

FOR PROGRESSIVE MUSIC RETAILERS

music inc.

NOVEMBER 2010 | MUSICINCMAG.COM

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Do's & Don'ts**
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"I have a rule for my employees: You can't say 'no' until I tell you that you can say 'no.'"

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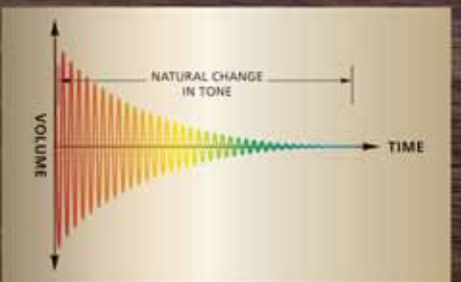
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NOVEMBER 2010 | VOL. 21, NO. 10

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES: \$50 one year (11 issues). \$90 two years (22 issues) to U.S.A. addresses. \$75 one year (11 issues), \$140 two years (22 issues) to Canada and other foreign countries. Air mail delivery at cost.

SINGLE COPY (and back issues, limited supply): \$9.95 to any address, surface mail. Air mail delivery at cost.

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OTHER MAHER PUBLICATIONS:
DownBeat, UpBeat Daily

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please allow six weeks for your change to become effective. When notifying us of your new address, include your current MUSIC INC. label showing your old address. MUSIC INC. (ISSN 1050-1681)

Published monthly, except April. Printed in U.S.A. by Maher Publications Inc. 102 N. Haven, Elmhurst, IL 60126-2932. Periodical Postage Paid at Elmhurst, IL and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MUSIC INC., P.O. Box 11688, St. Paul, MN 55111-0688





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Photo by Lisa Farrer

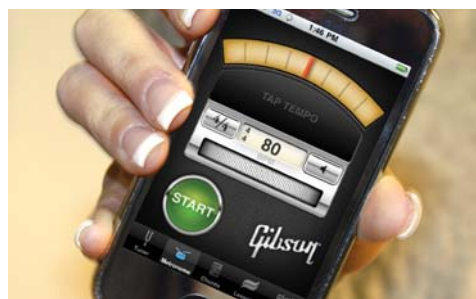
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Alan Rosen

50 | REAL VALUE

Lots of music retailers talk about value. Alan Rosen and the staff at his combo dealership, Bananas at Large, know how to sell it to even the toughest customers.



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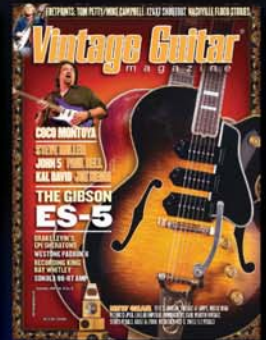
➤ Smith gives guidelines for improving demos

Cover photo by Lisa Farrer



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PERSPECTIVE

PERSPECTIVE | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

SELLING IN THE SOCIAL REALM

“You can’t sell on Facebook. The minute you do, you lose everybody.” That advice came from our cover subject, Alan Rosen of Bananas at Large, a combo retailer steeped in social networking. He’s not alone. In this month’s article “Got Friends, Now What?,” columnist Greg Billings of Steinway Piano Gallery stresses the *social* in social networking. In other words, you wouldn’t hand out catalogs at a cocktail party, so why would

you turn your Facebook page into a product listing?

It raises the question: If business and friendship don’t mix, why should dealers create a Facebook page at all? Ultimately, retail’s about making the sale, right?

It turns out you can have it both ways — assuming you tread carefully.

Take Summerhays Music. At the end of each week, the Murray, Utah, full-line retailer celebrates Facebook Friday. It posts an informal video on its page, promoting a product category. The videos are hosted by Cris Behrens, the store’s colorful manager, and range from simple Q&As (an interview with his Eastman rep) to elaborate productions (a trumpet accessories promotion that features a junior high band playing a Journey medley). Past Facebook

Fridays have plugged electric ukuleles, clarinet reeds, online instrument rentals — even harps. There’s no overt sales pitch, but Behrens always mentions that the products are available at his store.

“One of the first ones we did was for ukes, and our uke sales have doubled since then,” he said. “It’s about the bottom line right now but also tomorrow and next year. It keeps our store’s name in people’s heads.”

Piano retailers are getting social, too. Michelle Wlosinski, vice president of Denton Cottier and Daniels in Getzville, N.Y., has made inroads with influential prospects by promoting local arts organizations on her dealership’s Facebook page and on her personal page.

“They, in turn, posted our events on their [pages] — which have much larger followings — without me even asking,” Wlosinski said. “I had a few places give me complimentary VIP tickets and free print ads in their programs. I ended up with thousands in free advertising and a closer relationship with some people in music and arts organizations I had been cultivating for years with only limited success.”

Sam Ash Direct, the Hicksville, N.Y.-based retailer’s Web division, publicizes its Sam Ash Giveaway on Facebook. This initiative lets users enter their info for a chance to win everything from software to Epiphone guitars.

“Many people on the social networks claimed that had it not been for that promotion they would have never known about us,” said Mina Moon-Hansen, Sam Ash’s corporate training and social networking manager. “We’ve experienced a lot of positive feedback, and many of these customers have sworn loyalty for life.” **MI**



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LETTERS

The Health Care Debate Rages On

As a small-business owner myself, I felt like jumping right up on the soapbox with you, waving a torch and pitchfork, after reading the editorial and feature story by Greg Billings, “Does Looking at Your Health Care Costs Make You Uncomfortable?” (September 2010)

Medical insurance used to be based on shared risk, but these days, it’s more like pre-paid care than insurance. My husband has some chronic problems that make me afraid to shop for better deals and upset the apple cart. Meanwhile, I’m in very good health and take no medications but pay the same premium as we do for him because I suffer from the pre-existing condition of being a woman.

We now pay more than twice as much a month for insurance as we do for our house. And every year, we pay more for health care but get less for it. Access to medical care is rapidly becoming a case of the haves versus the have nots. If someone comes up with a cure for cancer, it will probably end up being proprietary and cost thousands, maybe tens of thousands, a month, even though much of the research will have been done at taxpayer-supported universities.

Does anyone remember when our government (which is us, by the way, not “them”) wiped out polio over three Sundays? Everyone went to a local school and ate a sugar cube soaked with vaccine. See? It can be done.

To all those who have fallen prey to the fear mongering



‘I suffer from the pre-existing condition of being a woman.’
— Madeleine Crouch

foisted upon us by lobbyists and are fearful of single-payer medicine: If my personal taxes went up by, let’s say, \$15,000 a year or more but I could have access to the basic health care I pay dearly for now, I would be more than \$10,000 ahead of the game. What’s wrong with that picture?

Madeleine Crouch
President
Madeleine Crouch & Co.

The Power of Competition

Thank you for publishing Greg Billings’ insightful analysis of how our health insurance system complicates and frustrates efforts of small-business people all over the United States.

As Bill Clinton said at the beginning of his ill-fated

attempt to bring reform, we have a great system of health care delivery and a poor way of paying for it.

From that time until now, the federal government has been unable to address the issue, and the problems have become progressively worse. Finally, we have a reform of the system in place that holds promise, but it’s unclear whether the promise will be realized.

Every other advanced economy in the world has a single-payer system, in which the government pays for its citizens’ health care, supported by high taxation. We in the United States, dedicated to capitalism and free markets, are determined to avoid what seems to work elsewhere.

There are, in my opinion, two good arguments for this. In order to control costs, some levels of rationing and price control are inevitable in a single-payer system. The former would force some people to wait longer than advisable for care; the latter, if brought to our economy, would reduce investment in medical innovation and threaten to destroy what is best in our system.

The alternative to single-payer must be some form of an insurance market, as health care is too expensive for most people to pay out of pocket. But everyone needs care at some time, and it doesn’t make sense to buy insurance for routine medical expenses.

The creation of health savings accounts was a positive step. They can — if properly funded — be used for everyday expenses and be tied to a high-deductible policy for major problems. But insurance can only work if everyone pays into the system. Here in Massachusetts, an individual mandate seems to be working to make sure that everyone has insurance.

The Obama health care reform, based on the Massachusetts model, is totally consistent with the idea of a market-based system of health care delivery. But one would never guess that based on the rhetoric of the Republicans and Tea Party advocates. In fact, they are suing to overturn the individual mandate on which the reform is based, claiming it’s unconstitutional to force an individual to purchase a product. It’s an interesting argument, but they ignore the fact that an insurance-based system can’t work

unless everyone participates. Are they ready either to foot the bill for healthy people who don't buy insurance or turn them away from hospitals when they need care because they can't pay for it?

The Republicans should be working with the administration to create a health care market where the power of competition can be used to keep costs under control and simultaneously drive medical innovation.

Instead, they have made a calculation that by opposing and distorting everything that Obama proposes — even when based on market capitalism and sound economics — they can fan the electorate's feelings of discontent, win back the Congress this year and

take the White House in two years. But they offer nothing more substantial than wishful thinking to address our serious problems. They don't deserve your vote.

Joseph Blumenthal
Downtown Sounds
Northampton, Mass.

'Looking Up, I Noticed I Was Late'

If you're half the Beatles fan I imagine you to be, you'll know the title of this letter is from the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album, and being a huge Beatle fan myself, I want to send you belated but hearty congratulations on the 20th anniversary cover of *Music Inc.*'s July issue.

In the process of putting my magazine files in order, I decided to look through the

Letters section of the August edition to see if anyone had complimented you on the quite clever cover and remembered that I had fully intended to do so myself.

I was disappointed to see that no one else had recognized the ingenious combination of a historic record album cover and equally historic moment in your publication's accomplishments.

Twenty years — now that's an achievement that even Mean Mr. Mustard's sister Pam would envy. Yeah, I know, she appears in *Abbey Road*, but I'm trying to make a point here!

Anyway, congratulations again on a very, very imaginative marketing idea. Oh, and also congratulations on the

magazine's 20th anniversary.

Jamie Foshee
Mississippi Music
Jackson, Miss.

Correction

The September 2010 edition of *Music Inc.*'s e-headlines included the wrong cover image for Carl Fischer's *18 Intermediate Christmas Favorites Collection*. The correct cover image is featured in this month's *Gear* section. *Music Inc.* regrets the error.

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

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Debuts redesigned Web site
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Hosts Taylor Guitars Road Show
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Adds stage, holds Marshallpalooza
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RETAIL

GREENWICH MUSIC | BY KATIE KAILUS

GREENWICH STANDS ITS GROUND

On Oct. 23, 2008, Joe Summa became the proud owner of Greenwich Music, a full-line dealership in Riverside, Conn. What should've been a happy moment in any first-time business owner's life took a turn for the worse within days, as the recession began to set in.

"Right after I closed on the store, like to the day, sales fell off the face of the earth," Summa said. "Sales just plummeted. I had to quickly re-evaluate my business plan, and all of a sudden, everything I planned for and everything I planned to do was out the window."

THE RE-EVALUATION PROCESS

Greenwich Music, which offers lessons, rentals and repairs, is a 5,000-square-foot dealership split over two levels. The store originally opened in the 1960s in New York but has been located in the Greenwich area since 1985.

While the company already had an established customer base, Summa still had to tweak his business plan, as well as his stock and staffing.

"I didn't cut staff just for the sake of saving money," he said. "I wanted to tighten up how we did things. For example, I had a full-time employee whose sole job was to manage the sheet



Joe Summa

'All of a sudden, everything I planned to do was out the window.'

music bid for one of the local school systems, which in the end we actually lost money on. When I saw that, it was really an eye opener, and I said, "This just doesn't make any sense."

The store now employs four full-time employees and one part-timer. Summa also cut lines

and, consequently, overhead.

"I had to decide which lines and how many we were going to carry," Summa said. "When I took the store over, we were dealers for everyone under the sun, and with the downturn, it just didn't make sense if the purchases weren't going to be there to carry that much inventory. So we had to let some lines go, but in the end, I'm not looking back because it hasn't impacted anything."

Advertising through direct mail and e-mail was vital to the store's survival, though.

"What I have found is really effective is direct mail and

Constant Contact," Summa said. "It is a great way to communicate, whether it's reminding people about lessons, rentals or sending out specials."

IN-STORE PROMOTIONS

A grand re-opening sale, two Taylor Road Shows and Taylor restringing events have helped drive new customers into Greenwich Music and expand its lesson program.

"Those [events] got a lot of people into the store and let them know that there was a change of ownership," Summa said. "And we also have an ongoing promotion where first-time students can take a free 30-minute lesson, and that has been really successful because people think it is no risk to them, so they might as well try it. And the majority of the people end up signing up for more lessons. It has really led to a lot more students."

Two years later, Greenwich Music continues to grow steadily. While overall sales are down, rentals and lessons have been up in 2009 and 2010.

"With lower sales this year to date, my bottom line compared to last year has more than doubled," Summa said. "The retail part of the business is slowly coming back, and when it does hit, I think we are poised to benefit from it." **MI**

CLOSING

Kitt's Closes Sterling

Jordan Kitt's Music of College Park, Md., is closing its Sterling, Va., store. According to PJ Ottenritter, the company's vice president of sales and marketing, the lease was up, and Kitt's wasn't able to negotiate more favorable terms. He added that the Sterling location's inventory is being consolidated into the company's other local stores for the time being. Earlier this year, Kitt's liquidated its College Park, Md., headquarters.

GEAR

Gand Adds DiGiCo

Gand and Concert Sound, the live sound division of full-line retailer Gand Music & Sound in Northfield, Ill., recently added a DiGiCo SD8 to its digital console roster.



"Up until now, the DiGiCo line has been aimed at only the cream of the tour industry," said Gary Gand, president of Gand Music. "The SD8 breaks a price

and feature barrier that addresses the bell curve of acts today, which is our main focus."

SALES

Menchey Welcomes Mother of Eight

Reality TV star Kate Gosselin stopped by Menchey Music's Lancaster, Pa., store on Sept. 23 to buy sheet music for her twin girls. The mother of eight children, who found fame starring in the TLC show "Jon And Kate Plus 8," ended up purchasing a bag full of music but spent most of the visit on her phone.

"It was kind of cool, but it was also kind of creepy having the paparazzi lurking around taking pictures," said Joel Menchey, president of Menchey Music.

OPENING

Walcott Opens

Walcott Brothers Music opened for business in Perry, N.Y., on Sept. 18. The combo dealership, founded by brothers Josh and Billy Walcott, sells mainly new and used electric and acoustic guitars and offers repairs. According to an article in *The Daily News Online*, it will also offer music lessons.



The remodeled drum department in Sam Ash's Ontario Mills, Calif., store

SAM ASH MUSIC | DESIGN

SAM ASH REMODELS, EXPANDS MUSIC LESSONS BUSINESS

Sam Ash Music upgraded several of its stores over the past year. Most recently, the chain retailer redesigned its Ontario Mills, Calif., location.

According to Sammy Ash, company COO, the Ontario Mills store now features a 55-foot accessory counter in the middle of the showroom. This creates more room in the guitar department and allows for an expansion of the Guitars of Distinction section. The greater desk has been removed.

"Our accessory business was always good, but now, it went through the roof," Ash said of the counter. "It also added a couple of [gross profit] points."

The accessory counter in the drum department was expanded, as well, and new String Swing displays let more drums and accessories hang on the walls.

"We believe in this business and its future, so we can't afford to look shabby," Ash said. "Whenever we do this, our customers always thank us. After all, we are doing it for their shopping experience. When things do come back, we will be ready, and we will still be investing in our stores."

He added that Sam Ash Music began expanding its music lessons



The view from the front of the store; below: the exterior



business roughly nine months ago. Thirteen Sam Ash Music stores are currently outfitted with teaching studios.

"My goal is to get to 25 this time next year," Ash said.

GUITAR CENTER | PROMOTION

GC CELEBRATES COUNTRY & BLUES HOPEFULS

In October, Guitar Center announced Your Next Record with Keith Urban. The unsigned artist competition will give the winner an opportunity to record a three-song EP with a top producer and country star Keith

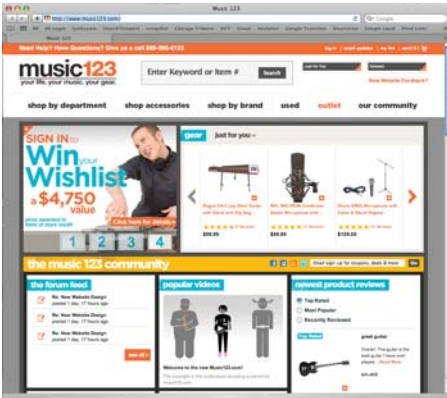
Urban. Through Nov. 30, unsigned artists in the United States are invited to submit their music at yournextrecord.com.

"I'm always ready to do whatever it takes to give aspiring musicians the chance to do what

they love," Urban said.

GC also crowned Randy Scott of Hacienda Heights, Calif., as the winner of its fourth annual King of the Blues competition in September. He beat out four other finalists at the House of

Blues in Los Angeles in front of a live audience and panel of celebrity judges. Scott took home \$25,000 in cash, endorsement deals and a range of gear. He also shared the stage with guitarist Derek Trucks.



MUSIC123.COM | WEB NEWS

The New Music123

Online retailer Music123.com launched a newly redesigned, interactive Web site on Sept. 27. It features extensive product info, an integrated community, a personalized shopping experience and a new customer rewards program.

To celebrate, the company hosted a 24-hour grand reopening event on the 27th. It featured special pricing on all types of instruments and accessories, including hourly deals. The festivities will continue throughout October with additional sales, free gifts and contests, such as the Win Your Wish List contest, where customers can win free gear up to \$4,000 in value.

"Now customers have the ability to view tutorials and interactive tools that help guide the purchase experience while educating them about the products and services available," said Kelly McGann, marketing director for Music123.com, of the new Web site.

The social media elements of the site enable users to engage with one another via forums, videos, user reviews and social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

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TOBIAS MUSIC | EVENT

Tobias' Big Taylor Night

Tobias Music and Taylor Guitars rocked Downers Grove, Ill., on Sept. 23 with the Taylor Guitars Road Show. Bob Taylor, co-founder of Taylor, came out to this year's event, held at the Tivoli Theatre.

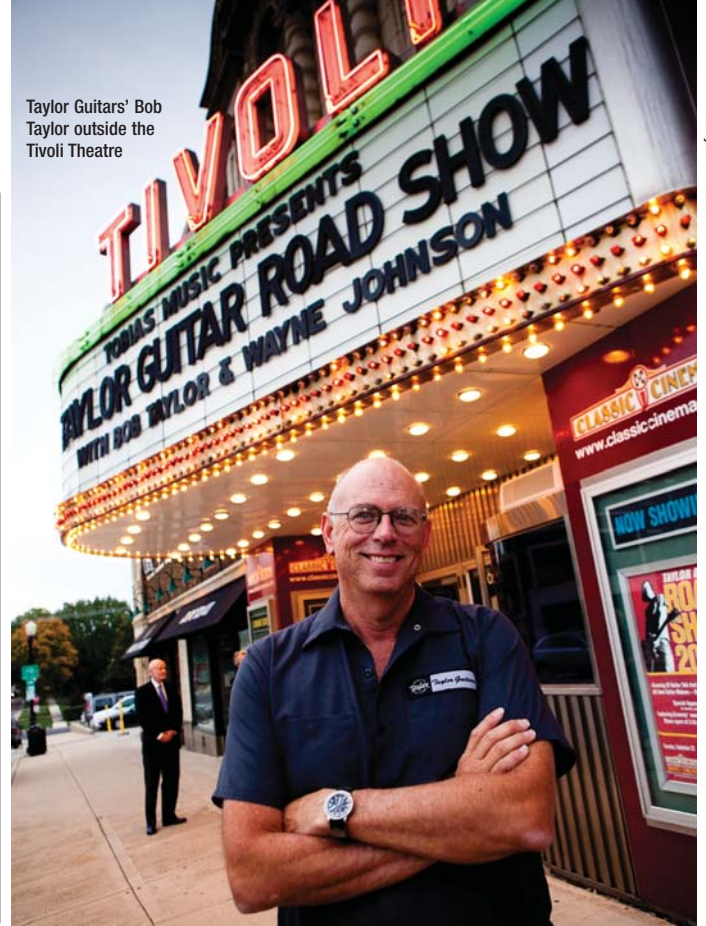
He gave a history of his company during the show, and guitarist Wayne Johnson offered demos of the Taylor T3 and T5. Taylor's Mike Ausman explained differences in tonewoods and body shapes, and Andy Lund, also with Taylor, demoed the new GS Mini. According to Tivoli Theatre staff, the show brought in roughly 600 attendees.

"Bob Taylor really charmed the crowd," said Paul Tobias, co-owner of Tobias Music, based in Downers Grove. "He came early just to hang out with everyone. He must have signed

300 autographs. Once the show started, he did a great job explaining the history of Taylor Guitars and spoke about his methods of guitar building."

Tobias Music displayed about 40 guitars in the Tivoli lobby, including several one-offs and build-to-order models. Paul Tobias said his dealership sold six or seven high-end guitars at the Road Show. The following day, Ausman and Johnson came out to the store for a sales event. Johnson gave free lessons to students in Tobias' lesson program, then led a jam session with students and teachers.

Of this post-show event, Paul Tobias said it "also led to more Taylor sales. We're getting close to 20 Taylor sales because of the show — much better than we expected."



Taylor Guitars' Bob Taylor outside the Tivoli Theatre

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



Students in Marshall Music's Summer Rock Camp take the Marshallpalooza stage

MARSHALL MUSIC | DESIGN

MARSHALL-PALOOZA ROCKS LANSING

Marshall Music of Lansing, Mich., held Marshallpalooza in September to introduce customers to its recent store redesign. The 35,000-square-foot flagship location now features a completely functional rock stage with lighting and amps that augments a 150-seat auditorium.

Marshallpalooza featured performances throughout the day from high school drum lines, private lesson teachers and bands that participated in Marshall's Summer Rock Camp. Marshall offered storewide promotions, and neighboring businesses gave discounts to customers who made purchases at the event.

"Trying to complete a sale when a high school drum line kicks in was a challenge, but the performances brought parents and friends into the store who had no idea we carried such a large selection of product," said Joe Cardenas, Marshall's combo products manager.

"Besides the inventory we sold, Marshallpalooza created a great energy among our entire staff, from sales to the credit department," said Dan Marshall, company owner.

Marshall Music adds a rock stage with lighting, amps to store

WASHINGTON MUSIC CENTER | PROMOTION

WMC SPONSORS NASCAR

Chuck Levin's Washington Music Center sponsored Nemco Racing's No. 87 Nascar Sprint Cup entry in the Air Guard 400 Race, held Sept. 11 at Richmond International Raceway in Richmond, Va. This is the second year in a row that the Wheaton, Md., dealership served as a sponsor. The car was driven by Joe Nemecek.

"We're fortunate to have members of several Nascar teams as customers of the store, and several members of our staff are avid Nascar fans, so sponsorship of a car seemed like a natural idea for us," said Brian Meader, a guitar salesman and the director of Internet marketing at Washington Music Center.

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Alternate guitar tunings are catching on fast. That's why we decided to go all out and bring you four new tools to create sounds you never thought possible. The K-lever is a partial capo with the ability to press down the uncapoed string/strings whenever you want. All you have to do is press the lever... It's just that easy.

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Casio's vision to create electronic musical instruments that everyone could enjoy became a reality in 1980 with the introduction of the CTK-201. As a leader in electronics and engineering, Casio has continued to expand the capabilities of its products to make Celviano what it is today. Only the company that created the first commercially available 16-bit sampler could create a grand piano sound that delivers such a natural, expressive and dynamic piano experience.

The new Limited Edition Celviano AP-6 encompasses 30 years of electronics expertise in digital musical instruments. It is not only beautiful to play, but its luxurious polished ebony finish will make it an elegant addition to any home.

CASIO.

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CELVIANO

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Drives uke sales with displays
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Industry pioneer Karl Bruhn
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Forms new U.S. business unit
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Names Phil Ressler as new head
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SUPPLY

SOULDIER STRAPS | BY KATIE KAILUS

DEALER-FOCUSED STRAPS

Souldier Straps began five years ago as little more than a craft project.

Company founder Jen Tabor — then a school music teacher — decided to make a couple of guitar straps as birthday gifts for her bandmates. “I wanted to give them straps that would match their stage clothes and personal style,” she said.

Since then, Tabor has built her strap project into a premier boutique accessory company. The Chicago-based manufacturer now boasts distribution to 300 independent music retailers and recently added Best Buy as a client.



UNIQUE SELLS

Souldier has niched itself with unique designs and a green angle. “All of our straps are made with vintage fabric and recycled seatbelts as a backing,” Tabor said.

She has also managed to get her hands on the original leftover fabrics from 1960s and ’70s strap manufacturer Ace and used them to recreate Jimi Hendrix’s straps. With more than 900 exclusive fabrics, in fact, Souldier has something for everyone in every market. And Tabor stresses this selling point to her dealer base.

Souldier can customize orders based on a retailer’s location, vibe and clientele

“What sells in New York isn’t the same thing that sells in L.A., and Florida is different from New Orleans,” she said. “City and suburbs can be different, and I get the character of these varied markets and

assist in getting stores a well-rounded order that will move.”

DEALER-FRIENDLY

This dealer-friendly business model lets retailers tell Tabor the amount they want to spend, and she customizes an order based on the store’s location, vibe, clientele and price range. Souldier’s large amounts of fabric stock allow for originality at every dealership.

“The thousands of combinations ensure that stock is always fresh,” Tabor said. “You will never find the same selection in two stores, and

dealers can pick a selection that fits their particular customer base.”

If a product doesn’t work, Souldier’s swap-out policy lets dealers trade in unused straps for a credit toward their next order.

“We provide dealers with a 50-percent margin and additional discounts for orders in large quantity,” Tabor said. “And the swap-out policy is good because it lets the inventory remain fresh.”

She added that she only sells Best Buy six exclusive designs. This gives independent retailers the benefit of carrying a deeper selection of Souldier product.

“The Best Buy deal will help boost the sales of Souldier’s independent retailers with its marketing campaigns and extensive advertising,” Tabor said.

And she can’t put a price on the free advertising she receives from such musicians as Wilco, Sheryl Crow and Dave Matthews Band. They all rock Souldier straps.

“Music is about expressing yourself,” Tabor said. “You don’t buy a valuable guitar and put a strap with it that is not of the same caliber. It’s not about the strap — it’s about how you feel when you play.” **MI**

THE GUITAR AND ACCESSORIES MARKETING ASSOCIATION | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

INSTANT GUITAR CUSTOMERS

Since 1995, the Guitar and Accessories Marketing Association (GAMA) has turned a half-million kids on to the guitar, courtesy of its Teaching Guitar Workshops.

Last summer alone, more than 300 school music teachers completed the program and are now bringing guitar instruction to their classrooms. This means thousands of kids need instruments. For this reason, Harvey Levy, GAMA's president, said music retailers need to get on-board.

"These are *instant* customers," he said. "Every student taking the course needs a guitar."

In early September, *Music Inc.* Editor Zach Phillips spoke with Levy, who also serves as vice president of Levy's Leathers, about these untapped opportunities and more.

Highlights:

Phillips: *Some people in the industry still don't know what GAMA is. Can you explain?*

Levy: GAMA members are comprised of guitar manufacturers and distributors, guitar accessory manufacturers and distributors, amp manufacturers and distributors, and guitar-related publications. In short, any supplier or manufacturer of guitar-related products is eligible for regular membership. GAMA also has a supporting member category for non-manufacturing companies that are interested in growing the number of active guitar players.

Phillips: *How do GAMA's Teaching Guitar Workshops help grow the market?*



Harvey Levy

Each year, thousands of kids learn guitar in school, courtesy of GAMA. Will you be selling them their first axes?

Levy: The workshops teach accredited music teachers how to set up a guitar program in their schools. They are not necessarily guitar players, but they must be music teachers capable of teaching all the elements of a

classic music program — theory, reading, writing, composition, harmony, improvisation. All of the skills traditionally taught on piano, violin or other traditional instruments are taught on the guitar.

Every music teacher in the U.S. is required to upgrade his or her skills. This is one of the ways they move up the salary grid. Graduates of the GAMA Teaching Guitar Workshops receive three accredited teaching credits from Duquesne University.

Additionally, they learn all of the skills and receive the logistical information necessary to start a guitar program in their school. The guitar, as the basis for popular music, is in

demand from both parents and students alike. This demand provides additional security for the teacher's music program. At a time when school boards are short of funds and looking for ways to cut costs, a guitar program is significantly less expensive to set up than with other traditional instruments.

Phillips: *Why should music retailers support the program?*

Levy: There are a half a million reasons to support the program. That's how many students have taken guitar in school music programs since 1995. Thousands more will begin taking lessons this fall from the 300 teachers who attended the workshops this summer. These are *instant* customers.

GAMA does not give guitars to students. Each teacher taking the course receives a guitar valued at around \$500 and accessories and books necessary to teach the course. All this they receive free of charge. And that is where the freebies end. The student or the school itself is responsible for acquiring the guitars and accessories necessary to take the course. The teachers are encouraged to contact a retailer in their community to provide these necessities. Thus, the benefit to the retailer is immediate and complete. Every student taking the course needs a guitar.

Phillips: *How can retailers know if teachers in their area are participating?*

Levy: GAMA has a database with the names and contact information of the more than 2,000 teachers who have taken Teaching Guitar

Workshops. This database is available to every music retailer interested in supplying guitars and accessories when a teacher starts a program. It's available from GAMA's executive director, Rob Sulkow. Rob can be contacted by e-mail at assnhdqs@earthlink.net.

Phillips: *Who funds the Teaching Guitar Workshops program?*

Levy: From the outset, NAMM, and now the NAMM Foundation, has been an enthusiastic supporter and, in fact, has provided most of the funds needed to keep Teaching Guitar Workshops going — more than three quarters of a million dollars since its inception.

Over the years, GAMA has received funds from independ-

ent music retailers, too. The Alliance of Independent Music Merchants has been a longtime financial supporter, as has Sam Ash, Brook Mays Music and Guitar Center. Three years ago, GC's CEO, Marty Albertson, made headlines at the winter NAMM show when he donated \$100,000 to GAMA for the Teaching Guitar Workshops.

GAMA member companies, in addition to their dues, provide additional cash dedicated to the program and provide all of the guitars, accessories and books for the teachers.

Phillips: *As I understand, the program's facing some funding challenges now.*

Levy: The Teaching Guitar Workshops have been so successful that GAMA is now

having difficulty finding the money to grow the program and keep up with the demand. The cash requirements for this year's program approached \$150,000. This requirement is significantly in excess of GAMA revenues.

As a result, GAMA is actively looking for ways to raise additional funds so that we can continue to grow [the program].

Phillips: *How can GAMA raise those funds?*

Levy: The two most obvious sources for additional funds are from increasing our membership and finding more retail sponsors. We have more than 50 members. However, that represents only a fraction of the hundreds of companies that

make their living selling guitars and guitar-related products.

Music retailers can also help by joining our Adopt-A-Music Teacher sponsorship program. Details about this program can be found on GAMA's Web site, discoverguitar.com, or from Rob Sulkow.

Additionally, we are looking to foundations that earmark funds for worthwhile causes and, in partnership with MENC, have set up a 501c3 to accept these funds.

Those of us in the music business are well aware of the benefits of music and a sound music education. For too long, guitar has been an afterthought as a school instrument. GAMA is your guitar association. We're changing that one teacher at a time. **MI**



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Note from Skip

Bringing Your Staff to the NAMM Show Makes Sense!

I attended my first NAMM Show in 1972 and haven't missed one since. To this day, I still leave the show confident that my time spent was rewarded by opportunity I would have missed if I weren't there. There's no more efficient or effective way to keep my staff—and my stores—on top of the latest innovative products than to see and hear about them from the manufacturers themselves. Now more than ever, customers expect us to have all the answers to their new product questions as soon as they're released.

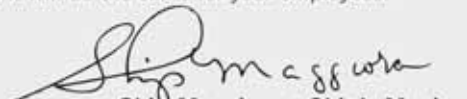
There's nothing more motivating than sending my sales staff to the shows. After all, the industry is so much bigger and more exciting than what they can experience within the four walls of Skip's Music. The NAMM Show offers retailers a unique opportunity to help develop the quality staff that consumers seek out when making buying decisions. Nothing can generate more long-term ROI than the investment you make today in the development of your sales staff for tomorrow.

Before the show, my sales staff pre-plans their schedules to the minute. Afterward, we have a contest that awards the staff member who returns with best new product or marketing idea that can potentially result in the most new business. In just two days and one night, they cover all the products and catch several NAMM U sessions—a small price to pay for freshly motivated, reignited and productive employees.

I remember sending a young employee to his first show one year; it made a profound impact on both his life and mine. He saw how exciting the industry really was—a different side than he had known as a player. He took more notes and brought back more new ideas than even I had hoped for. That employee returned with determination and a renewed commitment to make the music products industry his chosen career path. That employee was Joe Lamond.

I hear that retailers are fearful of bringing the staff to the show because they're afraid of exposing them to other job opportunities. I understand their concern. But then I think, what if you don't educate, develop, excite and engage your staff in making this their chosen career? The last thing that you want is an unmotivated, dispassionate sales team.

For nearly a decade, I enjoyed Joe's presence and impact on Skip's Music. I still benefit, along with the rest of the music products industry, from his commitment that came from attending that first NAMM Show. Bringing him along was an investment that certainly paid off, and I believe it will do the same for your employees.


Skip Maggiora • Skip's Music

A Sneak Peek at Sessions Set for the 2011 NAMM Show

These Idea Center sessions will offer tips to energize your staff—and your store!

Get Connected—Online Business Strategies

Presented by Mike Nessen,

Rinforza Social Media Marketing

In this series of sessions, you'll learn how to be found in the crowded electronic marketplace, reach out and identify your customer base online, and apply strategies to appeal to the new generation of online consumers.

Adding Up: 5 Ways to Increase Every Sale

Presented by Bob Popyk, Founder of

Bentley-Hall, Inc., and Columnist for Music Trades Magazine

Simple ways to maximize each customer and substantially increase the dollar amount of each individual sale.

No More Slow Days!

(How To Get A Crowd in Your Store Every Day)

Presented by Bob Popyk, Founder of *Bentley-Hall, Inc., and Columnist for Music Trades Magazine*

Here's how to keep your store traffic constant and the cash register ringing every day—without draining your checkbook.

The Key To Buying Music Product Inventory

Presented by Alan Friedman, CPA, *Friedman, Kannenberg & Company, P.C.*

In this updated session, you will learn how to buy the right music products, quantity and mix at the right cost and payment terms. Learn the secret to making smart inventory buys.

The Value of Being There...

“The sessions at the Idea Center are phenomenal. The guys are bringing to the table ideas that maybe you have thought about before, but they help you bring it to fruition and give you the tools to do that with.”

Micky Hardy • Springfield Music

NAME NAMM News November 2010

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ACE PRODUCTS GROUP | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

THE REBEL

Alan Poster

Ace Products' unorthodox road to growth

Ace Products Group has spent the last five years flying in the face of convention.

Just as U.S. manufacturers found their sea legs in China, Ace opened a factory in Vietnam. When cheap instrument cases flooded the market, Ace bought a luxury gig bag company. And when Dave Carroll sang of United Airlines breaking guitars, Ace's team filmed a Strat being tossed off a roof.

In return, the Petaluma, Calif.-based manufacturer has undergone a growth spurt, yielding as much as 30-percent bumps in a single year.

"Last year was flat," said Alan Poster, company president. "This year is going to be 5–10 percent above last year, so we're starting to climb again. Before that, we're talking increases of 10, 20, 30 percent a year."

MARKETING FROM THE TOP DOWN

Poster said picking up Reunion Blues five years ago kick-started the growth.

The gig bag line, which is well-respected among brass and woodwind players, gave Ace a world-class brand to build upon. It also presented new opportunities for marketing downward. In January 2009, Ace launched RB Continental. While not as posh as its high-end counterpart, the new brand filled a price-quality gap in the guitar market, according to Poster.

"The expensive Reunion Blues did not sell well to the broad part of the guitar market because customers had to really reach up for a leather bag — \$400, \$500, \$600," he said. "With the RB Continental, we focused on [producing a] more affordable Reunion Blues, allowing us to capture a broader part of that business."

THE STRESS TEST

But Ace first had to convince guitarists that RB Continental was more protective than conventional wood and plastic cases. To do so, the team shot a video of a Stratocaster being placed into an RB Continental and tossed

off a four-story building. The guitar is then retrieved, unscathed.

"We had to make the claim that the RB Continental was better than wood or plastic," Poster said. "So we dropped one off a building. You can't do that with a wood or plastic case. It would shatter."

The video was posted to YouTube in July 2009, just as Dave Carroll's "United Breaks Guitars" song became a viral hit. To generate views, Ace's team put "united breaks guitars song" in the video's title. John Maher, the company's marketing director, explained that every time people viewed Carroll's song, the RB stress test video popped up next to it.

To date, the RB video has gotten more than 80,000 views.

VIETNAM, THE NEW CHINA

Four years ago, Poster also began shifting manufacturing from China to Vietnam. The move has given Ace more control over production expenses, as inflation continues driving up Chinese labor costs.

That said, Poster acknowledged that his company will never be completely out of China. He estimated Ace's OEM business to be 40–45 percent of its total portfolio and a strong segment since the economic downturn. "We supply a lot of OEM people with product that we ship to their factories in China," he said. "That's not going to change."

Owning factories provides more hands-on quality control and the ability to turn on a dime, according to Poster. He said he takes pride in these factories and scoffs at rumors that Reunion Blues' quality has gone downhill since production shifted to Asia.

"That's not even the slightest bit true," Poster said. "We buy only the best materials from all over the world. We also make up to a million cases a year and take the best of the best and incorporate that knowledge into the Reunion Blues line. So we are constantly improving and have very highly skilled people making this stuff." **MI**



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ARTIST APPROVED

Music Inc. Alum Joins Sonor Roster

Los Angeles-based drummer Joe Babiak is now endorsing the Sonor Drum Co.



Babiak, originally from Chicago, worked as an intern for *Music Inc.* magazine while attending Elmhurst College. He has recorded and toured internationally with world-renowned guitarist Michael Angelo Batio. Most recently, he played in the rock band South Of Earth.

Babiak joins the likes of Steve Smith, Danny Carey and Phil Rudd, who also endorse Sonor drums.

{sonor.com}

PERSONNEL

Gator Employee Retires After 38 Years

Delena Murphy, former international sales manager for Gator Cases, retired from her position on Sept. 28 after nearly 38 years with the company.

As one of Gator's senior staff, Murphy started working for Jerry Freed, CEO and COB of Gator Cases, back in the early 1970s with International Music during the Hondo Guitars and Black Diamond Strings era — before the formation of Freed Sales International, which would later become Gator Cases.

"Delena has been a loyal employee for almost 38 years," Freed said. "She has been a fixture and will be missed by all."

{gatorcases.com}

EVENT

Interactive Clinic

Mapex Drums and Majestic Percussion will be showcasing combo, marching and concert percussion at the upcoming Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Indianapolis this November.

In addition to hosting an exhibit, Mapex and Majestic will be throwing special performance clinic events. Mapex artist Dom Famularo will be conducting a clinic on basic drum set fundamentals. A second set of drums will be set up next to Famularo's drum kit, letting volunteers attending the clinic play along for a more interactive experience.

{mapexdrums.com; majesticpercussion.com}



YAMAHA | PROMOTION

YAMAHA GETS FAST & FURIOUS WITH LEXUS

Yamaha's Rock Tour drums were featured in the latest Lexus commercial, "Music Track." The 30-second commercial, which is airing nationally, features a 2011 Lexus IS playing a rock 'n' roll drum groove on a series of Yamaha Rock Tour drums.

The concept of "Music Track" called for the car to roll over a series of custom-designed, pressure-activated pedals that triggered drumsticks and bass drum pedals to strike the instruments.

Dr. Curtis Bennett, chair of the math department at Loyola

Marymount University, helped arrange the pedals at exact intervals that created a 155-beats-per-minute groove attuned to fractions of a second. The car then had to be driven at a precise speed, passing close enough to the drums and stands to trigger the pedals without knocking anything over.

"It took a lot of work by a lot of people to pull this off, and the end result looks amazing and sounds incredible," said Dave Jewell, marketing manager for Yamaha Drums.

{yamaha.com}

P. MAURIAT | PARTNERSHIP

ST. LOUIS MUSIC TO DISTRIBUTE P. MAURIAT

P. Mauriat recently forged a distribution partnership with St. Louis Music. Owned by Albest Musical Instruments, P. Mauriat's line consists of more than 40 models from soprano to baritone saxes, and they're available in a variety of finishes and price points. St. Louis Music will be distributing P. Mauriat's saxophone and profes-

sional trumpet lines.

"We are so excited to form this partnership with St. Louis Music," said Albest Musical Instruments CEO Alex Hsieh. "They really understand the U.S. market very well and have the ability to stock large levels of inventory and offer P. Mauriat dealers long-term financing."

{stlouismusic.com}

HOHNER | BY ZACH PHILLIPS

EYE-POPPING UKES

How do you stand out in the crowded uke market? If you're Hohner, create displays that shoppers can't pass up.

The supplier of Lanikai and Kohala brands tripled its ukulele sales in 2008 and 2009, and Scott Emmerman, Hohner's director of marketing and sales, credited that in large part to his company's merchandising solutions.

"The benefits of the silent salesman are well-known," he said. "We introduced this concept to a whole new product category, and we are reaping the rewards."

These silent salesmen range from the Hang 10, a floor-standing surfboard display that holds 10 models (pictured), to the Hang 3, a three-uke counter display. Hohner also offers two wall displays, the Hang 5 and Boogie 3, and a freestanding cardboard display for the Kohala brand that holds 24 inexpensive ukes. All are provided to dealers for free with a required purchase.

"We've been manufacturing ukuleles for a long time, and unlike many newcomers who have jumped on the bandwagon lately, we really understand the market," Emmerman said.

DEALER PROTECTION

He also singled out Hohner's retail policies as a selling point for its ukes.

"Hohner is a 154-year-old music industry leader, and we can offer dealers benefits that others can't: extended credit terms; a formal restocking policy that allows dealers to swap out slow-moving inventory for faster movers at their discretion; a formal price protection policy that guarantees automatic reimbursement to dealers in case we ever reduce prices; and the potential for every dealer to earn quarterly rebates. More importantly, our size and global scope allow us to produce and stock the large levels of inventory necessary to support this business."



Emmerman added that Hohner reinforces minimum advertised pricing to ensure its retailers stay profitable.

STANDOUT PRODUCTS

Lanikai's LKP-C koa concert ukulele pack has become a best-seller since its launch at winter NAMM last January. It offers a concert-sized Hawaiian koa ukulele with abalone inlay and gold tuners, as well as a wider nut width. The LBU-C Banjolele, which Emmerman said has also sold well, combines the size and playability of a concert uke with the projection of a banjo.

"Our ukes stay in tune, intonate well and don't require any after-sale support," Emmerman said. "We focus our offerings to supply key money-making, profitable SKUs for our dealers and leave the slow-turning, low-margin novelty products to our competitors." hohnerusa.com

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TRIBUTE

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

Karl Bruhn

Music industry pioneer Karl Bruhn passed away on Oct. 5 in Anaheim, Calif., after a brief illness. He was 80. He is recognized industry-wide as the “father of music making and wellness” due to his work on the Music Making and Wellness Project and support for recreational music making.

Active in both music retail and supply, Bruhn served as senior vice president, marketing for Yamaha Corp. of America, a position from which he retired in 1989. Later that year, he became NAMM’s first director of market development. During that time, he led the music community to present the work of the National Coalition for Music Education.

He also served as the executive director and president of the American Music Conference, president of the National Piano Foundation, president of Piano Manufacturers Association International and presidential advisor to the American Music Therapy Association. Most recently, he was chairman of the Yamaha Music and Wellness Institute.

Bruhn collaborated with Dr. Barry Bittman on a series of research projects focused on developing and scientifically testing the bio-psycho-social aspects of recreational music making. Their protocol,



Clavinova Connection, was launched by Yamaha Corp. of America in the United States. Additionally, Bruhn co-authored the HealthRhythms Group Empowerment Drumming facilitator-training program with Bittman and Christine Stevens for Remo.

“Karl Bruhn was a rare gift to the music products industry — a humble man who earned a stellar reputation as an advocate for arts education and the bene-

fits of lifelong music making,” said Joe Lamond, president and CEO of NAMM. “His achievements have been felt by every NAMM member, and his legacy will have a positive impact on the industry for years to come.”

“Karl was one of the clearest thinkers I have ever known, and he challenged those around him to do so, as well,” said Terry Lewis, a friend of Bruhn’s and former executive vice president of Yamaha Corp. of America. “One of the ways he did this was to begin with a provocative saying, and these came to be known as Bruhnisms. There were many. At Yamaha, the employee favorite became, ‘Your salary becomes effective when you do.’ But dealers might best remember, ‘There are two kinds of music dealers: Yamaha dealers and those who would like to be.’ He was a true mentor to me and to so many in our industry. He will be greatly missed.”

Bruhn was an accomplished musician who played professionally and led his own orchestra. He was awarded the honorary degree, doctor of music, by the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

He’s survived by his daughter, Sandy Singleton of Ashland, Ore.; son, Craig of Anaheim, Calif.; and several grandchildren.

NAMM | PERSONNEL

NAMM Cuts Eight Jobs

NAMM has announced the elimination of eight jobs in an effort to better manage its costs and balance its budget. In 2009, facing an estimated 17-percent overall decrease in U.S. industry sales, NAMM members reduced marketing costs, including trade show spending, therefore reducing NAMM’s income.

“During the historic economic downturn and in this slow recovery period, our members cut costs in every aspect of their businesses,” said Joe Lamond, president and CEO of NAMM. “We support those decisions and understand that our members’ long-term success is our No. 1 goal. And given these industry changes, it’s important that NAMM is sized correctly for our income levels, so the association can continue to fulfill our mission and create more music makers.”

With the reduction, NAMM currently has 63 full-time employees, plus five full-time employees at the NAMM Foundation’s Museum of Making Music. Prior to reducing staff, NAMM worked to reduce its fixed costs and overhead in all areas without negatively impacting member services or programs. During this past fiscal year, NAMM’s trade shows, government relations, music education advocacy, market development, public relations, grants and scholarships, and member service program budgets have remained strong, according to NAMM representatives. namm.org



SHEPTONE | CONTEST

PICKUP GIVEAWAY

Sheptone is giving away pickups to selected subscribers of its monthly e-newsletter.

Customers and fans can visit the Sheptone Web site to sign up for the e-newsletter. Winners will be selected on a regular basis and will receive their choice of pickups.

In addition to the chance to win products and merchandise, subscribers will receive monthly subscriber-only discounts, news on new-product releases, tone tips, artist news and revised listings of dealers where they can purchase product.

sheptone.com

MUSIC ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL | WEB NEWS

Music Achievement Council Reboots Site for Teachers

The Music Achievement Council has finished rebuilding its Web site, musicachievementcouncil.org. The new site provides instrumental music teachers with comprehensive materials — tips, tools and resources — to support their goals of recruiting and retaining students.

Dr. Tim Lautzenheiser, Marcia Neel, Charlie Menghini, Dr. Teryl Dobbs, Rob Medd and Greg Bimm, all respected individuals in the music education field, provide video highlights for “Tips for Success,” a collection of must-accomplish areas and best practices for a superior program.

“Through the publication of ‘Tips for Success,’ the Music Achievement Council is providing successful organizational strategies,” Neel said. “These topics are often neglected in our formal education, and this collection provides practical, easy-to-use information to ensure that educators stay on top of the many and varied elements of the successful music program.”

The Music Achievement Council Web site also features products that teachers can order or download for use in their classrooms. musicachievementcouncil.org



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Universal Percussion's headquarters in Columbiana, Ohio

UNIVERSAL PERCUSSION | EVENT

UNIVERSAL HOSTS DRUMFEST

Universal Percussion hosted Drumfest 2010 on Aug. 29 at its headquarters in Columbiana, Ohio.

During the event, Universal opened its office, showroom and warehouse to dealers, vendors and other drum industry visitors. Drumfest featured a buffet lunch; special one-day-only deals on merchandise from different manufacturers, including Universal's own proprietary Cannon, Attack, Wuhan and Beato brands; and several jam sessions.

“We held our open house because we want our customers to get to know all of us at Universal on a personal basis,” said Tom Shelley, president of Universal Percussion. “I firmly believe that main-

taining a meaningful personal relationship with our dealers fosters a more efficient and more enjoyable business relationship.”

Universal also hosted a free evening of drum-related entertainment that was open to the entire community at nearby Firestone Park in Columbiana. A free dinner was provided by UP and included hot dogs and pizza.

Former *Modern Drummer* Editor Rick Van Horn took a break from touring with 1960s icon Jay & The Americans to emcee the festivities, and Yanni drummer Charlie Adams presented a play-along session to video tracks from Yanni's Live At The Acropolis show. universalpercussion.com

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SUPPLY 

MARSHALL | DISTRIBUTION

MARSHALL FORMS NEW U.S. UNIT

Marshall Amplification has formed Marshall USA. The new business unit began operations on Oct. 1 and began shipping to U.S. dealers on Oct. 18.

“It certainly is the right time for Marshall to launch this strategic effort in the U.S.,” said Jon Ellery, Marshall U.K. co-managing director. “This initiative will allow us to truly leverage the iconic position of our brand and to provide the absolute best in customer service, marketing and promotion. We have also entered into logistics and service agreements to ensure that we provide proper levels of technical and customer service, distribution and support.”

Marc Lee Shannon has

‘This initiative will allow us to leverage the position of our brand.’

been named vice president of sales, and Ryan Rhodes has been appointed as brand director. Marshall will add to staff as it continues the transition.

The company recently parted ways with Korg USA, its previous U.S. distributor, after decades of working together.

marshallamps.com

LOS CABOS | DISTRIBUTION

LOS CABOS HEADS SOUTH

Los Cabos Drumsticks has announced a new distribution deal with North Carolina’s Southland Music Distributors.

The partnership will bring the complete line of Los Cabos products to retailers throughout much of the Southeast.

“Southland Music is an emerging company just like us and seems to fit well with our present needs and capabilities,” said Larry Guay, president and owner of Los Cabos Drumsticks.

This partnership marks the first major distribution agreement between Canada’s Los Cabos Drumsticks and a full-line instrument distributor in the United States. loscabosdrumsticks.com

SENNHEISER | AWARDS

CITT Honors Sennheiser Canada

Every year, the Canadian Institute for Theatre Technology (CITT), a national arts services organization that provides support for those working within Canadian live performance, honors members of that community who excel in their field. This year, CITT recognized Sennheiser Canada with the Supplier Achievement Award for Sennheiser's wired and wireless audio products and for its commitment to educating the live theater community in best audio practices.

"Sennheiser is an audio company highly respected throughout the industry, and the quality of its products and services is renowned worldwide," said Victor Svenningson, production and technical manager at the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga, Ontario. "In Canada, Sennheiser has always been a key player in supporting CITT." citt.org



CITT's Victor Svenningson (left) and Sennheiser's Frédéric Gerard

APPOINTMENTS

Seymour Duncan Names CEO

Seymour Duncan has named Phil Ressler as its CEO and president. Ressler has worked as a senior marketing executive for 20 years before joining the capital firm Clearstone Venture Partners as vice president and executive in residence.

"Phil understands what we've always been trying to do," said Seymour Duncan, the company's founder and owner. "He really gets it. I feel good knowing that he's able to take what we've created and build on it from here."



Phil Ressler

Marshall Amplification's USA Division has appointed Nick Bowcott as its new director of marketing and artist relations. Bowcott has a long history with iconic music brands, including more than 18 years with Marshall.

"We are very pleased to be able to bring Nick back into the Marshall family," said Jon Ellery, Marshall's U.K. co-managing director. "He is well-known around the world as someone that bleeds Marshall, and we could not have put a better person into the position."

Harman Professional has created three new sales team positions and appointed Kaushal Garg, Robin Ghose and Vibhor Khanna to fill the roles. The new additions will serve as the national sales manager and the regional sales managers for north and west India, respectively.

Celestion recently appointed Ken Weller

to the newly created role of product marketing manager.

Lyris Hung has been named **D'Addario's** bowed product manager.

Audio-Technica has elected Mark Donovan to its newly created position of sales engineer.

Gon Bops has appointed Terry Ryan to the role of international sales manager.

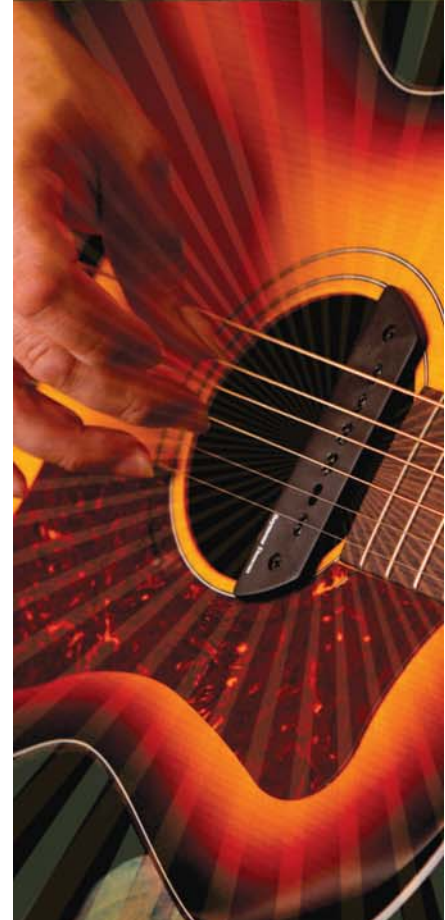
Rico Reeds has promoted John Moore to support the company's operations improvement program.

Renkus-Heinz recently appointed Rik Kirby as the vice president of sales and marketing.




>>> Terry Ryan

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A person is lying in bed, partially covered by white sheets. An acoustic guitar is lying on the bed next to them. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a window with sheer curtains in the background.

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IDEAS



>>> **Inside IDEAS**

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

HOW TO TAKE THE HEAT

remember being a young lad in Sunday school and learning the importance of the commandment “Thou shall not lie.” Even at that age we struggle with how much to disclose. Aunt Edna asks if you think her dress is pretty, and you don’t like it. What’s the appropriate response? Is hurting her feelings integral to telling the truth?

I grapple with similar dilemmas 40 years later. If you plan on firing an employee at the end of business, is it a lie to pretend everything’s OK until 5 p.m. when you call him into your office? Is it necessary to disclose to a customer that your purchasing agent failed to place his special order? Is it a fib to not reveal that an unboxed keyboard was returned after two weeks in another customer’s home, even though it was never played?

How do you deal with a customer calling you or your business to the carpet? What do you do when customers have a legitimate complaint? No matter what level of exposure you choose to risk, there are some healthy guidelines you and your staff should keep in mind when dealing with



‘A customer sharing criticism with you is giving you a gift.’

negative feedback and playing the customer blame game.

Rule No. 1: Discretion is the better part of valor. In most cases, the less you say, the better. Too often, our inclination to rationalize goes too far when explaining personal faults. Many times, friends don’t need us to dwell on our faults, and neither do cus-

tomers. Own the mistake, but never admit more than you have to.

Watch emotional, overly casual wording. “We made an error” is far more tactful than “We screwed up royally.” This is especially significant when it’s another employee’s fault. You don’t want to throw him or her under the bus with inappropriately colorful language. “Our clerk is an idiot” doesn’t give the offended customer confidence in the employee or the employer. (Who hired her, anyway?)

Think of the recent British Petroleum “top kill.” What an embarrassing choice of words for the solution to an environmental disaster. The name not only sounded haphazard but it highlighted the destructive consequences to marine life. Couldn’t BP have come up with a more constructive label for its plan of attack to correct this unpardonable transgression? It had Madison Avenue at its disposal, right?

Don’t insult the customer (obviously), but don’t unnecessarily insult yourself or your business either. You can accept blame without confessing incompetence. “We blew it, but

we are better than this, and we expect ourselves to behave to a higher standard.”

Use verb tense constructively. “We are going to improve ourselves” is more positive than “We won’t do that again,” as the former implies forward motion. A customer sharing criticism with you is giving you a gift. The best thing you can do in any confrontation, first and foremost, is thank a customer for taking the time to offer suggestions to make your business better. Even if the customer’s just griping, your “thank you” makes him feel important, *and* you’re giving cordial validation to a concern, even if you don’t privately agree with the implied degree of imprudence.

New employees need a laundry list of taboos. In our company, discussing compensation is grounds for dismissal. We are also strong on customer privacy, especially addresses and credit information. Make sure these are understood upfront, and you won’t pay the price later. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 30-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.

THE CUSTOMER WHISPERER | BY GREG BILLINGS

Got Friends, Now What?

When I was a little boy, we had a dog who chased cars. My grandmother used to say, “What would he do with a car if he ever caught one?” By now we’ve all been told that social marketing is the future and we’d better get on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. It’s probably good advice.

But like that poor mutt, no one has told us what to do when we get there.

The benefits of LinkedIn for retailers, except as a recruiting tool, are dubious. And unless you have an immediate, compelling message that can be communicated in 140 characters, Twitter’s probably not useful. (“UPS delivered a fresh shipment of valve oil and bow rosin!” Who cares?) But Facebook is a dream come true for retailers who want to engage their communities. And best of all, it’s free, easy and fun.

The biggest misconception about Facebook is that it’s for young people. Certainly, there are teens and young adults on FB, but there are also many adults and grandparents. “It’s the best way to know what our grandkids are up to, and I even see pictures,” said a silver-haired lady with a MacBook in her lap at a local Starbucks. (I was shocked to learn on FB recently that my granddaughter is in a relationship.) Facebook’s demographics are vast, but more important, those demographics align with our customers.

THE VIRTUAL BLOCK PARTY

Before jumping into social marketing, there are a few things a wise businessperson should consider. Correspondents on Facebook are called *friends*, and the network is called *social*. This implies all the norms of polite social interaction. Think of FB as a virtual, hybrid cocktail party/block party/Thanksgiving dinner. All the manners and customs appropriate to those functions apply. There are things you wouldn’t say out loud at a cocktail party without appearing boorish — how much money you made

today or your political and religious views. And there are things you wouldn’t do at a block party — pass out business cards or show pictures of products you have for sale. But there are things you might want to communicate to an individual or a small group, and fortunately, Facebook has a semiprivate Message feature for this purpose.

Since we are talking to friends at a social function, we need to consider what friends might find interesting and appropriate. Generally, people find the same things interesting on FB that they would in a conversation. They

like to hear about news, laugh, and see pictures and videos. They don’t like to be offended or embarrassed, and they think people with poor grammar who can’t spell are stupid. They don’t like people who are boring or who try to sell them something.

A look at music stores’ Facebook pages is revealing. There’s an amazing amount of diversity. Obviously, no one has written the book on how to do this, so every page is an experiment. Many of the experiments, like any evolving mechanism, are miserable failures. A few are wonderful surprises. There’s very little in between.

Quite a few companies, and some really big ones, treat a Facebook page as a little Web site. They create a profile and think they’re done. There are no posts. This is fatal. If you don’t talk to your friends, there’s no reason for them to listen or engage. One of the best things about Facebook is the e-mail we receive when someone comments or clicks “like” on our post. Unless we place posts designed to elicit responses, valuable impression opportunities are lost, and relationships languish. So, if you have a Facebook page, use it. And use it often, but not too often. Twice a day might be too much, but once a week usually isn’t enough, and once a month makes you look lazy.



Facebook is a dream come true for retailers wanting to enhance relationships with customers, prospects

POLITICS & RELIGION

Some smaller users seem confused about the distinction between a personal page and a business fan page. Your customers are not interested in pictures of your kids' little league games or what you had for dinner, and you may not want them to know about your new Mercedes. So keep your personal and fan pages isolated from each other.

I know a local music teacher who has loaded her page with right-wing political posts, links to support her opposition to childhood vaccinations and other conspiracy theories. It never occurred to her that some parents might be concerned about exposing their kids to unvaccinated children in music class or would shun a

teacher they perceived to be a wing nut.

We live in a highly polarized political time. About 40 percent of the population is committed to one party or the other, and the big picture divides about 50/50. If a businessperson takes a partisan political position in public, at least half his customers will disagree with it, and one in five will disagree vehemently. Most people are uncomfortable and offended when politics comes up at all. Religion is even more polarizing. Taking a political position when you don't have to is a helluva way to cultivate business or nurture relationships. Since most people assume we agree with them until informed otherwise, there's absolutely no upside to spouting off on Facebook.

I've tried to convince this teacher that she's better off cultivating the image of sweet music education advocate lady rather than that of crazy wing nut lady. So far, she's sticking to her First Amendment rights, and of course, her practice is languishing. The lesson for the rest of us is that a Facebook page can be used to establish and enhance a store's or individual's image, stature or reputation. Or, it can define you as a nut, a shill or someone who flunked eighth-grade grammar. It's a blank slate, and you can paint any picture you choose.

AVOID PITCHES

Some Facebook pages are just one long commercial. One page I found served as a catalog, with each post pre-

senting a different product. Who wants to look at that? It's OK to post a sales message once in a while, especially if it's for a truly unique product. But if that's all there is, the page becomes the Home Shopping Network, and your friends will tune out (i.e. "defriend" you, in modern vernacular). The best way to send a specific call-to-action sales message is with Facebook's Message feature. It sends your subjects an e-mail notification of the message and avoids having the post haunt your page long after it's relevant.

The most counterproductive thing a page can do is brag. Nobody cares how successful your sale was except your banker. People who would never talk to customers

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about how great business is or what their top salesman sold today seem to think it's appropriate behavior on FB. It's not.

Today's consumers have a limited tolerance for commercial messages and commercialism, in general. It's best to tread lightly in this social environment and provide more interesting content and do less overt selling. Posts about upcoming clinics, recitals and concerts thread the needle nicely. They are commercial but not overtly so. No one's going to object to an occasional selling message if you have established a pattern of interesting, funny, uplifting and relevant posts.

I actually used FB to sell a piano recently but in a very personal way. One of my clients was away at her summer home when I came across a piano just right for her. We made a video of a kid playing

the instrument and posted it. Then, I sent her a private message with a link to the post. This was definitely using the site as a sales tool, but all the other friends saw a cute video of a kid playing the piano.

FACEBOOK DO'S

There are many other creative ways to use Facebook. Here are just a few.

People love pictures. Take pics at events in your store, and post them immediately. If something unusual or special comes in, take a pic and post it. Tell everyone at your clinic or recital that you will be posting their pictures on your page, and hand out cards with your Facebook address. Take pictures of happy customers with their new instruments, post them and encourage your customers to share them with their friends. A few months

ago, a red-tailed hawk tried to get through our glass door. Our friends loved that picture.

If a customer wants you to e-mail a picture of an instrument, post it to FB instead and send the customer a link. (Try to get him in the picture with the instrument.) This eliminates the inevitable attachment problem and drives prospects to your page, where they can see all your other interesting posts.

People love video, too. Post little snippets of things going on in your store, such as recitals, service guys doing an interesting procedure, a customer playing really well, a cute kid playing not as well or a special visitor (even a rep). Post a video of one of your favorite songs, a YouTube link related to a product, a customer or employee giggling, or a tricky delivery or installation. There are great video links at namm.com and many suppliers' sites. It doesn't have to be fancy, and it shouldn't be long. And did I mention it's all free?

Adding a video link of a clinician or performer to a post announcing his upcoming event can make the effort much more effective and will get more shares — and reservations (which FB will track for you).

Facebook can be the perfect adjunct to a Web site. Many of our Web sites have current event pages with either no current events or an upcoming event from three years ago. Using a Facebook link at the current events page, and keeping FB fresh, solves this problem in a relevant, engaging way. A call to action, such as "follow us on Facebook here," increases the number of clicks. And you can reverse the process by placing a link on FB to take people to your Web site — if you provide an interesting reason to click.

Any relevant or encouraging music-related item found online can be posted as a link. Scott Robertson from NAMM sends an e-mail blast of these items every few days. You can usually find at least one to post, and you will look like the genius who found it. (Sorry, Scott.) Remember, it's better to make three posts over six days than three at a time. Tasteful jokes, especially musician jokes, can get a wonderful response and even more shares.

Also, dealers who post often about music, their students and music advocacy define themselves as passionate music supporters. And their friends will tell their friends when they click "share." Share clicks are how your message can go viral and how you add friends.

Facebook can be used to echo anything that appears in print or online about you, your staff or your suppliers. News is news, and everybody wants to know what's coming up next, so multiple posts of future events are fine.

My friends at Steinway Hall-Dallas had people guessing the number of parts in a Steinway grand. **People like polls (just don't be controversial) and contests.** And people like free stuff. A few dealers are using Facebook contests to give away tickets to local concerts and recitals.

Facebook is a great way to engage customers and prospects and enhance relationships — and again, it's free. It's an online party, and occasionally, friends say something foolish, but maybe the most foolish thing would be not having a Facebook fan page at all. **MI**

Greg Billings whispers to customers at Steinway Piano Gallery in Bonita Springs, Fla. You can visit his Facebook page by typing "Steinway Naples/Bonita Springs" into the search window.

+ FB DO'S & DON'TS

DO

- + Post pictures and videos.
- + Use the same manners you would use at a party.
- + Be interesting and relevant, but cast a wide net.
- + Post upcoming events and reviews after the events.
- + Drive people to your page by posting their pictures.
- + Post often but not too often.
- + Keep it close to home, and post about customers, students, teachers, staff and suppliers.
- + Link to and from your Web site.
- + Use contests and (non-controversial) polls.
- + Echo anything that appears about you or your staff in the press or online.
- + Keep personal and business fan pages separate.
- + Use the Message feature for semiprivate messages and overt sale promotions.
- + Check spelling and grammar.
- + Be informal.

DON'T

- ✗ Be too informal or brag.
- ✗ Post too often.
- ✗ Get political or controversial.
- ✗ Sound like a catalog.
- ✗ Post too many overt sales messages.
- ✗ Make personal posts on a business fan page.
- ✗ Forget to check spelling and grammar.
- ✗ Overlook the free opportunity Facebook presents.



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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLIOM

Analysis Paralysis

Last month, I addressed some of the difficult business decisions we find ourselves making on a seemingly regular basis. I mentioned one of the more ironic aspects of this process: that decisions seem to get more perplexing the longer we're in business. This month, I'll take a closer look at this aspect of decision-making and share lessons I've learned that helped streamline my thinking and move me to action.

With the economy sputtering along, it's only natural to put more weight on decisions. In a positive business climate, we can get away with an occasional poor decision. But with today's pressures, we take every decision so seriously that we get the cold sweats at the prospect of doing the wrong thing. It reminds me of a basic tenet of sports psychology. When players get into slumps, experts blame it on a player's focus. Baseball players who focus on their last strike tend to swing and miss. Likewise, focusing on our last poor decision handcuffs us.

Another aspect of decision-making is the experience upon which we draw. The longer we're in the business, the more we learn. When I was a neophyte in the music industry (back when dinosaurs walked the earth), I often made decisions based on limited knowledge and experience. I don't believe I was ever irresponsible. I did my homework and learned the key issues that helped lead me to the right decision. But I hadn't experienced every nuance that could go into the thought process, so I made more simplistic assessments. They say ignorance is bliss. I suppose

I was living proof of that adage.

As the recent recession hit and I found myself on the downward slope of a tiring business, I became almost incapable of making decisions. It's not that I was making bad decisions. I often made *no* decisions for fear that they'd be the wrong ones. I suffered from a classic case of analysis paralysis.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Now that all of that is behind me, how did I fix it? For starters, despite the tough job of closing a business, I remembered that I had decades of stellar success. Like the ballplayer focusing on strikeouts, I had neglected to consider every home run that I'd hit. So, I allowed myself to remember my feelings of success and focus on them. I committed to "working toward the win" — a process that involves doing whatever it takes to get from where you are to where you want to be after you've made that great decision.

But positive thinking isn't enough in times of rapid change. More than ever before, I've become a great data collector and a strong proponent of research. Every tough decision is made drawing on enough empirical data to allow objectivity of the issue at hand.

Once you have all the data, let it intersect with your positive thinking. That important crossover point is your gut instinct. With data as a backdrop for sound decision-making, trust your intuition and feel for what works for your company. There were several years when I stopped letting my keen instincts have an impact on my decisions. If your fear of hard times is keeping you from making necessary moves, realize that inertia can become a huge contributor to your problems.

The final piece of this puzzle is always plotting your escape path. Few decisions are irreversible. Include a plan of action you will follow if your decision proves to be the wrong one. Otherwise, you're just being reckless.

With a well-balanced combination of gut instinct, carefully culled data and responsible planning, you may surprise yourself as you see forward progress for the first time in a long time. **MI**

Gerson Rosenbloom is managing director of Wechter Guitars. He's former president of Medley Music and a past NAMM chairman. E-mail him at gersonmusicinc@gmail.com.



'Inertia can become a huge contributor to your problems.'



**"Some things practically
sell themselves."**

George Sigler
Ritchies Music Center, Rockaway, NJ



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Bahama
Blue



Rio Red

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CUSTOMER CARE | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Overinvolved Parents

It's great to have parents involved in their kid's music lessons, but some parents have a hard time letting go. After a few music lessons, your staff may notice a parent acting as if he or she knows more about teaching music than you do. This can create an aggravating but completely treatable case of what I call teacher parent syndrome, or TPS.

Early warning signs can be subtle. Watch for "When I took piano lessons growing up, I always did it this way," or "My music teacher never made me learn notes, so why can't Johnny just learn songs and play along to music?" Teacher parents want your staff to follow *their* ideas of how to

teach. Often, they'll ask a teacher to teach certain elements a student's not ready for. In many cases, teacher parents aren't educators themselves but just want the best for their kids.

Some of the worst cases of teacher parent syndrome come in the form of music teacher parents, or MTPs. These folks mean well, but since they play an instrument, they often assume they know as much as the teacher. In many cases, the MTP has taken a few lessons but never completed a music degree, studied music beyond high school or seriously continued with lessons.

CASE STUDY

A few weeks ago, a mother canceled her daughter's guitar lessons at my teaching studio. This struck me as odd since the daughter was a devoted student. I spoke with the teacher and learned that the mother worked at a local middle school and regularly compared notes with its

general music teacher. This had created a long struggle with teacher parent syndrome that was at odds with our curriculum.

