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MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

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Getting the Most Out of the NAMM Show 2026



NAMM Show 2026
Buyer's Guide - Part II



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MMR

MUSICAL MERCHANDISE REVIEW

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By Christian
Wissmuller

A New Year, A New Mix: Why 2026 Is Shaping Up to Be a Defining Moment

**NAMM 2026 won't succeed
because it's bigger. It will succeed
because it's more intentional.**

There's something about the turn of the calendar that invites both reflection and recalibration. In our industry, January doesn't just mean a new year—it means NAMM. And as we look ahead to the 2026 NAMM Show, it feels like more than just another trade show on the schedule. It feels like a checkpoint.

Over the past few years, the MI industry has been navigating a complicated mix of disruption, recovery, innovation, and fatigue. We've debated the value of trade shows, rethought product strategies, and watched technology blur lines between categories that once felt comfortably separate. The New Year offers a moment to step back and ask a simple but essential question: What actually matters right now?

For many retailers, the answer still starts with NAMM.

The 2026 NAMM Show arrives at a time when trade shows have something to prove—but also something to reclaim. The conversation around trade events has shifted dramatically since 2020. Attendance ebbs and flows. Budgets are scrutinized. And yet, year after year, the same truth reasserts itself: there is no digital substitute for being in the room. For independent retailers especially, trade shows remain one of the few places where education, relationship-building, product discovery, and inspiration converge.

NAMM 2026 won't succeed because it's bigger. It will succeed because it's more intentional. Retailers are no longer attending just to walk the floor—they're attending with purpose. They want meetings that matter, products that solve real problems, and conversations that acknowledge today's retail realities: tighter margins, smarter inventory, and customers who expect expertise, not just availability.

That expectation extends well beyond NAMM and speaks to the broader role of trade shows in general. Whether regional, category-specific, or international, trade shows are evolving from spectacle to strategy. The winners—both exhibitors and attendees—are those who treat these events less like a product dump and more like a working session for the year ahead.

One of the most interesting developments likely to surface in 2026 is how deeply recording equipment continues to integrate into the core MI retail story. The lines between "instrument retailer" and "content creation retailer" have been fading for years, but now they're practically gone. Today's customer might walk in looking for a guitar and leave asking about interfaces, microphones, monitors, and software subscriptions.

That's where recording equipment bundles enter the conversation—and why they deserve serious attention in the New Year.

Bundles are nothing new, but the way they're being positioned is changing. Instead of simply stacking boxes to hit a price point, manufacturers are getting smarter about ecosystems. A mic that pairs seamlessly with an interface. An interface optimized for a specific DAW. Software that doesn't just come "free," but actually gets used. For retailers, this represents both an opportunity and a challenge.

The opportunity is clear: bundles increase average transaction value, simplify decision-making for customers, and reduce friction for first-time buyers. They also create a more defensible value proposition in a market where price transparency is unavoidable. The challenge, however, lies in education and execution. A bundle only works if sales staff understand why it's configured the way it is—and can explain that value confidently.

This is where the New Year mindset becomes critical. 2026 shouldn't just be about selling more gear; it should be about selling better solutions. That means rethinking staff training, merchandising, and even how we talk about recording products on the sales floor. It also means resisting the temptation to over-bundle. Not every customer needs everything—and trust is still the most valuable currency we have.

Stepping back, what ties all of this together—the NAMM Show, trade shows broadly, recording bundles, and the New Year itself—is alignment. Our industry doesn't need more noise. It needs clarity. Retailers are at their best when their assortments, events, and strategies align with how musicians actually live and work today.

The start of a new year is always a mix of optimism and realism. Optimism because musicians will always need instruments, tools, and inspiration. Realism because the business of providing those things is more complex than ever. The retailers who thrive in 2026 will be the ones who use moments like NAMM not just to react, but to plan—to listen as much as they talk, and to invest where it truly counts.

So as we head into NAMM 2026 and the year beyond, the goal isn't to chase every trend or attend every event. It's to choose wisely, show up prepared, and remember why these gatherings—and this industry—still matter. If we do that, the New Year won't just feel new. It'll feel purposeful.

