

# *Time To Recast NAMM As An Industry Association?*

**A**midst the routine business at the sparsely attended NAMM member meeting in Chicago last month, management consultant Phil Kuehl quietly let slip an announcement of startling significance. NAMM's long-range planning committee, he said, was exploring the possibility of restructuring the association's board and by-laws with the thought of giving commercial members (manufacturers) a greater voice in setting policy. Most at the meeting were primarily concerned with getting to dinner, so the announcement was, for the most part, ignored. Thus, it's ironic that one of the most potentially significant changes in NAMM's 90 year history prompted such a mild reaction.

Without making any promises, Kuehl in effect intimated that NAMM was considering the prospect of giving manufacturers the opportunity to vote on how the association would spend its money. Some retailers may find the idea of manufacturers participating in NAMM as heresy, but we feel that it is an idea whose time has come.

For most of its 90 years, NAMM's activities and charter were focused exclusively on the needs of the industry's retailers. More recently, however, bolstered by substantial trade show profits, the association has taken on the challenge serving the entire industry through the promotion of music making. Like it or not, with this move NAMM has been transformed from a retail association to an industry-wide association. The task of increasing the number of music makers is a daunting effort that transcends any specific industry segment; thus it seems only logical that if NAMM is to succeed, it will have to engage all facets of the industry.

As we have noted in this column for over a century, the health of the music industry rests on a mutual partnership between manufacturers and retailers. To be successful, industry promotional efforts require a similar mutuality that can exist only if manufacturers and retailers have an equal involvement over the process.

While retailers control the board, and manufacturers provide the funding through the trade show,

no one actually owns NAMM. In situations where there is no prerogative of ownership, like in governments, school boards, and trade unions, change moves at an excruciatingly slow pace. Thus its unrealistic for anyone to expect NAMM to transform itself overnight. However, we would encourage the association to continue moving in the direction of including manufacturers on an equal footing. Future efforts to build the market depend on it.

In addition to enhancing NAMM's effectiveness as a promotion agency, a mixed board would yield a few ancillary benefits. For example:

\*Manufacturers enjoy sitting back and lamenting how NAMM and its board are incapable of accomplishing anything. Inviting these individuals to join as full fledged board members would unquestionably diminish the armchair criticism. It might also yield some good ideas.

\*Manufacturers and retailers sitting side by side on a NAMM board would help reduce the corrosive antagonism that has plagued the industry for years.

\*Finally, as an association representing the entire music industry, NAMM's stature in all things would increase.

Ninety years ago, when Music Trades Editor John C. Freund asked Chandler Smith, NAMM's first president, to outline the association's goals, the response was "to black ball dishonest employees so they will never find work in the industry again," and "to wrest better freight rates" from the railroad companies. In the ensuing years, the association goals have continuously shifted, reflecting changing industry concerns. What we have outlined above should be viewed as just another evolutionary step. Like any change, it will probably entail a degree of discomfort and uncertainty. But then, isn't that the price of progress?

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