We met with the mother and her daughter to discuss what they both wanted from lessons and to see if we could communicate our lesson plans and end results. We explained that the daughter had gotten to the point where lesson

material was getting more difficult and that her progress would be more gradual. We reassured the mother that her daughter was advancing and that she was a talented performer, but she was facing new obstacles that required more practice. From open dialogue with the mother, we learned that activities had always come easily to her daughter. The daughter was losing interest since lessons were getting more difficult. The mother understood our position and agreed to keep her daughter enrolled. We agreed to keep her in the loop every week on her daughter's progress.

TREATING TPS

I now have three rules of thumb for recognizing and treating TPS.

1. Outline your curriculum. Make sure parents understand what you are accomplishing in every lesson by speaking with them or emailing updates each week. Give details on where you started on the first of the month and where you would like to be by the end of the month.

2. Get parents involved. Do you have parents who play in bands, want to play in bands or play an instrument at home? Get them into the lesson to jam periodically. Pick a song the student likes, and offer to teach it to the parent. This shows that you're the teacher, and more important, parents will feel as if they're contributing.

3. Make sure the parent's and student's goals are clear. Since the parent is paying the tuition, he may have expectations that Johnny should practice for a certain amount of time every day, whereas Johnny is only looking at playing an instrument recreationally. The parent and student need to be on the same page with the teacher, in terms of what's expected, the proper steps to get there and the game plan in case the student's interests change. **MI**

Billy Cuthrell operates Progressive Music Center and askourmusicians.com. Contact him at billy@ppdsonline.com.



Treatment options for parents who get too involved in their kid's music lessons



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THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Phone Marketing 2.0

Last month, I talked about using a Web-based approach to holiday marketing. OK, so let's say you've Facebooked, tweeted, YouTubed and updated your Web site. Now, your phone rings. Staffer Billy grabs it while eating a doughnut. "XYZ Music." He swallows. "You're looking for what? You saw what on our Web site?" You've just witnessed a fatal flaw in your holiday marketing: your people's phone skills.

Customers who discover retailers on the Web still call the store. Your digital marketing will look the same for every customer who sees it, and your store displays will remain constant. But the experience customers receive can be different each time they call or visit. This is where you can lose sales and lesson sign-ups.

Your staff needs to be as consistent as your online marketing and your in-store merchandising. Overlook this potential flaw, and you'll only have limited success. You don't want customers who respond to your online efforts getting blown off on the phone or in the store.

Usually, the best sales staff are busy selling. The weaker ones or newest hires are not, so they're answering the phone. Remember that first impressions over the phone are just as important as first impressions in person. Therefore, you need to put as much effort into your telephone training as you do your Web site and YouTube page.

PHONE-CERTIFIED

Let's start with this idea: Do you really want everyone answering the phone? You don't have people repairing instruments unless you know they're competent technicians, so why not have phone-certified staff members? These people should look and sound as good as your online marketing experts.

The store greeting should be short and sweet. "Happy holidays. Thanks for calling XYZ Music. This is Sam. How can I help you?" Train the staff to be upbeat and not too fast on the delivery.

Also, make sure they display proper posture and don't lean on the counter. They should look the same speaking on the phone as they do talking with customers in person.

Show them how to put the phone on hold. It sounds bad when it's left live on the amplifier. And make sure these salespeople know essential store

information, such as hours, directions and services.

SPREAD CHEER ALL YEAR

If Santa were answering the phones at your store, customers would come in. Why? He knows how to be friendly and cheery. It sounds weird, but a lot of your staffers text on their cell phones more often than they talk. Making conversation is becoming a lost skill.

Educate your staff on how to be friendly and cheery. Teach them to ask questions, such as "How are you doing?" and "Who are you looking to buy this for?"

Also, teach them to listen for answers. Let them know that most incoming callers aren't musicians but gift buyers. Leave a quick telephone reference guide near the phone or saved on a computer next to the phone. The guide should describe what's being promoted on your social media sites and Web site. A great telephone call can inspire that decision to buy, and a bad one can send the customer to the next store.

Last, evaluating your staff's performance is important. Don't assume that they're doing everything you've taught them just because they've been trained. Daily reminder huddles are a must. **MI**

Pete Gamber is the owner of Alta Loma Music in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. He welcomes questions and comments at pete@altalomamusic.com.



Employees need to put as much effort into the phone as they do your online marketing

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STREETWISE SELLING | BY KENNY SMITH

What's in Your Demo?

Simply put, the demo is a critical part of selling musical products. Yes, customers can purchase instruments online and at warehouse stores, but don't be fooled. This is not a commodity-based market — it's an inspiration- and fantasy-based market. And the power of an awesome demonstration can overcome scads of challenges for salespeople. Here are guidelines to improve your demos.

Keep it clean and working. From dusty pianos to stacks of boxes to filthy restrooms, customers constantly judge us and secretly keep score from the get-go. They don't have time to wait for us to get our acts together. We can easily miss a sale if they want to check something out and we're not ready. When busy displays get messed up or floor models get sold, keeping everything functional and replenished is priority. I recommend walking through and inspecting the entire store each day before opening the doors.

Prepping is essential. Tuning up your knowledge pays off and gives you more to discuss with customers than just price. Chris Bristol, president and CEO of Roland U.S., recently shared this wisdom: "If you don't know the product, how is the customer going to? When I worked in music retail, I saw my job as one where I was supposed to take my customers from Kansas to Oz. For me to be able to do this, I had to read manuals, understand what the product was for, learn how to use it and study the history of its manufacturer. I even took things apart to see how they were made."

Entertain and educate. Many of us play, which is great, but be careful not to overplay. It scares off customers, especially beginners. They think they'll never be as good as you. Pick a short lick, and make it look easy. Find out what kind of music they like before you dive in. Customers love to talk about music that inspires them. Also, remember that it's easy to overeducate and

confuse customers. Finding a happy medium where they can comprehend you will make them much more apt to ask questions and communicate.

Break it down. When showing complicated products, deliver your message in bite-size pieces. Have a few key bullet points ready for each product. Focusing on a particular area, section or feature lets the customer absorb the item's overall concept and helps you uncover his or her "hot buttons."

Stop and confirm. "Even though we may have already qualified them, early in a demo we need to ask the customer, 'Is this cool? Are we on the right

path?'" Bristol said. "If we are, keep going. If we're not, finding out early will help us find the right product without wasting their time. Too many salespeople are afraid to interject this question because they don't know their craft. However, for those who do, it creates an opportunity to engage the customer and find out what other expectations they have."

Do multiple demos at once. Music stores are like emergency rooms — they can go from mellow to insane in minutes. Be sure to acknowledge everyone who comes in. Be aware of your surroundings, especially when giving a demo. Momentarily excuse yourself, and see what the other customers need. Great salespeople can give up to five demos at once and get every deal.

Accessorize. I've seen too many customers who couldn't enjoy what they bought because salespeople never mentioned the necessary accessories. Know what accessories to include in your demo, including batteries.

Don't get too lost in the product. This is the biggest mistake. Shut up, and ask questions. Be quiet and listen. Find out what customers' dreams are, and use this information to connect them with features that fulfill their fantasies. **MI**

Kenny Smith is an industry veteran and consults both retailers and suppliers. Find him at kennysmithsalesguru.com.



Eight guidelines for demos that sell the fantasy, overcome major sales challenges



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Alan Rosen

Photo by Lisa Farrer

BY ZACH PHILLIPS

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NOUN

THE WORTH OF SOMETHING COMPARED TO THE PRICE PAID FOR IT

Lots of retailers talk about value. Few sell it like Alan Rosen and the staff at Bananas at Large, Northern California's premier combo shop

“No” is not a word in Alan Rosen’s vocabulary. He just found out Joe Satriani’s stopping by tomorrow. The guitar wizard wants to demo a couple of boutique amps, and Rosen needs to find someone to pick them up from the manufacturer and schlep them back so Satriani can crank up to “11” after hours. At the same time, Rosen has been asked to serve as a waiter for a local fundraiser. And his combo dealership, Bananas at Large, is two weeks away from opening a second store in Santa Rosa, Calif.

But judging from the calm way he handles the endless back and forths with his assistant, you get the sense this is his life.



Rosen at his San Rafael store's pedal display case. He's holding The Big Banana, which was named after his company

“You can’t say ‘no,’” he explained with a half-smile. “You just find a way.”

Based in San Rafael, Calif. — a posh suburb north of San Francisco — Rosen counts Satriani and Metallica’s James Hetfield among his more exclusive clientele. He’s personal friends with Journey’s Neal Schon and Jonathan Cain and even brought Cain on NAMM’s music advocacy trip in Washington, D.C., this year.

But Rosen’s real passion is catering to the kid picking up his first ax. Ultimately, Bananas at Large is a labor of love, a place where he can recreate everything he liked best about music stores as a teenager. And it’s his willingness to say “yes” to every client — no matter his or her skill level or pocketbook size — and then overdeliver on expectations that has made Bananas at Large Northern California’s premier combo dealership.

“I even have a rule for my employees: You can’t say ‘no’ until I tell you that you can say ‘no,’” Rosen said. “There’s

always a way to say ‘yes.’”

Sometimes saying “yes” can be painful, of course. Rosen admitted he would’ve lost his mind last year if he worried about making high margins on every sale. And there are those customers Bananas will never win over — the click-and-buy shoppers who’ll never even walk into the store. But for those who buy into the company’s brand of value-added retail, Rosen has a bustling market. And that includes many who only care about the lowest price.

OVERCOMING PRICE OBJECTIONS

In fact, during the catalog heyday, Rosen developed a simple technique to steer discussions away from price and toward value. Bananas salespeople use it to this day.

“When I was a salesguy on the floor, I remember people walking in with their catalogs,” Rosen said. “I’d say, ‘Listen, let’s deal with that right off the bat. What are you looking at, and what’s the price? OK, I’ve got that covered. Relax. They’d

‘You used to buy six months of inventory. Now, I’d rather order six times and keep a 30-day inventory.’

give you this sort of bewildered look, and it really develops a big trust bond.” Rosen now has Internet terminals on the sales-floor, so staff and customers can compare prices.

“It’s part of that whole message: You won’t spend more here at Bananas, but your money will go further.”

And that’s where the real discussion begins. A poster hangs in the showroom called “Why Buy From Bananas?” It puts in plain language the value customers get from shopping at the dealership. It explains how proceeds from

every sale go to Bananas’ Community Action Program, an initiative that gives back to the community with donations of cash, gear and services. It explains how salespeople are not only knowledgeable musicians, but buying at Bananas helps support the local music scene. It explains the company’s liberal no-questions-asked return policy. “Refunds should be done happily, pleasantly and easily,” Rosen said. “Make them an opportunity.”

And then there are the services not listed. For instance, salespeople who have to order items for customers are encouraged to lend them a comparable product to hold them over.

“If you get [price] out of the way, then you’re open to discuss things like accessories, add-ons, other models, proprietary stuff or unique stuff,” Rosen said, adding that these are often the biggest margin-producing SKUs. “It allows you to spend more time with the customer. And if they do go home and find [the product] cheaper, call us. We’ll refund the difference.”

Salespeople at Bananas aren’t allowed behind the counter except to ring up orders. (Rosen said they’d be out on the floor with iPads all day if it was practical.) Free time is used to call prospects to let them know about new items or company events.

Rosen called his staff “the best in the business” and said they’re well-compensated. Average tenure at the company is six years. One key way he pays for this level of talent is by keeping an open-book policy. This shows sales personnel exactly what they need to do for a raise.

“Nothing’s hidden,” he said. “Anyone who wants to see the books can see the books. You

want to make more money? You want a raise? Sell more. Raise your margin. It's a no-brainer. There's no mystery. And we're really lucky that the people who are here buy into it."

To find such star performers, Rosen never stops interviewing. "Always accept resumes," he said. "Never stop. Always be hiring. *Always.*"

He added that the best employees tend to be the people who, while interviewing, express a desire to improve their sales chops.

RECESSIONARY BLUES

But keeping good people hasn't always been easy.

Rosen and his wife, Meredith, bought Bananas at Large from its former owners, J.D. and Andrea Sharp, in late 2008. For Rosen, it was the natural progression of what had been a 15-year career with the company. Unfortunately, he and Meredith finalized the deal right as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were making headlines. The Great Recession was in full swing.

Survival meant rethinking the company's short-term goals. Rather than focusing on growth and bigger numbers, Rosen decided he needed to accomplish three things: keep people employed, pay the bills and continue giving back to the community.

The company immediately sharpened its back-office practices. For starters, Rosen paid off his flooring company to get it to "go away quickly," saving him from high interest payments. He also renegotiated a lease he'd only signed months earlier. He explained by letter that he was embarrassed to even ask for better terms, but he needed help. The landlord immediately responded with a better offer.

Some employees had their hours cut. Weekly morning training meetings were canceled and replaced with video conferences. "Even though that doesn't make a huge change, it's the overall summing of those actions," Rosen said.

Right around the crash, Bananas' purchasing agent also quit. Rosen took on the job so he could watch every dollar leaving the business. He began taking better advantage of prompt pays from suppliers. And, most significantly, he changed the company's buying patterns. Rather than purchasing months of inven-

tory at a time, he started buying smaller amounts more regularly.

"It used to be we'd buy the big bundles," he said. "You'd buy six months of inventory. Now, I'd rather order six times and keep a 30-day inventory." This limited Bananas' dead stock and improved product turns.

That's not to say the company cut back on its selection. In fact, Bananas began

stocking up deeper on fast-turning, high-margin small goods. Nowadays, its San Rafael showroom is an accessory heaven, with an extensive stock of everything from odd capos to boutique straps — all out where customers can see them. Near the front of the store, a 35-foot-long display case features stomp boxes of every make and model — major brands and obscure finds. (One is even named The

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“The main thing is don’t lose turns,” Rosen said of recessionary purchasing. “My wife pushes me to buy. When I get freaky and don’t want to spend more money, she says, ‘No, you have to spend money.’ That’s where a lot of stores during the downturn are suffering. They look like they’re empty. They act like they’re not going to survive. They refuse to purchase what they need.

“And so, maybe to the detri-

ment of some of my higher-end instruments or keyboards, I’ve focused on not running out of strings, picks, tuners, capos, drumsticks and drumheads. The trick with me was to run the inventory tight, so I made more turns.”

With the worst behind him, Rosen said he now realizes he achieved all three recession-era goals. “In the first year of the downturn, we actually improved on our Community Action Program. We did more dona-

tions and more Community Action Programs than we did in the previous year.”

“Alan Rosen is one of the brightest stars in the MI universe,” said Ken Fuente, vice president of sales for Gator Cases. “He has been a tremendous resource for me personally over the years, especially on promotional concepts and new product ideas.”

THE BANANAS ESSENCE

This past summer, Rosen and a videographer friend met with Bananas staff over a weeklong period. Rosen interviewed salespeople on film about their latest musical projects, pet gear and favorite customer experiences. These interviews will form the basis of the company’s next YouTube blitz, a strategy Rosen said he believes will prove more effective than posting run-of-the-mill product demo videos. “I think people are really going to dig it.”

Bananas at Large’s marketing strategy is loosely based off what Rosen called the Black Strat story. “Why should somebody buy a black Fender Stratocaster from you when they can buy it at a million places for the same price?” he asked rhetorically. “And the answer is ‘you.’” In other words, personality comes before product.

Similarly, Bananas’ Facebook page focuses on the company’s Community Action Program and happenings with people at the dealership. A product announcement often goes up each week, but it’s never designed to push sales.

“You can’t sell on Facebook,” Rosen said. “The minute you do, you lose everybody. It’s a medium by which you let people know what’s going on. It’s a medium by

which you get entrenched in your community.”

YouTube and Facebook drive traffic to Bananas’ Web site, which Rosen estimated accounts for roughly 12–20 percent of the company’s sales, depending on the month. Using Google AdWords helps, too, and Bananas’ webmaster tweaks the site often, so it generates better search results organically. Plus, the site is promoted on every Bananas catalog, business card and ad, not to mention the store awnings.

SELLING TO MOMS & DUDES

Still, much of the company’s marketing goes on inside the store. Since purchasing the business, Rosen and his wife gave the showroom a facelift. They laid blue carpet, installed large windows along the front and added a couple of display cases for special products. “You actually feel as if there’s more inventory in here, but you don’t lose the sense of air, the bigness,” Rosen said. He also moved the repair department downstairs and put it behind a window. “That way, we can sell the service,” he said. Plus, digital pianos were arranged in a semicircle display with bamboo flooring.

One of the smallest display changes ended up having the biggest impact. Using the in-house printer, Rosen created signs for each department and hung them from the ceiling.

“Meredith did a survey to find out what customers liked and didn’t like about Bananas,” he said. “I told her parking would [rate the lowest]. But leaps above everything else, it was department signage. And I never had a clue that somebody needed to be told that those are electric guitars over there and those are basses over there.

“Again, it’s that mentality

+ SANTA ROSA GOES BANANAS

After 41 years with only one location, Bananas at Large opened a second store in Santa Rosa, Calif., this past September. Alan Rosen got the idea to expand after his accountant, Tim Jorstad, said the market was booming — and underserved. Getting Jorstad’s blessing on the project gave Rosen the impetus to push forward.

“We really felt the area was underserved and in need of a full-line pro music shop like us,” Rosen said of the Santa Rosa market. “The next nearest music store is many miles away and several towns over.”

He added that opening a second location is part of a growth strategy.

“Everybody wants to get back to 2006, 2007 numbers. Can you expect this single store to ever do those numbers again? Let’s be real.”

Rosen got reasonable rent on a building that previously housed Stars Music and, later, Music X. To better support the area’s Latino community, the Santa Rosa location will dabble in band instruments and accordions, which Bananas at Large doesn’t carry at its San Rafael store.

