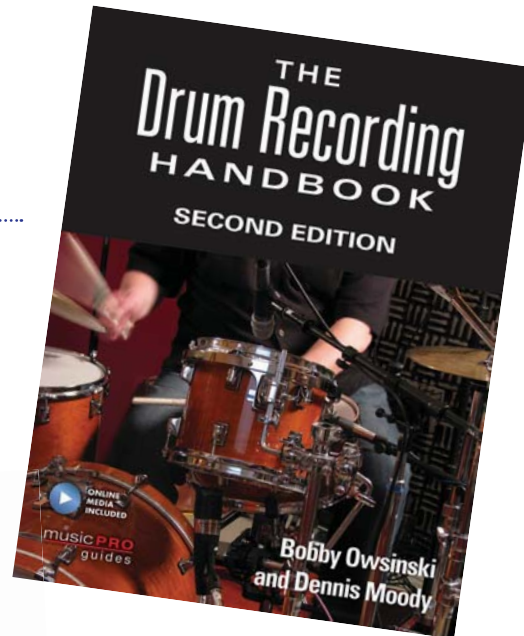


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### HAL LEONARD

#### THE DRUM RECORDING HANDBOOK, 2ND EDITION

Drums are the foundation of just about any kind of music, and a great drum sound is essential to a great recording. But, that sound can be elusive. *The Drum Recording Handbook, Second Edition*, uncovers the secrets of making amazing drum recordings, even when using inexpensive gear. The book explains typical mics and miking techniques used by the pros to get great sounds (and how to get those same results without the high-end gear), and can't-miss mic placement for all drums, cymbals, room mics, and many more. [halleonardbooks.com](http://halleonardbooks.com)



### ZILDJIAN PLANET Z CYMBALS

Zildjian announced that its Planet Z cymbals are now available in the United States. Planet Z is made of a proprietary nickel-silver alloy that delivers a sonically superior cymbal at an economical price point and gives drummers a definitive “good-better-best” selection with the ZBT B8 alloy (92 percent copper, 8 percent tin) and the new S Family B12 alloy instruments (88 percent copper, 12 percent tin). Zildjian Planet Z cymbals are available in four popular cymbal sets and as singles in a 10-inch Splash and 18-inch China. Like all Zildjian cymbals, the Planet Z series features a two-year limited warranty. [zildjian.com](http://zildjian.com)



### ATTACK DRUMHEADS FROST BITE SERIES

Attack Drumheads has launched the Frost Bite series. These 1,000-gauge Dynaflex film drumheads are given an additional thin coating. The result is a drumhead that's loud when required yet extremely responsive at lower volumes — making it great for brush work. For snare drums there's a 14-inch Frost Bite No Overtone model, with 3 inches of double coating around the edge to cut out unwanted overtones. [attack-drumheads.com](http://attack-drumheads.com)



### CHAUVET COLORADO 1-QUAD ZOOM VW

The COLORado 1-Quad Zoom VW from Chauvet has a high-output fixture that offers a variable white color temperature range of 2800K to 9000K and a full output color temperature of 5000K, allowing designers to tune in their ideal color temperature for a wide variety of application. Offering full IP65 protection, the product can be used outdoors with an IP rated 5-pin DMX cable without whip adaptors required. Performance features include smooth dimming with selectable curves and 16-bit capacity and zoom and color-mixing control via DMX or from an on board display. [\[chauvetlighting.com\]](http://chauvetlighting.com)



### NUMARK WS-100

Numark has introduced the WS-100 digital wireless diversity microphone system. Recognizing that performers want the freedom of mobility, Numark's WS-100 microphone has a dual-antenna diversity system that ensures interference-free, consistent and reliable operation within a 200-foot range. Independent digital ID eliminates signal crosstalk, while the signal-to-noise ration of 96 dB and wide-range frequency response of 50-18 kHz improve sound quality. This wireless microphone system takes AA batteries and is designed for heavy-duty use under difficult conditions. [\[numark.com\]](http://numark.com)

### ELEKTRALITE

#### DAZER DOWNLIGHT

Featuring a design based on the Dazr fixture, elektraLite's Dazer Downlight puts the same power and intensity in an architectural form factor designed to fit more distinct environments. The light has 36 five-watt LEDs and is available in Warm White and RGBA versions, as well as a variety of LED array options and custom body colors upon request. The Dazer Downlight sports a terminal strip for data and screw terminals for power, and an integrated yoke allows for sloped-ceiling mounting. Plus, the light offers up to 90 percent energy savings.

[\[myelektralite.com\]](http://myelektralite.com)



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## On Maintaining Great Service:

“Our motto is, ‘Always do the right thing.’ If that motto is followed, you’ll deliver great customer service. It’s really that simple. If I had to break it down further to just one word, it would be: listening. We take the time to truly listen to the customer — to hear their concerns, requirements, applications, and needs, and to understand the rest of their rig and how they use it. This is the essential component of customer service. Listening and understanding allows our service team members and sales engineers to realize what needs must be met to satisfy any issues, what the customer is passionate about, and how to connect and build the relationship with the customer.”

