

The Top 100 Revisited

Last year, when we issued the first Top 100 report, ranking the nation's largest music and sound retailers by dollar volume, we were overwhelmed with the industry response. As a paid circulation magazine with no newsstand distribution, single-copy sales for *Music Trades* are nominal, averaging 50 or 60 issues per month. However, last July, within two weeks of mailing our Top 100 issue we had sold nearly 1,000 additional copies. By year end, single-copy sales of the Top 100 issue had topped 2,000, and we could have sold more if we'd had more copies on hand. The reason this precedent-setting report struck such a resounding chord was that the music industry is starved for quantitative data.

Following up on last year's effort, we present in this issue a new and expanded version of the Top 100 ranking. Aside from sales rankings and various productivity measures, this year's report also contains year-to-date comparisons. While the sales data presented is, in part, estimated, we feel that it is sufficiently accurate to attempt the comparisons.

In quantifying the music business, our Top 100 listing illustrates the extremely fluid and changing nature of the industry. Specifically, 14 new dealers joined the list this year, and only 13 out of 103 maintained the same sales rank as last year. Overall industry sales may be

flat, but there are continual shifts among individual retail businesses. It's much like a bank of elevators: People go up and down constantly, but the actual bank of elevators never changes.

Unfortunately, the shifts in rank were effected more by dramatic declines than dramatic growth, but then, this is the nature of the music business. The cash generating ability and the inventory requirements of the average music store seriously limits how fast it can grow. By contrast though, there is no limit to how fast a business can contract. Last year for example, there were several large retailers whose sales declined by 100%.

The fluctuations among the Top 100 roster demonstrates the delicate nature of music retailing enterprises. As proprietor businesses, very few music stores have any momentum. In other words, the minute management stops doing the right things everyday, the business quickly atrophies. Music stores are not like Sears Roebuck, which through sheer inertia, has been able to limp along through 20 years of inept management.

We want to thank everyone throughout the industry for being so helpful in supplying us with the data required to produce the Top 100 report. We also hope that this year's report proves as useful and sought-after as last year's.

The Meaning Of Commitment

Commitment is one of the more overused words in the music industry. It's popular to talk about commitment to one's business, or commitment to the industry. But as the old saying goes, talk is cheap. Not surprisingly, in more than a few cases many prattle on about their "industry commitment" while surreptitiously looking for greener pastures elsewhere. Commitment, like other moral precepts, is displayed through action, not words.

Anyone interested in what commitment to the music industry really means, should read Jerome Bleeker's letter, which appears on page 5 of this issue. During the Los Angeles Riots, Bleeker's business, Reed's Music Store, was devastated; in two days, thieves literally stole everything that wasn't bolted down, taking nearly \$1.0 million worth of inventory and equipment.

Such an overwhelming loss would crush the spirit of all but the truly committed. Rather than retreat, Bleeker demonstrated his commitment to music and the music industry by rebuilding his wrecked store and forging ahead. "We all need music," he writes.

As one of the most noble and timeless of all art forms, music exerts a strong pull on the hearts and minds of mankind. This irresistible power can be seen in Bleeker's willingness to start over amidst the turmoil of downtown Los Angeles. It certainly would have been easier to walk away from the business and retire.

Searching for the right words, Bleeker writes, "I wish I could express how much I love this business." Through his actions, though, he has eloquently expressed a dedication to this industry that trivializes the most high-flown rhetoric. He also provides us all with an example worth following.

Music is one of the great forces of good in societies everywhere. We take this opportunity to salute all those, who, like Jerry Bleeker, express their commitment to music through action, not empty words. In doing so, they are making the world a better place.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor