

# IDEAS



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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## KEEP SUMMER NAMM

I came back from the 2009 Summer NAMM show exhilarated. Every year, my conviction grows firmer that the naysayers are best ignored. The experience reminded me of a really good party where you walk out realizing that you had a great time, shared your soul and learned something, versus the superficial fête where the players gather to be seen and transparent presence trounces fulfillment.

Many big vendors abandoned the show in the interest of short-term fiscal efficiencies. Dealers shunned attending with similar short-sighted cost-cutting. My business partner and I, on the contrary, enjoyed the opportunity to meet new-blood exhibitors and pump palms with aggressive, optimistic fellow dealers. Much as we like the sensory-overload winter show, this was a contrasting opportunity to see the forest *and* the trees.

**We felt significant.** NAMM went out of its way to make this show independent-friendly, and it didn't go unnoticed. Plenty of educational sessions had been set up for us, with opportunities to link up with other independents.



**Summer NAMM was a party where only the cool people came**

We even felt like the exhibitors themselves were wired to service us. We appreciated the "Chairman's Reception" and the opportunity to socialize with industry movers and shakers, one on one.

**We met people.** Standing in line for a soda, cruising the show floor, attending some of the exhibitor-sponsored events, we met some of the most creative, industrious, entrepre-

neurial types in the industry, and we shared ideas. I felt like there was less whining, despite the economy, and more dreaming than I've seen at any show.

**We made deals.** I'll even name names. Fleabass, BreezSong, Pick Stick, Revival guitars, Kentucky mandolins, Lava cables — these are vendors we would not have met at a larger show. I also don't want to forget some of the bigger names. We insist on doing business with them because they took the time to be there. Yamaha, Mapex, Zildjian, Martin, Quik Lok — these are some of the exhibitors we felt compelled to load up on and incorporate into our vital fourth-quarter purchasing. And if Summer NAMM exhibitors didn't get our purchase orders at their booths, they'll get them soon enough. As far as the other big companies go that abandoned the show, all I can say is they'll get the crumbs of our leftover opportunity cash.

**We learned something.** At the NAMM Breakfast Sessions, I learned about a fascinating concept called price elasticity of demand. (Google it.) I also learned about purpose-driven product and selling accessories

that give customers "permission" to visit the store. I was reminded that it's not our customers' job to remember us but our job to be remembered. I was chastened by fellow columnist Alan Friedman that opportunity is not something that falls in our laps; it's something we create. I was reminded that no matter how much we use the bad economy to rationalize poor business performance, \$4.47 trillion were *still* spent in 2008.

At the educational seminars, we were handed ideas by our own peers. I've already ordered four-color, custom lesson postcards we can give out to customers, leave at day cares and distribute to other local teachers, and I'm kicking myself for not thinking of this on my own. (Thanks, Todd.) I'm keeping some of the fantastic ideas we learned close to my vest because we intend to keep our competitive advantage. Some tricks a girl needs to keep to herself.

Summer NAMM was a great party. And only the cool people came. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 29-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.