

# IDEAS

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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLUM

## GOING? OR ... GONE?

How many NAMM shows have you attended? For me, Winter NAMM 2014 will be number 91.

Let me just tell you, that's a lot of lunches leaning on the convention center trash cans!

I started as a young kid, tagging along with my parents to Chicago, and walking from room to room in the Conrad Hilton to see each exciting exhibit. The big guys took multi-room suites, but most displays occupied a single hotel room with the bed removed. It was such a thrill to see my musical heroes conducting demos in the close confines of a hotel room and a blast to try out the latest gear. But it was more than star power and gear envy that made those early shows so important to me. I was being molded into a member of the society we call the music products industry.

### EVERYONE GREW UP

The show grew and eventually graduated to the convention center format we know today. Exhibits became more elaborate, as did the demonstrations. I recall getting so excited that I couldn't wait to get back to my



store to start selling. I saw the Yamaha exhibit in the lower level of McCormick Place where Toto demonstrated the brand new DX7, and holy cow did I make money on that product, because I happened to be there and recognized the opportunity. I can only imagine the impact on the course of my business if I had decided that it "cost too much" to attend that show.

Not long later, as some started to whine about the "wake on the lake," I scored an invitation to visit the private suite of Ray Kurzweil for the unveiling of the K250. While my competitors scratched their heads trying to figure out how to catch up in the red-hot keyboard craze at

the time, I just kept enjoying one exclusive product after the next. At that same trade show, I had breakfast one morning with a group of fellow retailers from around the country, and went home with enough great ideas to pay for the trip to the show one-hundred-fold.

### THE PRICE OF ABSENCE

Despite all my NAMM show successes, I guess I just came to take it for granted. Perhaps the starry-eyed amazement of such a spectacle started to feel commonplace. And because of this, I made the unfortunate decision in the summer of 2007 to skip the summer show in Austin, Texas. I had a dozen reasons to justify my decision at the time ... the cost, the time, other commitments, the less-than-stellar turnout the year prior.

But I was dead wrong. Skipping that show was a costly lesson learned. I allowed myself and my company to fall out of the mainstream; to miss the important networking opportunities; to lose the advantage of my own keen observations of new products, product and business trends; and to miss the always-valuable NAMM Professional

Development sessions. With that costly decision, I lost my edge.

### JUST ONE MORE THING

Did that decision matter? Did it change that course of history? Well, here's a simple morsel for your consideration: I closed my business by the end of 2008! Coincidental? Well, it would be naïve to think that one NAMM show could have reversed the string of issues that eventually caused my demise.

But what if I had run into just one industry colleague there, who had one great idea that could have helped me? What if the Breakfast of Champions provided one pearl of wisdom that I could have put to work to reverse a crisis situation? There's no way of knowing if anything at that show might have helped me. The only thing for certain is that not attending guaranteed that I'd get nothing out of the show.

I sincerely hope to see you at the show. Don't do it for me — do it for you! **MI**

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