

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

# The Next Big Thing

Depending on how long you've been in the music industry, you'll probably remember times when influences outside our direct control drove business. Whether you were around to enjoy the moment, you've undoubtedly heard about The Beatles' first appearance on "The Ed Sullivan Show." I remember my dad and I arriving at the store the next day to see people lined up outside. We suddenly had more business than we knew how to handle. The public had an insatiable thirst for guitars — and manufacturers couldn't crank them out fast enough.



**You don't need another Beatle mania or DX7 to energize a product category**

Some years later, the movie "Deliverance" started a feeding frenzy for banjos. "Dueling Banjos" created unexpected business for unsuspecting retailers, who were largely unprepared for the onslaught.

During guitar and banjo madness, Dr. John Chowning was doing academic research at Stanford University, creating a patent that would, in the 1980s, become a commercial bonanza for Yamaha and music retailers all over the world. To this day, retailers, manufacturers and reps view the DX7 as the holy grail of music products, the gold standard by which all others aspire. I wish I had a dollar for every time a rep came to my store with a new product and said, "This is going to be the next DX7."

But few products ever measured up. I can't help but remember those times when I had literally hundreds of people with deposits on DX7s at extraordinary profit margins. And once you've experienced something like the DX7 or The Beatles or the ADAT — or any of the other music industry revolutions — it's hard to not get caught in the trap of waiting for the next great wave. But here's the problem with waves. On rare occasion, they come in a steady flow. (Think DX7, M1, Mirage.) But more often, there are enormous gaps between

the big ones, during which time you can find yourself adrift at sea.

## CREATING YOUR NEXT CASH COW

You can't wait for the next big thing to come along. When it happens, it's a fabulous bonus, but depending on someone or something else to drive business is a formula for failure. I hear

the laments all the time: "There are no gotta-have products," or "There are no new guitar heroes." Get over it, and do something to control your own destiny. There are plenty of opportunities to create growth without the chance outside influence.

Here's an example. My company makes a purpose-built Nashville-tuned guitar, which uses the high strings of a 12-string set. In essence, every guitarist is a potential customer for the instrument, and yet only a small portion of guitarists even know such a thing exists. I have dealers who say, "No one asks for these guitars," while others make an effort to put them in the hands of each and every customer. The latter group sells a *lot* of Nashville-tuned guitars. The former group only sells to the occasional customer who responds to our advertising.

We are living in a time with no shortage of great products. Pick one you and your associates believe in, and become its champion. Learn everything there is to learn about it, and show it to anyone with a pulse. You may be surprised how many sales you can make through the passion that comes from truly understanding and evangelizing a product. It's not quite The Beatles, but it's completely within your control. **MI**

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