Christian Wissmuller
christian@mrrmagazine.com

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PUBLISHER

Mike Lawson
mike@artistpro.com

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Christian Wissmuller
christian@mrrmagazine.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Menzie Pittman, Jaimie Blackman

ART DIRECTOR/PRODUCTION MANAGER

Produce Shop Design

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Matt King
matt@mrrmagazine.com

ACCOUNTING

Shannon Kebschull Lawson
accounting@artistpro.com

PRINTING/FULFILLMENT

Liberty Press
1180 N. Mountain Springs Pkwy.
Springville, UT 84663

artistpro, LLC

artistpro
PUBLISHING

7012 City Center Way, Suite 207
Fairview, TN 37062
(800) 682-8114

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■ upfront

FENDER NAMES EDWARD ‘BUD’ COLE AS CEO



Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC) has announced that its Board of Directors has appointed Edward “Bud” Cole as chief executive officer and member of the FMIC Board of Directors. Cole will serve as CEO-Designate effective January 19, 2026, and will officially assume the CEO role on February 16, 2026. He succeeds Andy Mooney, who will retire from the company following a decade of transformative growth and innovation.

Cole currently serves as president of Fender Asia Pacific (APAC) and brings a multi-decade global career across consumer, lifestyle, luxury, and FMCG brands to the role. During his decade-long tenure at FMIC, Cole has shaped some of the company’s most significant growth initiatives, leading the expansion of Fender’s business across 14 countries in the APAC region.

A bilingual English/Japanese speaker and seasoned global operator, Cole has played a pivotal role in strengthening Fender’s presence worldwide, including launching Fender’s APAC headquarters in Tokyo and establishing full regional commercial and operational capabilities; building robust direct-to-dealer operations in Australia, resulting in a significant increase in efficiency, brand control, and distribution performance; and expanding Fender into mainland China and Korea, including developing direct-to-consumer (DTC) capability through e-commerce and driving long-term growth strategies across the region.

He also spearheaded the creation of the world’s first Fender Flagship retail experience in Harajuku, Tokyo, redefining Fender’s brick-and-mortar retail presence and consumer immersion, and developed a robust artist ecosystem across the APAC region, driving successful product innovation, including multiple Made-in-Japan launches that became standout global performers and strengthened Fender’s cultural influence and credibility throughout the region.

Before joining FMIC, Cole held senior leadership roles across several global lifestyle, luxury, and consumer brands — including Pernod Ricard, LVMH, QVC, and Ralph Lauren — where he led commercial expansion, brand development, and regional strategy across international markets. A visionary, who has conducted business in more than 60 countries, Cole’s

global perspective has been shaped by a multi-decade career building and managing world-class brands at scale.

“Bud has been one of the most impactful leaders within our organization,” Mark Fukunaga, executive chairman of the FMIC Board. “He has a deep understanding of the Fender brand, our global players, and the commercial and operational foundation required to propel us into the future. His track record of building teams, expanding markets, and elevating Fender’s presence around the world makes him uniquely qualified to lead the next chapter of growth. On behalf of the Board, I also want to thank Andy Mooney for his leadership over the past decade and for the significant contributions he has made to the company.”

Since joining Fender in 2015, CEO Andy Mooney has more than doubled the size of the company and extended Fender’s worldwide leadership in the Musical Instruments category. Mooney championed product and marketing innovation at Fender and led the company’s successful entry into subscription based digital software.

“Leading Fender has been a highlight of my career,” said Andy Mooney. “I’m deeply grateful for the creativity and commitment of the Fender teams around the world and proud of what we’ve accomplished. I’m excited to pass the baton on to Bud and confident that under his leadership, Fender will continue to inspire players for generations to come.”

A lifelong musician, Cole bought his first electric guitar — a Fender Made-in-Japan 1969 Thinline® Telecaster® reissue — as a teenager and still plays it today. His personal connection to Fender’s legacy and to the player community continues to shape his approach to leadership.

“To lead Fender is the honor of a lifetime,” said Edward “Bud” Cole. “This brand has been a part of my life since childhood, and I’m committed to ensuring Fender continues to empower players everywhere, from beginners picking up their first guitar to the artists shaping the sound of today and tomorrow. Together with our global teams, partners, and loyal community of players, we will write the next era of Fender’s history.”

Cole’s appointment marks the beginning of a new chapter for Fender as the company continues to expand its global footprint, deepen its commitment to players, and shape the future of music worldwide.

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GIBSON GIVES ACHIEVES RECORD-BREAKING YEAR OF IMPACT



Gibson, together with its philanthropic division Gibson Gives, celebrates a historic year of giving in 2025. This milestone underscores their unwavering commitment to expanding global access to music through education, health, and wellness programs, as well as initiatives that empower and inspire youth.

“The impact Gibson Gives has made this year is nothing short of extraordinary” says Erica Krusen, global executive director of Gibson Gives. “This year proved that when music meets purpose, the results are powerful. Thanks to the generosity of our artists, partners, and supporters, we expanded our reach, deepened our impact, and turned compassion into action, using music as a catalyst for lasting positive change around the world.”