“[We’re] doing this in a challenging time,” Rosen said. “What better time to do it?” — Z.P.

Bananas at Large opens its second location during the recession

of who we're trying to get as customers. Those guys already locked into a music store don't need it, but a mom who comes in might. If you go into Borders and Toys 'R' Us, what do they have that's really good? Signage."

The new look has also made a difference in the store's vibe. One customer, a wealthy Lamborghini-driving business

Adding department signage instantly made Bananas' showroom more consumer-friendly

owner, admitted to Rosen he only felt comfortable in the store after the redesign.

"It seems like the silliest thing," Rosen said. "He could buy me out, literally, but he felt intimidated."

"He said, 'Lately, it feels different. It feels lighter, more accessible. I feel more comfortable getting around.'"

CATERING TO BOBBY

Walk into Bananas' San Rafael showroom on any given day, and you'll probably see Bobby shredding away on a speed metal riff. Bobby's a teenager who has made Bananas at Large his unofficial second home, and Rosen wouldn't have it any other way.

"You've got to develop the next generation," he said.

Rosen lamented that music store employees tend to ignore young customers to serve, say, a lawyer who has already bought several guitars. "Guess what?" he said of that lawyer. "He already owns those guitars. He's done. If you spend all your time with him, you'll ignore the kid who needs to buy something new. And he'll go home and tell his mom, 'I'll just buy it online.'"

"These kids might be coming in full of piss and vinegar and have attitude. But it's great. Enjoy it. Relish it. Encourage it. Jump in with them." And most of all, Rosen said, respect them.

It all comes back to recreating the things he liked best about music stores as a kid. He tells a story of when Bobby was

sitting in the showroom and struggling with the riff for Metallica's "Enter Sandman." At the time, the band's frontman, James Hetfield, happened to be at Bananas to pick up his daughters from music lessons. He crept up behind Bobby, leaned over his shoulder and said, "This is how it's done, kid." And Hetfield gave Bobby an impromptu guitar lesson.

"James sees Bobby's phone and goes,

'Now's the time to take that picture, kid,'" Rosen said with a laugh.

"It happened here. Bobby got a lesson from James Hetfield himself. That's an extreme example, but isn't this what we're supposed to be doing? As an industry, isn't that what we, what any player, should be doing? Do you think Bobby will forget that moment? Do you think he'll ever stop playing guitar now?" **MI**

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A braided cable designed for extended frequency response and low handling noise, while also protecting and enhancing the performance of internal components and preventing tangles for added flexibility.

{spectraflex.com}

RAPCOHORIZON I-BLOX

This new addition to the BLOX series lets users interface their instruments with an iPhone amplifier or recording apps. The clip design makes it easy to attach to a belt or instrument strap.

{rapcohorizon.com}



GEORGE L'S CABLES

The company's cables are solderless; available in 0.155 and 0.225 sizes; and come in black, red, blue, purple and white. Its No. 1 selling item is the effects kit, which includes 10 right-angle plugs and 10 stress relief jackets — a total of 10 total feet of cable.

{georgelsstore.com}



SOLID CABLES DYNAMIC ARC ULTRA

Dynamic Arc Ultras were created to be the ultimate no-compromise guitar cable, featuring ideal sound but a price tag that won't break the bank. They're made in Portland, Ore., and have an unlimited lifetime warranty. MSRP: starts at \$130.

{solidcables.com}



them some big money.

“That leads to great trust and soon they have us out at their church troubleshooting the whole system and training their sound crew.

“Most of our customers are confused by things like TRS versus TS, balanced versus single-ended speaker cable versus instrument cable, etc. So we go to great lengths to explain and, if need be, diagram how a cable works and how to hook up their system.”

THE RECESSIONARY ADD-ON

David Russell, president of Spectraflex, said cables are an important category because they’re a necessity and a product that can improve sound without breaking the bank.

“Cables are one of the few products priced under \$50 that will make a significant improvement in your sound,” he said. “In times of economic uncertainty, people are hesitant to throw down \$2,000 for a new guitar or \$500 for a custom effects box. But for relatively little money, someone can purchase a new cable or two and improve their sound.”

Craig Theorin, product manager for Elixir Strings, added that cables can be a strategic impulse category for brick-and-mortar dealers, with shoppers being less impulsive online. And premium cables can even serve as an aspiration purchase.

“A player might not be able to afford a high-end instrument but may consider investing in premium cables,” he said. “Most high-end cables come with lifetime guarantees, so the cable will still be around when a player is ready to invest in that Custom Shop Strat.

“Players want to know the real story behind all the confusing information they hear about cables. An educated clerk can be invaluable in steering a consumer to the appropriate cable and steering them away from cables that don’t live up to their claims. Do your own demos, and share what you learn with your customers.”

STOCKING ESSENTIALS

Andrew Swift, assistant national sales manager at EMD Music, acknowledged that leaner dealer inventories for mid- and high-end instruments make

sense in tough economic times.

But he cautioned that slim inventories can be disastrous for cables, connectors and other accessories, as cables are products that nearly every musician needs at some point.

“You won’t have the sell-through percentage if you don’t have the product on hand,” Swift said. “A studio owner once equated cable purchases to sports car tires. He said his studio has more than \$250,000 worth of gear, but without \$250 worth of cables, he can’t go anywhere or do anything.”

George Hines, president of George’s Music in Berwyn, Pa., said he stocks a number of cable lines to appeal to all customer types and budgets.

“We look at the core product selection and make it clear to the customer that they have choices in price and quality,” he said. “For example, we promote 10-foot cables on endcaps using a good-better-best approach to allow the customer

to make an informed buying decision. This results in customers making the decision to upsell themselves when given a clear choice.”

Hines recommended offering a minimum of three to five cable lines that can address the good-better-best approach to merchandising and promoting, and monitoring the GMROI (gross margin return on investment) and increasing the budget accordingly.

“Cables are easy to sell in bulk and can be cross-merchandised throughout the store,” Hines said.

“Cables are rarely discontinued, damaged in transit or marked down and do not become obsolete. They can be all price points and provide extra items per transaction to drive the average ticket price and improve the bottom line on most major good purchases. This is about as safe an inventory investment as you can possibly make.” **MI**

— By Jeff Cagle



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Steve Hobeck

MI retailers
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CROSSOVER MARKET

If customers don't acknowledge Steve Hobeck's greeting as they walk into Heinz Musitronics in Charlottesville, Va., he doesn't take it personally. They're not ignoring him. More often than not, they don't even hear him.

"We've recognized that most of the people who come in here are kind of techie, music-savvy people, and they are coming in with their earbuds in," Hobeck said. "We realized it's a market we can target, especially because we have a big music community in our town. People have gotten to know that we sell headphones and mention that we sell a larger variety than places like Best Buy."

He carries a range of SKUs,

with price points starting at \$30, and is in the process of building a listening station to go with his headphones wall. He keeps several models at impulse-buy locations near registers, where he also displays earbuds.

"We figured we should [carry more headphones and earbuds] because we already have an audience, and customers can check them out," Hobeck said. "People are looking at headphones as more of a consumable product versus something that they think they will keep for 20 years like they used to."

MERGING MARKETS

Stefanie Reichert, vice president of strategic marketing at Sennheiser, said the com-

pany has traditionally divided its consumer-focused products into MI dealer business and consumer electronics business but has seen the two merge over the past couple of years.

"We've realized these categories aren't that different," she said. "If you look at the marketplace and look at the last three years with Best Buy opening MI stores, you can see how on the big-box retailer level there are efforts to merge this somehow."

"People who are either musicians or are musically inclined tend to be the type who will consume two, three or four pairs of headphones because they are so involved in that space. Out of that

thinking came the question of where they go to shop. If they are out shopping for instruments or pro audio equipment in their favorite MI retail stores, why wouldn't they go and purchase their headphones there, as well?"

Jose Rivas, Shure's director of sales for the Americas business unit, stressed that retailers should consider video producers and even commuters as potential headphones customers.

"Almost every new electronic device — even a camera or a tablet computer — is equipped with the ability to record and even edit high-quality audio and video," he said. "More and more people

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The HP series offers lightweight designs for easy transport and sturdier designs for professional use. The high-powered HP 700 3,500 milliwatt headphones feature a flexible housing design for double- or single-ear monitoring and fold up for easy transport. MSRP: \$25.95–\$129.95. {adjaudio.com}

AUDIO-TECHNICA ATH-ANC25

These noise-canceling headphones block up to 80 percent of environmental noise while offering quality sound, comfort and portability at a low price. Unlike many noise-canceling headphones, ATH-ANC25s even function with a depleted battery. {audio-technica.com}



BEYERDYNAMIC DT 770 PRO

These closed dynamic headphones have been designed for critical music and sound monitoring. The single-sided cable makes handling the headphones easy, and the cushion system lets the DT 770 Pro be used comfortably for long periods. {beyerdynamic.com}



EXTREME HEADPHONES EX-29

The EX-29 offers 29 dB of isolation and weighs in at 11.5 ounces. It's designed without metal in the headband for hours of comfortable use. {extremeheadphones.com}



SHURE SRH840

Optimized for studio recording and critical listening, the SRH840 features reference-quality frequency response, rich bass, clear midrange and extended highs. Its ergonomic fit and collapsible construction provide extra comfort and portability. {shure.com}



ULTRASONE PRO 2900

The Pro 2900 is the only open-backed headphone in Ultrasone's Pro series. It's available in a standard, single-cable version and a balanced, double-cable version. The 2900 offers accurate sound production and the airy, natural sound of an open-backed headphone. {ultrasone.com}



SENNHEISER CX 280

These affordable in-ear-style headphones feature clear, detailed sound and ideal noise isolation. They also include a volume control and iPod carrying case. MSRP: \$69.95. {sennheiser.com}



are creating their own content, and this means that the need for professional-level monitoring headphones and earphones is increasing. These customers are looking for headphones that combine stellar sound quality, outstanding comfort and ruggedness, and excellent value.”

Rivas added that customers are increasingly value-conscious in the sluggish economy, but they want more than just great performance at a great price.

“They want the assurance of knowing that they’ll have access to first-class support, parts and service for years,” he said. “They’re much more willing to invest in gear that comes from brands that they trust. Savvy dealers are refining their product assortment to focus on lines that deliver the triple-play of performance, value and brand horsepower because those products sell faster, generate more profit and build a more loyal customer base.”

EDUCATION ANGLE

Russell Cox, president of Corner Music in Nashville, Tenn., said he sells a full range of headphones because his customer base tends to skew toward pros. But recently, his best-selling models have been in the \$70 range.

With consumers turning to MI stores for headphones, Cox said he also sees education as a great selling point, as there’s usually a knowledge gap between a pro audio buyer and the average shopper. He often takes the time to educate customers about electromagnetic radiation. He said he explains how some headphones are designed to fire into the folds of ears rather than directly into the ear canal — and the difference that makes in safety.

“Headphones can sometimes be a flooded market, and the average consumer might not know the difference between an open- or closed-back headphone,” Cox said.

But in the end, value wins out.

“Everyone is looking for a great deal,” he said. “It’s kind of like VCRs. As time passes along and they get more sophisticated and more people jump on the bandwagon, the prices come down. You can get a great set of headphones for half the price they were five years ago.” **MI**

— By Jeff Cagle

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Mobile device mania hits the MI industry

THE APP CRAZE

The future is here, and it's on your iPhone.

At least that seems to be the case, judging from the plethora of MI suppliers going app crazy. Every time you turn around, another company is releasing a new download or accessory for mobile devices.

Hohner, Alfred, Peavey and Yamaha are a few of the suppliers that are jumping in with their own apps at Apple's iTunes store.

"Our apps are geared to supplement the educational methods we publish to bring awareness to music hobbyists that may not be so familiar with Alfred and printed music, not to replace them," said Dan O'Toole, CIO of Alfred.

The print publisher's iChord Guitar app comes with a built-in tuner and teaches the user to

play any chord by note, type and variation. It costs 99 cents. Alfred is also working on a similar app branded after its Music For Little Mozart piano course.

"By designing these apps, we hope to increase the number of music makers and therefore the number of printed sheet music customers by bringing our products to the attention of millions of iPod and iPhone users," O'Toole said.

Hohner's How To Blow The Blues app teaches users how to play blues bars on the harmonica and features a graphic demo of how to play three different harmonica licks.

"Exposing users to blues music is a good thing in and of itself, but teaching them how to actually play licks on the harmonica is pretty cool," said Scott Emmerman, Hohner's director of marketing and

sales. "Retailers can profit because the more harmonica players that can take up the instrument, the more harmonica retailers will sell."

He added that the app could be the reason for the continued growth of Hohner's harmonica sales.

"We've had over 3,000 downloads so far of our app, and the number of downloads is actually still ramping up," Emmerman said. "Maybe the success of our app is one factor contributing to Hohner's harmonica sales being up year after year."

Jeff Hawley, the director of Yamaha's Customer Experience Group, echoed Emmerman's positive outlook. Yamaha's latest app, The Hub, is set to be released in early November.

"The Hub's whole purpose is to drive traffic into dealer

locations," Hawley said. "The app includes tracking and mapping technologies on the iPhone that let users very easily find Yamaha dealers. Plus, every time users put the app to use, they are eligible to receive points towards rewards from Yamaha, furthering their use."

The free app is one of many that Yamaha has launched in an effort to drive sales without replacing actual hardware.

"We are very aware that a keyboard app could replace a physical keyboard," Hawley said. "But, we would much rather have an app that presents content and drives traffic into stores."

ACCESSORY BOOST

During this year's "Best In Show" session at Summer NAMM in Nashville, Tenn., the IK Multimedia iRig got a nod as

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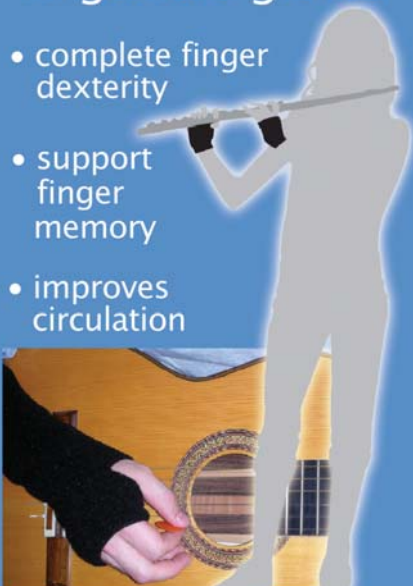


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{iACCESSORIES}

one of the “Gotta Stock It” items. The unit uses a real-time multieffects app and interface that lets musicians hook up their electric guitars and basses directly to their iPhones.

Another product, the iConnectMIDI from iConnectivity, is an advanced MIDI interface that provides several MIDI functions, such as merge, patch, filter and thru.

These accessories open up retailers to new sales in a different category. “Apps can drive more iConnectMIDI sales by making more consumers aware of the product, desire the product and need the product,” said Michael Loh, CEO of iConnectivity.

DEALER FEEDBACK

Sweetwater Sound in Fort Wayne, Ind., which has delved into stocking iPods and iPads, uses apps as a selling point.

“Even though we’ve seen a grow-

ing number of music-related apps, I don’t feel like they have had a direct impact on the sales of any of the products we’ve been selling,” said John Grabowski, director of purchasing for Sweetwater. “The new [accessories] that are specifically designed for use with the iPod, iPhone and iPad have done quite well in our store.”

Kevin Peckham, product manager for Full Compass Systems in Madison, Wis., also agreed that apps have opened new sales doors.

