



EDITORIAL

THE INDUSTRY'S HIGHER PURPOSE

Flipping through magazines at a recent publisher's conference, I was struck by the fact that the challenges currently facing the music products industry are hardly unique. We're concerned about the impact of low-cost imported products from China and the resulting deflation. Based on the amount of coverage in *Lighting Design & Application*, so is the entire lighting fixture industry. How do independent retailers compete effectively against much larger chain stores? If you're looking for ideas, there is no shortage of them in *Hardware Store Age*, just substitute the name Guitar Center for Home Depot and the coverage is surprisingly similar to what appears in our columns. Recruiting, retaining, and training good sales people has been a perennial area of concern in the music industry. Given that the lead story in a recent issue of *Insurance Agent* is titled "How To Recruit, Retain, And Train Salespeople," we assume that it's an issue on the minds of insurance agents too. Everyone in the music industry ponders how the internet will ultimately affect the way music and audio gear is sold. Coverage in magazines like *Pet Store World*, *American Jeweler*, *Housewares Journal*, and numerous others, would suggest that people in every other industry are pondering the same thing.

While other industries may have the same commercial concerns as our business, they lack something that defines us: namely, a higher purpose. To read *Shoe Store News*, or *Plumbing Supply*, or *Tire Retailer News* is to read about people simply figuring out how to make their businesses run more profitably. People in the music industry work hard to make money as well, but they enjoy the added satisfaction of working in the service of an art form that brings untold joy and happiness to the world. And, for a lot of us, the "non-monetary" compensation that comes from being associated with music is almost as important as the actual paycheck.

The philosopher Nietzsche famously wrote, "Without music, life would be a mistake." I'm still looking through my *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, but I haven't found the entry that reads "Without quality floor coverings, life would be a mistake." Music is of incalculable importance everywhere. It plays a central role in all our celebrations and our

solemn events. People literally define themselves by the music they listen to. As an industry making and selling the tools for musicians, we play a vital part in perpetuating this amazing human expression.

For such a small industry, why do we have such out-sized trade shows? One reason is that being engaged in this higher purpose creates a powerful bond that pulls industry members together for an annual celebration. And it's a bond that transcends national and cultural boundaries. In this issue, we profile a Chinese-based audio maker, a European instrument company, an American guitar maker, and a Brazilian harmonica manufacturer. Despite wildly different product offerings, and different nationalities, there is a common thread to be found in all of these stories: namely, people animated by the challenge of creating tools that allow for musical expression. They are all interested in the mundane concerns of sustaining a profitable business, but the prospect of making beautiful music is what gets them excited about going to work in the morning.

With the beginning of a new year, and the incumbent challenges at hand, it's worth remembering what exactly we do in this industry. Yes, we work hard to address competitive threats, contain costs, boost inventory turnover, manage margins, and all the other things associated with keeping a business afloat. However, we do much more. Over 2,500 years ago the Greek philosopher Pythagoras described music as "the most perfect and exalted of all art forms." More recently, Mickey Hart, drummer of the Grateful Dead, remarked, "God is a vibration, because vibration is the essence of life." We are intimately involved in promoting this "perfection" and "essence of life," and it is a noble calling that can't be reduced to mere dollars and cents. Celebrate this at the NAMM show and revel in it for the balance of the year.

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