

The Power Of Joint Action And Changes Afoot At NAMM

There has not been an oversupply of good news in the piano industry lately. Economic, demographic, and social changes have contributed to depress sales over the past five years. Compounding the problem is a seemingly endless supply of used pianos. Amidst all these difficulties, though, cause for optimism can be found. Specifically, in Green Bay, Wisconsin, Des Moines, Iowa, and Salt Lake City, Utah, dealers and manufacturers have conclusively demonstrated that a joint public relations and advertising campaign can have a positive impact on piano sales.

As detailed on page 33 of this issue, the Piano Manufacturers Association International, and a group of dealers in the three cities mentioned above, pooled their resources to stage a four-month promotional test. Results of the test were revealed at the Winter Market, and they were highly encouraging. Despite a harsh economic climate, sales in all three markets posted noticeable gains, and the participating retailers all reported increased store traffic.

What this test potently illustrates is the fact that manufacturers and retailers, working and investing together in the market, can make a difference. The joint quality of this effort is particularly relevant given the recent decision by the NAMM board of directors to give voting privileges to commercial members (see story on page 29).

For 90 years, NAMM has been run by retailers for retailers. The move to give manufacturers a say in running the organization is a momentous change that is not without controversy. A good number of longstanding NAMM retail members are correct in arguing that allowing manufacturers on the board will irrevocably change the character of the organization. As one former director put it, "Manufacturers and retailers are naturally adversarial. If you put both sides together on a board, you won't have the same free discussions that you had when it was an exclusive retailer organization." Others argue that once on the board, manufacturers will try and "take over the organi-

zation and undermine the efforts of retailers."

If NAMM's charter was simply to aid retailers, we would agree with those who say that manufacturers have no place in the organization. However, now that NAMM has taken on the task of trying to stimulate the market, we feel that industry-wide participation is required. A brief review of industry history confirms this.

In the seventies, NAMM attempted to promote the industry with an ambitious "Discover Music" campaign to be funded by a surcharge on exhibit space at the trade show. Manufacturers were never consulted about the program or given the chance to offer advice. As a result, their support and participation never materialized. In a similar vein, scores of manufacturer promotions have languished for lack of dealer support. As the recently concluded piano promotion makes painfully clear, our only hope for success is to enlist both manufacturers and retailers in some type of joint effort. It is worth pointing out that the same unified approach is necessary for other segments of the industry as well.

A NAMM board that included representatives from all segments of the industry is probably our best hope for forging a unified effort. We hope the NAMM membership approves this initiative and we congratulate the sitting board and officers for taking such a bold step.

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Editor