

Attend The NAMM Show!

Amidst all the discussion about one show versus two, and the ascendancy of the January show in Anaheim, it is easy to overlook the value and importance of the upcoming NAMM International Music & Sound Expo in Chicago. The show may not set new records for attendance or exhibitor participation, and it probably won't match the size of the January show. Nevertheless, it remains an extremely valuable opportunity for music retailers.

There is an immediacy to retail that often makes it difficult to take a longer term view of things. Furthermore, music retail is an intensely local business. The June trade show represents one of the few opportunities for a retailer to remove himself from his local environment and view the industry on a broader perspective.

What companies and products are on the ascendancy, who seems to be slipping, what overlooked opportunities are to be found? Answers to these questions are hard to find sitting behind a retail counter. However, on the floor of the trade show, where virtually every supplier in the industry is showing its wares, any observant individual can draw valuable conclusions.

Aside from just the opportunity to assess various products and programs, the trade show serves a more subtle purpose. Bringing together 20,000 people who are involved in the music industry has a magical way of renewing enthusiasm and spurring commitment. In a

recent random survey we conducted, virtually every retailer queried said, "Going to the trade show really charges up me and my staff. We always come back more excited and more effective than when we left."

The costs of hotels and airfares are modest when weighed against the tremendous benefits of attending the show. How else can you get the opportunity to carefully view all the products carried by your competitors? What else could you do that would motivate your sales force? And where else could you go to so effectively take the pulse of the industry?

To make the most out of the show requires some planning. Time is in short supply, and events and exhibitors are numerous. To start, turn to the exhibitor list on page 92 of this issue and circle those companies that you have a particular interest in. Then review the schedule of events to determine which seminars you plan to attend. Hitting the show floor cold, without any direction, results in a waste of precious time.

To beat long lines at the entrance of the show, there is still time to pre-register. For more information, contact NAMM, 5140 Avenida Encinas, Carlsbad, California 92008-4391; (619) 438-8001.

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The Value Of Salespeople

No matter how big you get, you still have to sell musical products one at a time. And ~"A store can be only as good as its sales staff," observes Ray Scherr, president of Guitar Center, one of the nation's music successful retailers. Scherr's comments should be heeded by everyone in the industry.

In selling musical products, salespeople are unquestionably the single most important factor in determining success or failure. In this respect, the music industry is not too far removed from the insurance industry. As marketers in the music and insurance industries have observed, an effective front-line sales force has a much greater impact on performance than the demographics, buying power, or "psychographics" of a given market area. In other words, good music and insurance salesmen routinely sell more than their markets should be able to absorb, while laggards consistently fail to exploit their market's potential.

Like insurance, musical products are not one of life's necessities. Both products have to be personally sold by

a skilled individual. The insurance industry goes to great lengths in an effort to recruit and train a skilled sales staff. With the exception of a handful of retailers and manufacturers, the music industry's sales training effort is somewhere between dismal and non-existent.

Everyone acknowledges salespeople are critical, but few do anything about it. It's no accident that the most successful retailers and manufacturers are the ones with the best training programs. Manufacturers might ponder the question, "Do dealers want another new model, or perhaps a program to help their salespeople?" Retailers should heed Ray Scherr's comments: "A store can be only as good as its sales staff."

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