

Moving Into The Mainstream

For much of the sixties, rock and roll was something of an underground, counter culture phenomenon. Beatle haircuts were viewed as subversive, Elvis's gyrations were too risqué for prime time, and the Doors were criticized for advocating "Free Love." To cater to this budding market, music retailers of the sixties adopted an anti-establishment stance and shunned virtually all commercial trappings. Stores were dingy and salesmanship and merchandising were non-existent. Fortunately, competition was far less intense.

Today, for better or worse, there is nothing more mainstream than rock and roll. Beatles songs are used to sell Nike running shoes, the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" has been arranged for Muzak, and Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood are featured in Michelob Beer commercials. Yet, while rock has become an accepted and prominent fixture in America's cultural life, scores of retailers are still mired in the counter culture of the sixties.

To put it mildly, the majority of music stores across the country could use a face lift. One retail design consultant who visited several dozen music stores in the Midwest recently commented, "Six out of ten stores look like all they sell is boxes. Products are jammed into the stores without any thought. The disarray of the would really try the patience of all but the most dedicated customers."

Pawn shop decor and flea market merchandising may have cut it in the sixties, but in today's market, it is no longer viable. With the advent of MIDI, recording gear, and sound re-inforcement, the music

store customer regularly spends large sums. And, like any other big spender, he wants to buy in a pleasant environment. This should hardly come as a revelation to anyone. Yet, it has apparently escaped the notice of the six out of ten merchants whose stores still resemble box depots.

The recent experience of Sam Ash Music in the New York area potently illustrates the power of a well appointed, well stocked store. Over the last two years, the Ash chain has made a significant investment to give a face lift to several of its larger stores. In every instance, the redesigned stores posted sufficiently large sales increases to more than pay for the improvements. (For a look Sam Ash's new flagship store, see page 74 of this issue.) More specifically, Ash reports that the redesigned stores enjoy a higher level of traffic, and greatly improved accessory sales. In short, Ash's experience proves that good looking stores helps draw people in, and attractive displays stimulate purchases.

As retailers search for ways to enhance their competitive position in the marketplace, a redesigned or refurbished store should be at the top of the list. To help encourage improved store facilities, in the coming issues, Music Trades will be highlighting excellence in retail design. In the meantime, consider the fact that our customers are no longer on society's fringe: they are the mainstream. And, they should be treated accordingly.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor

Go To Chicago!

It may not be as big and flashy as the Anaheim show, and there probably will not be much in the way of new product introductions. Nevertheless, there are still a number of compelling reasons to attend the upcoming NAMM International Music & Sound Expo in Chicago. The music industry remains an intimate business built on personal relationships, and these relationships can only be fostered by face to face contact.

The Chicago show offers a highly cost effective way for retailers to meet with scores of top suppliers

to make valuable contacts. As an added benefit, NAMM has enhanced the show with a long list of noteworthy speakers, headed by *USA Today* founder Allen Neuharth. A show's size isn't everything, and a trip to Chicago in June will undoubtedly reward a retailer with sizable dividends.

Paul A. Majeski
Publisher