*Chuck Surack  
Sweetwater*



## On a Balanced Online Presence:

“We are a single-location brick-and-mortar store that respects the power of an online presence and the reach that [it] can generate. Exponential growth can be had if you concentrate on what matters and keep the customer first. Our goal is to give people the experience of our showroom from anywhere in the world.”

*Andrew Yonke  
Chicago Music Exchange*

## On Handling Mistakes:

“There are always challenges and mistakes that are made, and it’s the way that we respond to those things after they happen — or how we proactively respond when we see something that’s about to happen — that makes a difference. That’s the core of our philosophy, and we talk about it every single day.”

*Mark Goff  
Chops Percussion*

## ON KNOWING YOUR TARGET CUSTOMER:

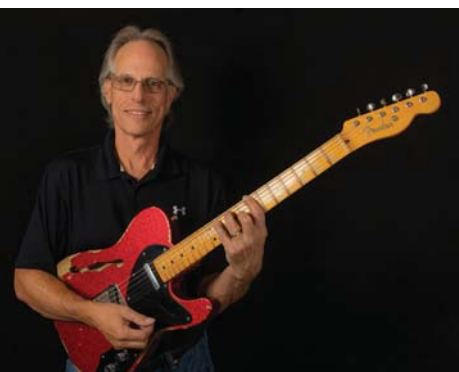
“The school music category continues to be pretty exciting with new products and new opportunities to leverage existing products in ways that interest our customers. For example, we launched a campaign in October about home recording for wind instrument players. And, while there are plenty of resources online that cover home recording, we can look at this activity through the lens of the wind-instrument player [who] is our unique customer. Our video team produced a great video that gives a 5-minute overview featuring a saxophone player walking through the home-recording process and the actual final process.”

*Kurt Witt  
Woodwind & Brasswind*

## On Selecting What Brands to Stock:

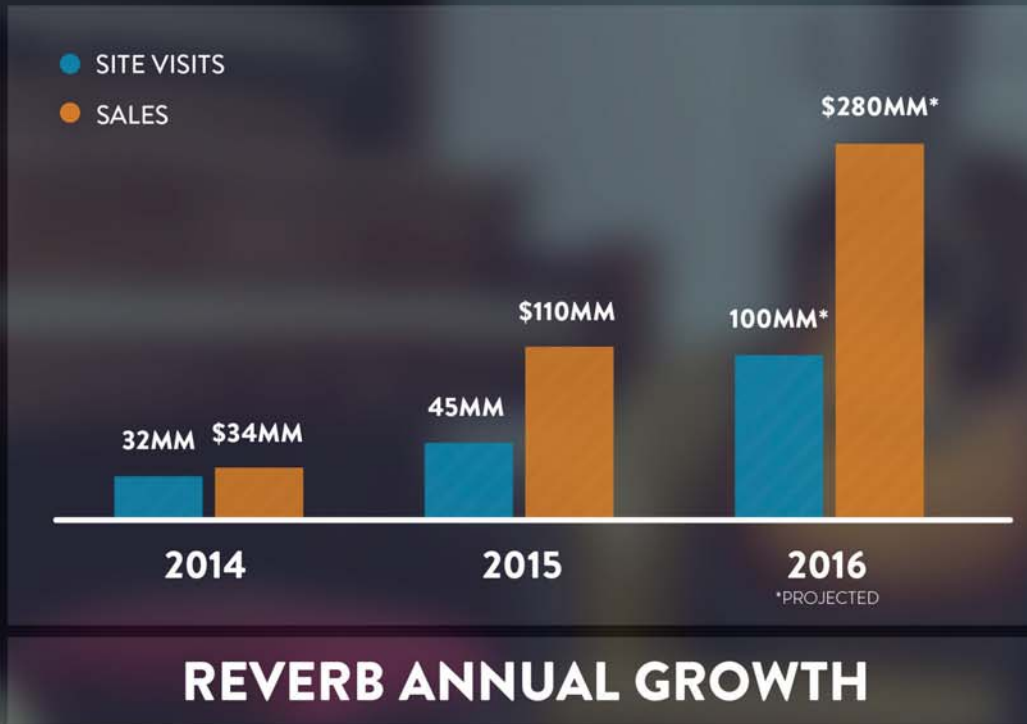
“We look for honor, integrity, and really inspiring instruments, as well as the sound of the instruments — that’s what really excites people. They want to be moved by the instruments. It’s not about what can make the highest margin; it’s about what moves us as players. We carry a very finite selection of instruments. Sometimes they are very unknown products, but if we like the ethics, it is something we pursue.”

*Steve Mesple  
Wildwood Guitars*



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