In 2025 alone, Gibson Gives donated 2,445 guitars, bringing the total to more than 16,000 guitars gifted since the foundation’s inception. The organization enabled over \$5.3 million+ in funding for key organizations through product donations and meaningful giving, with a retail value of \$2,489,541 in donated products this year. Additionally, Gibson Gives awarded more than \$401,000 in cash grants to partner organizations and assisted 301 organizations globally.

Scholarship support also grew significantly, with 27 Gibson Gives scholarships totaling \$139,000. These continued efforts reflect Gibson Gives’ commitment to advancing music education and supporting musicians worldwide.

Rolling out the first structural modification in more than 40 years...



Our special commemorative harmonica in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the iconic megahit.

Check out the LowRider in person at the Lee Oskar x TOMBO booth



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BOOTH
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More info: leeoskarharmonicas.com/lowrider

HAGSTROM GUITARS ANNOUNCES RELAUNCH IN THE U.S. MARKET UNDER NEW DISTRIBUTION LEADERSHIP-MMS MUSIC

Hagstrom Guitars, the iconic Swedish guitar brand known for its rich legacy, innovative designs, and devoted artist following, is officially relaunching in the United States under new distribution leadership.

With a celebrated legacy of crafting instruments played by legends including Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Kurt Cobain and Pat Smear, Hagstrom is poised to captivate a new generation of American musicians with its unique blend of heritage, innovation, and unparalleled playability.

After years of anticipation from U.S. retailers, collectors, and players, the brand is now positioned to once again become a leading name in American musical instrument stores.

The new U.S. distribution company MMS Music is being spearheaded by Michael Mascellaro, a veteran in the musical instrument industry with over 25 years of international experience. "We're thrilled to reintroduce Hagstrom to the United States," said Michael Mascellaro. "Hagstrom has an undeniable legacy—its designs are unique, its build quality is unmatched, and its artist roster is a testament to its staying power. I've worked across the global MI industry for more than two decades, and it's truly an honor to represent such a storied brand here in the U.S."



"As we celebrate Hagstrom's 100th anniversary this year, we're proud to mark the occasion with a firm return to the U.S. market," said a Karl Erik Hagstrom. "American players have always been an essential part of our legacy, and we're excited to once again offer them the instruments that reflect a century of innovation, craftsmanship, and dedication to music."

Hagstrom's relaunch in the U.S. will feature a full product line of electric guitars and basses, including reissues of beloved vintage models like the Viking and newer innovations that reflect Hagstrom's signature blend of tradition and forward-thinking design including the Fantomen, Krona, Adina, Megin and Nekromant models.

Retailers and musicians alike can expect improved availability, service, and support as Hagstrom establishes a stronger footprint stateside.

To celebrate the re-launch, and 100 years of company history, Hagstrom will be exhibiting at the 2026 NAMM Show in Anaheim, CA, January 24-26. Dealers and Musicians are invited to experience the iconic and newest models, vibrant finishes, and unmistakable tone that have made Hagstrom a guitar enthusiast favorite.

OPTIMAL AUDIO APPOINTS REPUBLIK PRO AVL AS NEW TURKISH DISTRIBUTOR

Optimal Audio has announced the appointment of Istanbul-based Republik Pro AVL as its new distribution partner for Turkey. Republik presented the Optimal Audio ecosystem on stand at the recent IMEEF Expo 2025 (4-7 December 2025 – Yenikapı Expo Center, Istanbul)

Republik Pro AVL was formed earlier this year with a clear mission to bring meaningful, brand-focused distribution back to the Turkish pro-audio market. Co-founder Kemal 'Kal' Yener explains, "Republik exists solely as a distributor with no integration arm. That means our partners know we're here to support them, not compete with them. It's a model built on trust."

That ethos aligns closely with Optimal Audio's own vision of simple, high-quality commercial audio. Yener observed, "The communication from Optimal Audio was clear, fast and refreshingly straightforward. It became very



natural to take the next step together."

Yener admired Optimal Audio's rapidly growing global presence and the strength of its ecosystem with flexible zoned control managed through WebApp. He also recognized a major opportunity in the Turkish

market. "Integrators would ask about simple, reliable solutions for hospitality, retail and leisure but struggled with stock and local backup. There's huge room to rebuild confidence. Optimal Audio's portfolio fits perfectly with where the Turkish market is heading."

Republik Pro AVL has

already begun laying strong foundations for the brand's success. The company is investing in a modern, digital-first operational backbone: a B2B portal linked to ERP for real-time stock and pricing, strong demo inventory, structured training and comprehensive after-sales support.