“I like to think of the iPod apps as sales accelerators that encourage our customers to purchase related products or technology,” Peckham said. “Rather than fear the diversion of sales away from the specialized devices we sell, I focus on the positive effect the iPod apps have on generating interest in the products they interface with.” **MI**

— By Katie Kailus

+ i ACCESSORIES



PEAVEY AMPKIT IPHONE APP & AMPKIT LINK

Peavey’s AmpKit LiNK is a high-fidelity audio interface for Apple mobile devices. It features Cross Talk Eliminator, which solves the feedback problem that results in existing unpowered iPhone inter-

faces. The real-time AmpKit app and pedal studio is free at the iTunes store. MSRP: \$39.99. peavey.com

IK MULTIMEDIA AMPLITUBE IRIG

IK Multimedia’s AmpliTube iRig is a combination instrument interface adapter for Apple’s mobile devices and the AmpliTube iPhone software for guitar and bass. It lets users plug their guitars into their iPhone and jam anywhere. The AmpliTube Rig includes three simultaneous stomp-box effects, an amp, a cabinet and a mic. MSRP: \$39.99. ikmultimedia.com



PRIMACOUSTIC TELEPAD-4



This device enables users to mount their iPhones to a mic stand, music stand or hi-hat stand. It’s suited for chord charts, backing tracks, guitar tuners and lyrics. MSRP: \$35. primacoustic.com



iCONNECTMIDI

This device connects MIDI gear to the iPod Touch, iPhone or iPad and your computer. It features two sets of DIN ports and two USB host ports that support hubs for USB MIDI devices. Advanced MIDI features include route, merge and bridge — between USB MIDI and DIN MIDI devices. Its firmware is upgradable using standard MIDI files. MSRP: \$199.95. iconnectmidi.com

+ APP CENTRAL



Hohner’s How To Blow The Blues lets users learn how to blow a 12-bar blues riff, play a virtual on-screen harp and learn about blues harp players. **Price: \$1.99.**



Alfred’s iChord Guitar features a built-in tuner and lets the user choose to see the chord displayed in various neck and fret-board positions. **Price: 99 cents.**



The Disklavier app from Yamaha enables wireless WiFi remote control of the instrument using the iPod, iPhone and iPad. **Price: Free.**

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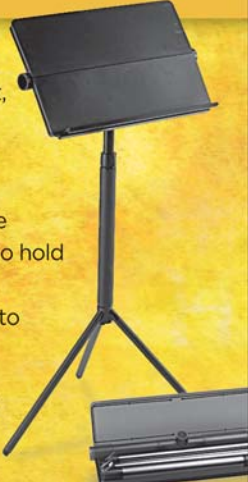
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GEAR



PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

DUNLOP | BLACK FANG PICKS

Fang-tastic Picks

Metallica's James Hetfield has inspired a line of Dunlop guitar picks. Based on a vintage tortoise-shell pick, the Black Fang is made of sturdy Ultex material that delivers a defined tone and sharp attack. Its pointed, contoured tip provides speed and control and is ideal for players looking to unleash their tone. The picks are available in 0.73-, 0.94- and 1.14-mm gauges. MSRP: six picks, \$4.38; pick tin with six picks; \$5.98. jimdunlop.com

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FENDER | HOT ROD III

Vroom, Vroom

Fender's new Hot Rod III series amplifiers feature several upgrades based on player feedback, including improved speakers, enhanced circuits and revised cosmetic appointments. All Hot Rod III series amps have easier-to-read black control panels, dog bone handles and LED jewel lights. fender.com



VOX | HAND-WIRED SERIES

Handy Amplification

Vox's new hand-wired AC15 and AC30 amplifier lines include four combo models, a head and a matching extension cabinet. Finished in fawn-colored vinyl reminiscent of a 1960s AC amp, the birch-ply cabinets feature solid, tight bracing and a natural high-frequency diffuser. Matched ruby tubes are used throughout for an extended dynamic range. voxamps.com



MUSICORP | MBT CASES

Ax Holders

Musicorp has introduced MBT Cases guitar bags. They're available in red and black and feature thick 20-mm high-density foam padding and a non-scratch interior lining with a neck restraint strap for additional protection. They also boast large front pockets with compartments for storing picks, strings, straps and sheet music. The cases are available in four sizes: acoustic, electric, classical and bass. MSRP: \$55. musicorp.com



STONE CASE | DOUBLE GUITAR GIG BAGS

Double Trouble

Stone Case has added four double gig bags that hold two guitars at once. They include a double solid body electric bag, double solid body bass bag, double acoustic bag, and a bag that holds one acoustic and one electric. All feature 600 denier nylon jackets with smooth interiors, 11 mm of padding, dual opening metal zippers, an outside accessory pocket and dual shoulder straps. shsint.net





1



2



3



4

1 PAUL REED SMITH JA-15

Paul Reed Smith has teamed up with guitarist and composer Paul Jackson Jr. to design the JA-15, Jackson's first signature model PRS guitar. The 15-inch archtop adapts to players performing many musical styles and includes two 53/10 bass pickups for a smooth, balanced tone. The thin and hard V12 finish and the two-piece adjustable bridge give the guitar a resonant, musical sound. prsguitars.com

2 FERNANDES GUITARS ELITE JS

Fernandes Guitars' Revolver Elite JS features a new form of camouflage inspired by Jonny Santos, a Grammy nominee and the frontman of Spineshank and Silent Civilian. The guitar boasts a red military pattern and is powered by the EMG-81 in bridge, EMG S in the middle and Fernandes sustainer in the neck position. The Elite JS features an alder body, maple neck and maple fingerboard. fernandesguitars.com

3 RICHMOND EMPIRE

Richmond Guitars is the latest member of the Godin Guitar family, and the new Richmond Empire offers serious tone and retro flair like the rest of the Richmond line. The instrument features a single-cutaway solid silver leaf maple body with poplar wings, 24.75-inch-scale mahogany ergocut neck with a worn-in feel, rosewood fingerboard, high-ratio tuners and chrome wraparound bridge. richmondguitarscanada.com

4 EASTWOOD AIRLINE ELECTRIC MANDOLA

Eastwood Guitars recently rolled out the new Airline Electric Mandola. The instrument features a seafoam green alder body in a U.S. map shape with an 18-inch scale maple neck and rosewood fingerboard. The guitar includes a single humbucker pickup with volume and tone controls. It's tuned in fifths, as well as a fifth lower than a mandolin. eastwoodguitars.com

TUNE TECH | TT-10 SHARK

Shark in the Water

Tune Tech's new TT-10 Shark tuners are named for their shark fin shape. They're a fully chromatic clip-on vibration tuner with four mode selections and a backlit screen that changes color when in tune. The TT-10s are available in black, silver, red, pink and blue. MSRP: \$19.95. shsint.net



BUDDA | BUDWAH

New & Improved

Budda recently enhanced its Budwah pedal to include a military-grade sealed potentiometer and heavy-duty switch with improved duty cycle. It's also now double-reinforced with commercial-grade adhesive. Plus, a heavier case for enhanced stability in live performance and a new battery compartment with door and battery cradle are included. budda.com



ELIXIR STRINGS | PRO PACKS

Packin' Punch

Offered in a limited edition, new specially packaged Elixir Pro Packs include three sets of the company's most popular strings. These come in four varieties with Nanoweb coating, including phosphor bronze acoustic strings in light and medium and electric strings in light and super light. Electric strings with Nanoweb coating provide tone that lasts three to five times longer than ordinary strings. They deliver the presence, punch and detail of conventional strings, while extending tone life. elixirstrings.com



BARCUS BERRY | SYNC CLIP-ON TUNER

Clip-On, Clip-Off

Barcus Berry's new Sync Clip-On Tuner is a mini-sized chromatic tuner with an LCD display and a tuning range of A0 to A6. It offers fully adjustable clip-on mounting with silica gel clip pads to protect the instrument. The Sync Clip-On Tuner also features chromatic, guitar, bass, violin and ukulele tuning selections. MSRP: \$39.95. barcusberry.com





GUARDIAN CASES | VINTAGE HARDSHELL

Vintage Protection

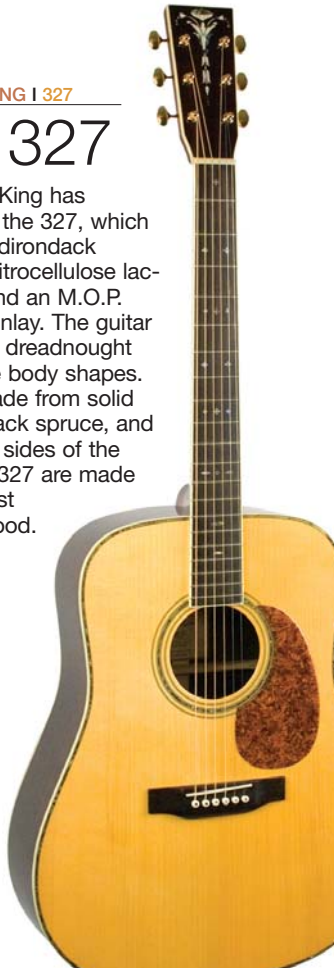
Guardian has added rectangular electric guitar and electric bass cases to its Vintage Hardshell line. The new cases offer seven-ply, cross-grained wood construction for strength and four 14-karat gold-plated latches and one lock to keep the top tightly secured. The line also features a leather handle for easy gripping. guardiancases.com

RECORDING KING | 327

New 327

Recording King has launched the 327, which features an Adirondack spruce top, nitrocellulose lacquer finish, and an M.O.P. and abalone inlay. The guitar is available in dreadnought and 000-style body shapes. The top is made from solid AAA Adirondack spruce, and the back and sides of the RD- and RO-327 are made from solid East Indian rosewood. They have ebony fretboards.

recordingking.com



TAYLOR | FALL LIMITEDS

Fall Tradition

Taylor Guitars has released its Fall Limited Edition guitars.

This year's Limiteds feature tonewoods led by figured mahogany and koa; new designs that include a deep-body dreadnought and 12-fret Grand Auditorium; and fresh inlay concepts, such as the laser-engraved Victorian motif. The electric line also boasts an all-mahogany SolidBody Classic and a T3/B that celebrate the vintage era. taylorguitars.com



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— Theresa Case — PianoCentralStudios.com

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KACES | RAZOR EXPRESS SERIES

Mixer's Messenger

Kaces' new Razor Express series messenger bags are ideal for laptop computers, small mixers, digital recorders and wireless mic systems. The exterior includes a contoured poly handgrip, an adjustable shoulder strap and a double-stitched cover flap secured with Velcro. The inside of the bag features a large zippered mesh compartment, ideal for holding cables, patch cords and AC adapters.

MSRP:
\$34.95.

{kaces.com}



GATOR | TSA MIC CASES

Safe & Sound

Gator's new TSA microphone cases are an all-in-one solution for transporting and protecting multiple mics. Made of a lightweight polyethylene plastic, these heavy-duty cases sport an upgraded look and black uninterrupted aluminum valance. Specialized foam mic drops hold up to 15 or 30 wired microphones securely during transport. The GM-15-TSA includes large interior storage space for accessories and cables, and heavy-duty TSA locking latches let these cases be safely checked and transported via air.

{gatorcases.com}



CERWIN-VEGA | INTENSE SPEAKER SYSTEM

Intensity Enhanced

Cerwin-Vega has enhanced the INTENSE! V2 Passive Portable P.A. speaker system. The three models available are ideal for fully portable sound on the go in P.A. applications, such as live sound, program playback and DJ systems. They're also ideal for installations. The speakers feature 34-mm compression drivers, steel frame woofers and a black carpet finish. {cerwin-vega.com}

AVID | GSR

Sound Reinforced

Avid has introduced the M-Audio GSR active sound reinforcement speaker series. Designed for small to mid-sized venues, the GSR series includes 10- and 12-inch full-range P.A. cabinets that deliver professional-quality sound and an 18-inch subwoofer that offers extended bass reproduction for larger venues. The GSR speakers are designed and engineered with lightweight components for maximum portability. MSRP: \$499-\$999.

{avid.com}





CHAMELEON LABS | TS-1 MKII

Lab-Tested

Chameleon Labs recently rolled out the TS-1 MKII small diaphragm tube condenser mic. Driven by newly designed vacuum tube electronics, the MKII power supply features an adjustable tube heater voltage control that gives users the ability to dial in a diverse range of sonic textures. MSRP: \$559.

{chameleonlabs.com}



*Gustavo Farias

SHS AUDIO | MONITORS

New Angle

SHS Audio has introduced the Flat Angle personal P.A. monitors. They're available in three sizes: 200-watt 15-inch, 150-watt 12-inch and 100-watt 10-inch. Each cabinet features a full-range speaker and P-Line high-frequency driver, integrated stand mount, and dual Speakon.

Cabinet construction features a full face steel mesh grill backed by breathable acoustical foam and flush integral handles. {shsaudio.com}



*Microphone Cable pictured

Composer/producer
Gustavo Farias
knows the importance
of being well connected

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comes to mic
and guitar cable,
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and for me, that's
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zaolla.com/farias
for full interview



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ULTRASONE | PRO 2900

Perfect Balance

The new Pro 2900 is the only open-backed headphone in Ultrason's Pro series. Ultrason has released both a standard, single-cable version and a balanced, double-cable version of these headphones. The Pro 2900s boast a classic black design and velvet-covered black ear pads. MSRP: Pro 2900 headphones, \$549; balanced Pro 2900 headphones, \$799.

{ultrasone.com}



KORG | MR-2

Hi-Res Recorder

Korg has added the MR-2 high-resolution mobile recorder to its MR series of DSD digital recorders. The MR-2 records in the ultra high-fidelity DSD format, using a 2.8 MHz sampling rate that captures every sonic detail while preserving the ambience of the original recording location. The unit also features a built-in, professional-grade, electret stereo condenser microphone and a highly visible, pixel liquid crystal display with backlight. MSRP: \$899. korg.com



WAVES | VIDEO SOUND SUITE

Making Waves

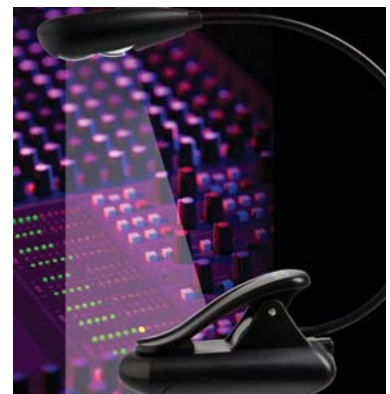
Waves Audio has introduced the Waves Video Sound Suite. The program reduces noise, cleans up and enhances dialogue, smoothes out and maximizes volume, and recreates room acoustics. It integrates seamlessly into Avid Media Composer 5, Apple Soundtrack Pro and Sony Vegas, and it includes special presets for video editors. MSRP: \$850. waves.com



TASCAM | DR-03

Bite-Sized

Tascam's new DR-03 recorder features 24-bit recording with built-in stereo mics in a package smaller than an energy bar. It records to microSD media, and a 2 GB card is included with the unit. The DR-03 features such playback functions as looping and variable speed audition to slow down music without changing the pitch. The recorder has an LCD display, a built-in speaker and a built-in desk-top stand. tascam.com



MIGHTY BRIGHT | XTRAFLEX 2

Shine On

The new XtraFlex 2 LED MusicLight from Mighty Bright features two LEDs that increase the contrast of words and notes on paper. The intensity can be set by pressing the button once or twice, and the light can be clipped and twisted to set the perfect angle. The clip opens extra wide, and if the battery runs low, the light can be plugged in. MSRP: \$19.99. mightybright.com



ALLIANCE RUBBER | WRAPZ

Wrap It Up

Alliance Rubber has introduced a reusable tool to bundle and organize cords, cables and ropes needed for instruments, mics, amps and lighting cables. The Wrapz are weather-resistant and come in multiple size options. Cable Wrapz, Gear Wrapz and Camo Wrapz provide users with extended usage. alliancerubber.com



AKG | PERCEPTION WIRELESS SYSTEM

Wonderful Wireless

AKG's new Perception Wireless System is a microphone system that includes bandwidths up to 30 MHz and excessively low-current transmitters. Perception Wireless is designed for musicians and entry-level audio technicians, although it has the capabilities to handle all different audio setups. akg.com



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BUMCHUM | THE BUMCHUM

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The small, portable BumChum delivers all the weight and power of a bass drum without the volume. The new unit lets drummers feel and experience the bass drum like never before and consists of a powerful tactile generator built into a throne top, coupled to a flight-cased electronics pack. The system uses bone conduction to deliver powerful, precise and nuanced reproduction without sound.

{thebumchum.co.uk}



DRUMTAGS | ADD-ON

Off the Chain

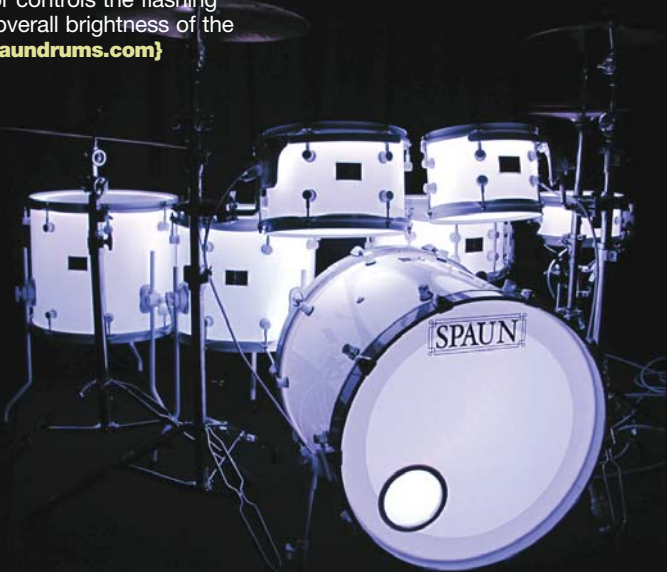
Drummers can now show off their fashionable side with DrumTags neck ware. Featuring a choice of nine authentic drum finishes mounted in custom-made, stainless-steel frames, DrumTags include a traditional 24-inch stainless-steel ball chain. Finishes include silver, black, red, blue and turquoise glass glitter sparkles, along with white marine, black oyster, black diamond and blue pearl. MSRP: \$29.95.

{drumtags.com}

SPAUN | LED LIGHTED ACRYLIC DRUM KIT

Light It Up

Spaun's new LED Lighted Acrylic drum kit includes a multicolored light system that can be operated via remote control. The kit features a wide range of color options, including seven different solid colors and 18 different flashing and strobe effects. The operator controls the flashing speed and overall brightness of the system. {spaundrums.com}



ADAMS | CONCERT BASS DRUMS

Ace Basses

Adams' new Concert bass drums are available in four different shell diameters, including 28, 32, 36 and 40 inches, with each diameter available in either 18- or 22-inch depth shells for extra fullness. These mahogany bass drums come standard in a lacquer finish, featuring 2-inch-wide wooden hoops, Remo Fiberskyn III heads and a swivel tension rod design to ensure perfect head seating.

{pearldrums.com}

GIBRALTAR | DRUM KEYS

Key to Simple Tuning

Gibraltar's new Quick Release drum key makes tuning simple by including a knurled grip for quick, easy head changes and adjustments. The Quick Release drum key hooks onto any lanyard or carabineer clip for easy access. gibraltarhardware.com



LOS CABOS | SHOTGUNS

Bullet-Proof

Los Cabos has launched Shotgun drumsticks, which feature a double butt-end with a diameter of 0.580 inches and a length of 16 inches. The sticks are available in white hickory and are ideal for both kit players and percussionists. MSRP: \$13.50. loscabosdrumsticks.com



SONOR | BEECH INFINITE DRUM KITS

Infinite Beats

Sonor has introduced custom Beech Infinite drum kits, featuring handcrafted shells with the company's Cross Laminated Tension Free process. The kits include lugs that are equipped with TuneSafe. The shells are finished by hand with a special Soft Touch paint. Finishes include Piano Black Soft Touch and Crème Lacquer Soft Touch. sonorusa.com

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PEARL | NEW YORKER COWBELLS

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Pearl's New Yorker Cowbells create a signature salsa sound with enough volume for any musical situation. The new line is comprised of three different bell sizes. Pearl has also released The Marc Quinones Timbal Bell, which features one-piece steel construction. pearldrums.com



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PIANOS & KEYBOARDS

NOVATION | ULTRANOVA

Super Nova

UltraNova, a new analog modeling synthesizer from Novation, is ideal for any user. It boasts a 37-note Fatar keybed, illuminated pitch and modulation wheels, eight assignable touch-sensitive rotary encoders, a 144-character LCD, and a large knob for fine control of parameters. The unit includes a single-part synth engine with up to 18 voices.

{novationmusic.com}



KORG | PA800

Elite Keys

Korg has added the Pa800 Elite to its latest line of interactive workstation keyboards. The Pa800 uses RX (Real eXperience) technology to drive the EDS (Enhanced Definition Synthesis) engine for a natural sound. Additional features include two user-assignable sliders, two assignable switches, four audio outputs, and a damper pedal input and user-assignable pedal input. MSRP: \$3,800.

{korg.com}

MOOG | MINIMOOG VOYAGER XL

Mini's B-day

Moog's new Minimoog Voyager XL celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Minimoog. The Voyager XL features a 61-note velocity-sensitive keyboard with after-pressure, ribbon controller with pitch and gate CV outputs, and a touch surface controller with X, Y, A and gate outputs. The unit also boasts extensive front-panel patchability. MSRP: \$4,995. {moogmusic.com}





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PROTEC | LUX PRO PAC CASES

Luxury Case

Protec's new Lux PRO PAC cases feature a lightweight shock-absorbent shell to protect the instrument. They also include a zippered messenger section with a built-in organizer, tuck-away padded backpack straps, a water-resistant 1680 padded ballistic nylon exterior and a removable shoulder strap. Lux PRO PAC cases are available for Bb clarinet, German clarinet, oboe and flute/piccolo. They come in black or chocolate. protecmusic.com



CONNOLLY MUSIC | BAZZINI

International Beauties

Connolly Music has released Antonio Bazzini, a line of step-up violin and cello outfits ideal for beginning musicians. Bazzini instruments are designed in Italy and manufactured in China under German supervision to exacting specifications. Inspired by Bazzini, a violin virtuoso, the instruments come in three different levels: studio, concerto and maestro. All are fully set up and include a bow and a case or a bag. MSRP: violins start at \$1,800; cellos start at \$4,800. connollymusic.com



ADAMS | GAT33

Vintage Vibe

Adams' new Artist Series GAT33 Orchestra bells boast a vintage sound with a strong traveler frame. They also feature an open-rail system, which not only allows for a foot-operated damper system but also eliminates the case noise that's usually produced by bells that are mounted in a box. The GAT33 features a 3.3-octave range. pearldrums.com



VANDOREN | M30 LYRE

Midpoint Magic

The M30 Lyre is the latest addition to Vandoren's French clarinet mouthpieces. This model is designed to be a midpoint between the gold-standard 5RV Lyre and the M30 — its tip opening and facing length position it directly between the two. The mouthpiece is flexible with a big, round sound that's harmonically dense and easy to control. The M30 Lyre is available in Standard Profile, Profile 88 and 13 series models. vandoren.com



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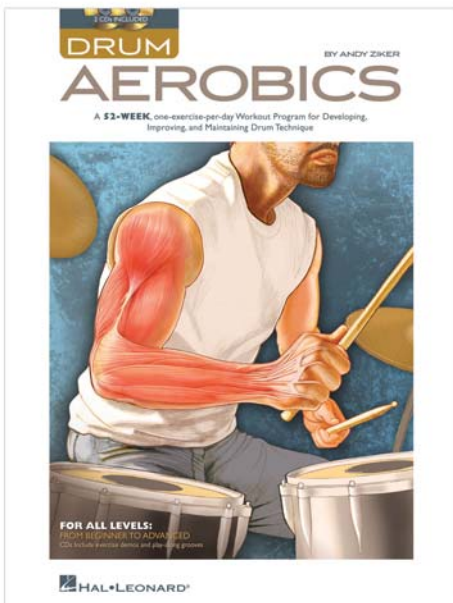
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HAL LEONARD | 'DRUM AEROBICS'

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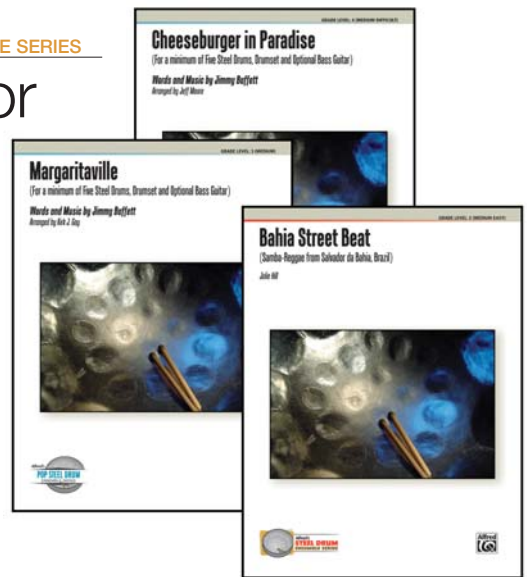
{halleonard.com}

ALFRED | STEEL DRUM ENSEMBLE SERIES

Island Flavor

Alfred's new Steel Drum Ensemble series is ideal for steel drum bands of all levels. Julie Hill's compositions, *Bahia Street Beat* and *Pepita's Dance*, are targeted toward the beginning band. For the developing and professional-level band, there are traditional titles, such as *Jamaica Farewell* and Jimmy Buffet's *Margaritaville*. MSRP: \$17.99-\$18.99.

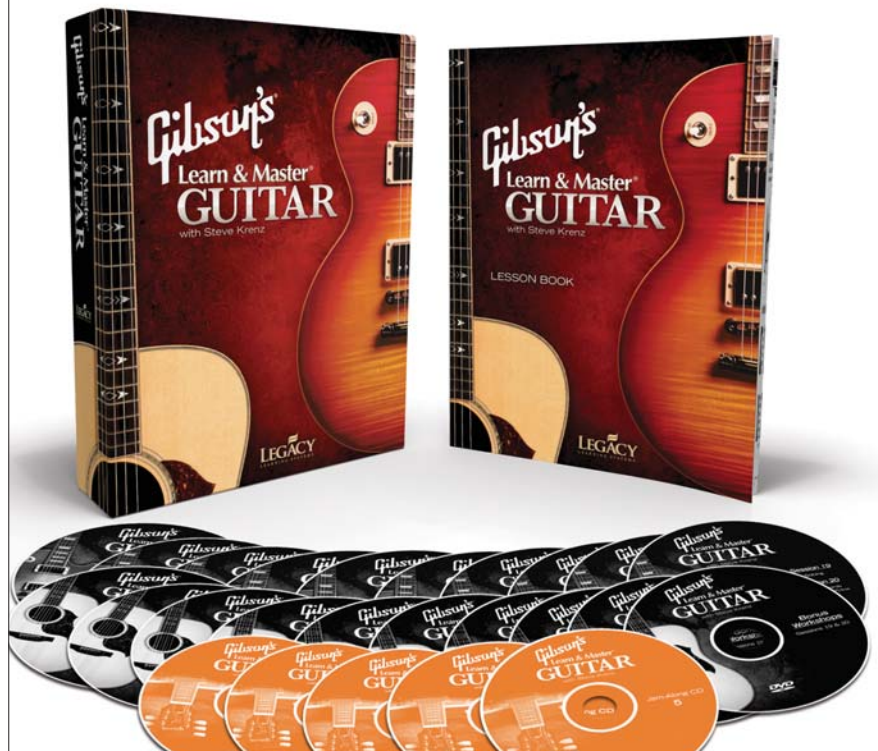
{alfred.com}



GIBSON | 'LEARN & MASTER GUITAR'

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Gibson has released *Learn & Master Guitar*, a course that consists of 20 professionally produced HD DVDs, five jam-along CDs, a 100-page lesson book and a free online student support site. MSRP: \$149. {gibson.com}



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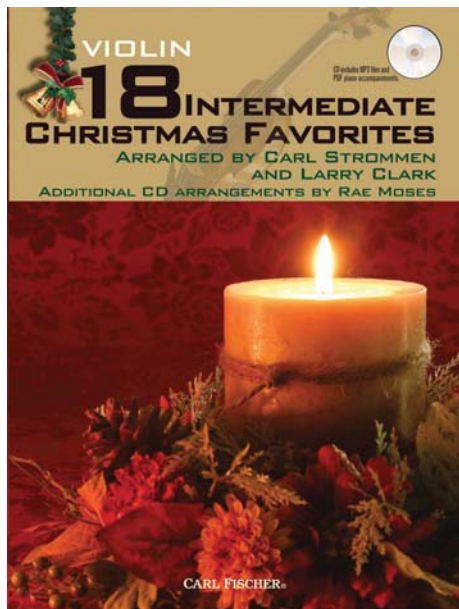
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CARL FISCHER | '18 INTERMEDIATE CHRISTMAS FAVORITES'

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HUDSON MUSIC | 'MODERN DRUMMER FESTIVAL 2010'

Drummer Fest Lives

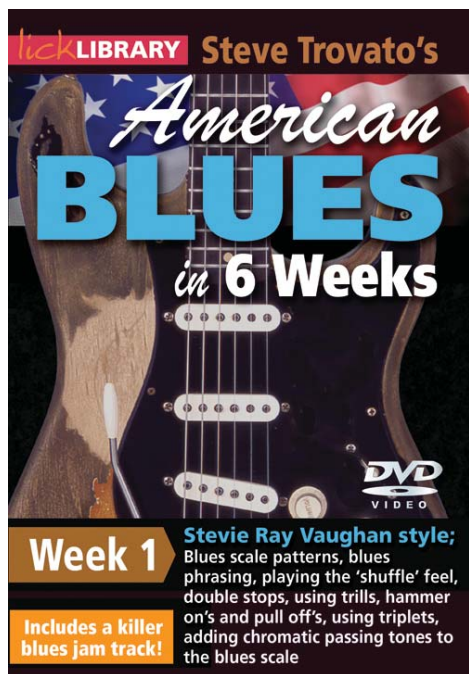
Hudson Music and Modern Drummer magazine have launched the Modern Drummer Festival 2010 DVD. It combines performance and master class footage from the May 22, 2010, Modern Drummer Festival in Montclair, N.J. Featured performers include Shannon Forrest, Shawn Pelton and Stanton Moore. Drummers Daniel Glass and Chris Coleman presented master classes at the festival, which are also included on the disc, along with a printable PDF e-book containing transcriptions of select performances. hudsonmusic.com



LICK LIBRARY | 'AMERICAN BLUES IN 6 WEEKS'

Six Blues in Six Weeks

Lick Library has launched Steve Trovato's American Blues In 6 Weeks, a series of DVD guitar lessons. With a DVD for each week, the series features expert tuition covering the great blues guitarists, including Stevie Ray Vaughan, Johnny Winter, Jimi Hendrix, Albert Collins and Albert King. The guitar lessons are presented by multi-stylist guitar wizard Steve Trovato. licklibrary.com



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CHAUVET | MIN LEDS

Lightweight Lights

Chauvet has released two ultra-compact moving yokes: the MiN Spot RGBW and the MiN Wash RGBW. The lights feature a 13-watt quad-color LED, built-in sound-activated and automatic programs, and a vector speed channel for smooth pan, tilt and color mixing. Each weighs less than 9 pounds and is ideal for small clubs or mobile DJs. chauvetlighting.com

ODYSSEY | SCRIM WERKS

Cover-up

Odyssey's new Scrim Werks Triangular Scrims can be used to cover speakers and light stand setups for a cleaner, more professional look. The scrim easily secures to any two bottom legs of a tripod and to the lower pole tension knob, covering a third of the bottom tripod leg area. The two scrims, the SPATRILG and SPARISM, can also be used for a wide variety of applications, such as temporary outdoor shading designs with multiple pieces or in conjunction with other Scrim Werks screen products. odysseygear.com



MBT LIGHTING | LEDBEEHIVE

All the Buzz

MBT Lighting recently launched a low-heat, energy-efficient LED effect light, the LEDBEEHIVE. It features 36 1-inch round lenses in a dome-shaped, all-metal housing and six ultra-bright 3-watt LEDs, which results in 216 sharp, colorful beams. The LEDBEEHIVE also features a dual-operation mode switch. MSRP: \$199. mbtlighting.com



PIONEER | S-DJ08, S-DJ05

Larger Than Life

Pioneer Electronics has debuted its first line of active reference monitoring speakers with the S-DJ08 and S-DJ05. Designed for DJing and music production, the compact speakers achieve a larger-than-normal listening area thanks to the use of a curved waveguide enclosure that directs the soft-dome tweeter's sound in a wider pattern. MSRP: S-DJ08, \$1,199 per pair; S-DJ05, \$899 per pair. pioneerdjusa.com

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Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation PS Form 3526-R 1). Publication Title: Music Inc 2). Publication Number: 0451-0990 3). Filing Date: 10/01/2010 4). Issue Frequency: Monthly-except for April 5). Number of Issues Published Annually: 11 6). Annual Subscription Price: \$50.00. 7). Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 102 N. Haven Rd, Elmhurst IL 60126-2970 8). Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: Same as above 9). Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher - Frank Alkyer, Address is same as above; Editor - Zach Phillips, Address is same as above; Associate Editor - Katie Kailus, Address is same as above 10). Owner: Kevin Maher, 102 N. Haven Rd, Elmhurst, IL 60126-2970. 11). Known Bondholders: None 12). Tax Status has NOT changed during previous 12 months 13). Publication Title: Music Inc. 14). Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: October 2010 15). Extent and Nature of Circulation: Better

Business Magazine for Music Retailers 15a). Total Number of Copies: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months (12 Mo. Avg.)- 10,653; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date (Actual) - 9,921 15b). Paid and/or Requested Circulation 15b(1). Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541: Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. -6,596; Actual - 6,469 15b(2). In-County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541: Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. - 0; Actual- 0 15b(3). Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution: Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. -416; Actual - 427 15b(4). Requested Copies Distributed by Other Classes Mailed Through USPS: Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. - 0; Actual - 0 15c). Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 12 Mo. Avg. - 6,596; Actual - 6,469 15d(1). Outside County Non-requested Copies Stated on Form 3541 included Sample copies, Requests Over 3 years old,

Bulk Sales. Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. - 3,069; Actual - 2,924 15d(2). Inside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on Form 3541 included Sample copies, Requests Over 3 years old, Bulk Sales. Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. - 0; Actual - 0 15d(3). Non-requested Copies Distributed Through the USPS by Other Classes of Mail: Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. -0; Actual - 0 15d(3). Nonrequested Copies Distributed Outside the Mail (Trade shows, Pickup Stands). Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. - 01; Actual - 0 15e). Total Nonrequested Distribution: 12 Mo. Avg. - 3,069; Actual - 2,924 15f). Total Distribution: Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. -9,665; Actual - 9,393 15g). Copies Not distributed: Total Number of Copies: 12 Mo. Avg. -988; Actual -528 15h. Total: 12 Mo. Avg. - 10,653; Actual - 9,921 15i). Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: 12 Mo. Avg. -68.2%; Actual - 68.9% 16). Publication Statement of Ownership: Publication Required. Will be printed in the November 2010 issue of this publication.

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Anthony Mantova
Mantova's Two Street Music
Eureka, Calif.

We have had tremendous success tripling our guitar string sales with an offer that includes buying one pack of strings and getting a \$3 restringing. Or customers can buy two packs of guitar strings and get a free guitar restring or buy three packs of strings and get 20 percent off plus two free guitar restringings.

This simple program has tripled our guitar string sales by adding value where customers don't expect it: guitar strings. It also provides the opportunity to sell other guitar accessories like polish cloths, string winders, cleaning products or whatever new products we have.

The offer increases our one-on-one [time] with the customer and employee, which is crucial for future sales.

>>>

Randy Luna
Guitars Boutique
Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

Our best accessory display is probably our strap wall. It features over 125 guitar strap styles. Our customers look at it and know there is one up there for them, even if they weren't coming in to purchase a strap.

We have all kind of styles, from religious to leather straps. We also carry inexpensive ones from mass-produced brands, as well as indie companies. We sell straps to people who don't need one.

For all our add-ons, we rely on having a great variety. Variety is the key — and making sure customers know about it.

One example

is our accessory corner that features over 12 capos, 40 cleaning and maintenance guitar products, nine strap locks, over 30 slides, and 28 pedal connectors. Customers always end up buying something. We make sure they know our variety, and that makes them tell their friends that our shop is the best option for accessories.



>>>

**Kevin
Damm**
Damm Music
Wichita, Kan.

What has been your most effective accessory display or promotion?

As far as holiday sales and promotions go, we do a Black Friday sale each year, and we make sure to always have an accessory table with cheap capos, guitar strings and guitar stands. They are good add-on items for our sale.

We have lots of accessory displays and spinning displays that feature most of our straps, capos and tuners.

The way we display them is simple, but we try to mix things up by moving them around. Moving our displays keeps the


dust off them and keeps everything looking fresh.

Our customers are always walking in and saying, 'Oh, you moved everything.' I try to keep them on their toes because if you move things around people will always find different things in your store.

We really practice that, and at least every quarter, we will flip the displays around.

We house most of our small-dollar items conveniently near the cash register. And we also have freestanding displays

where our cashiers stand. These have an overload of small goods that are usually between \$5 and \$10. Behind those, we keep our straps and tuners so the customer is surrounded, but not in an uncomfortable way, with accessories at the point of sale. This is convenient for two reasons: one is to help the customer's impulse to buy, and the other is to encourage and remind our sales staff to point out all of the things that are right next to them while they make the sale.



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