"These tools help us raise the game for Turkish integrators and rental companies," Yener explains. "We'll be delivering focused education, building a strong social presence and launching a B2B e-commerce platform to make ordering and support as simple as Optimal Audio itself."

David Morbey, Optimal Audio product manager, agreed, "Their pure distribution model, broad market expertise and commitment to integrators are a perfect match for Optimal Audio's philosophy. We're genuinely excited about the growth ahead."

ALGAM ASHDOWN APPOINTED AS EXCLUSIVE UK DISTRIBUTOR FOR OLLO AUDIO

Algam Ashdown is pleased to announce a new distribution partnership with OLLO Audio, becoming the exclusive UK distributor for a brand's premium professional-audio headphones.

This agreement brings OLLO Audio's acclaimed monitoring solutions directly to the UK market, beginning with the launch of the new X1 reference headphones.

Founded in Slovenia and known for their handcrafted, precision-tuned designs, OLLO Audio has built a strong reputation among engineers, producers, and audio creators seeking transparent, reliable tools for mixing and mastering. Their products combine meticulous acoustic engineering with sustainable manufacturing and long-term serviceability, a philosophy that aligns closely with Algam Ashdown's commitment to quality and professional support.



Introducing the X1

The first product available through the new partnership is the OLLO Audio X1. Engineered for absolute accuracy, the X1 delivers a natural, neutral response designed to help creators make confident mixing decisions.

Each pair is individually calibrated and supplied with OLLO's USC II calibration software, ensuring consistent translation between headphone and speaker environments. Built with premium materials including American walnut ear-cups and a stainless-steel headband,

the X1 is crafted for durability, comfort, and long-term use, with every component fully serviceable.

A Partnership Designed for the UK Professional Audio Community

Through this exclusive distribution agreement, Algam Ashdown will provide:

Enhanced UK availability of OLLO Audio's product range.

Localized customer service, warranty support, and product expertise.

Improved access for retailers, studios, and professional users.

A streamlined path for future OLLO Audio product launches in the UK.

This partnership reflects Algam Ashdown's ongoing mission to represent exceptional brands and supply the UK with world-class tools built for modern production workflows.

EAW NT206L DELIVERS WORLD-CLASS SOUND IN LIGHTWEIGHT ACTIVE LINE ARRAY

Eastern Acoustic Works (EAW®) highlights its latest Newport Series including the NT206L loudspeaker, at both NAMM 2026 (Demo Room 17116) and ISE 2026 (Stand 7E900 and Audio Demo Room D6). The NT206L is a compact, self-powered line array loudspeaker that simplifies audio setup and operation for installations and production events. Premium audio quality combined with fast, non-complex operation make the Newport Series the ideal solution for any event where speed and simplicity are critical without sacrificing audio quality.

“Newport represents the simplicity in setup and excellence in performance



that built EAW over our 47-year history,” says TJ Smith, president at Eastern Acoustic Works. “We look forward to showcasing the benefits of the NT206L and the Newport

Series to both NAMM and ISE attendees.”

Engineered for power and precision, NT206L features two 6.5-inch low-frequency drivers with 2-inch voice

coils and a 1.75-inch high-frequency driver, brought to life by 1500 watts of onboard power. A newly patented EAW waveguide leverages EAW’s Focusing technology to provide exceptional high-frequency response. NT206L also debuts a new EAW Core Technology called Adjustable Horizontal Directivity (AHD). With AHD, users can quickly choose between four horizontal coverage profiles through simple, toolless adjustments in the field. NT206L plays loud (139dB) and goes low (65-20kHz), all in a premium Baltic birch, steel and aluminum enclosure. Weighing under 32lb (14.5kg), this active loudspeaker is lighter than most passive, plastic enclosures in its class.

PEOPLE

d&b audiotechnik is pleased to announce that Cameron Wilkison assumes the role of managing director, d&b Canada, effectively immediately. Cameron will actively manage the overall business activities for d&b audiotechnik in the Canadian marketplace. Since joining the d&b Canada team in 2019, Wilkison has been overseeing and managing sales for western Canada. A veteran of the professional audio industry, Wilkison was previously with Canadian professional audio manufacturer Radial Engineering and Primacoustic, where he was involved in product development and responsible for a variety of sales and marketing activities throughout the region and internationally.

Francois Corbin, former managing director, and a key member of the d&b audiotechnik leadership team, will assume an advisory role for the company. Corbin will remain on staff in the near-term to facilitate the transition to the new managing director for d&b audiotechnik Canada.



d&b audiotechnik North America is also pleased to announce the appointment of Pierre-Paul Gignac to the role of sales support specialist, which entails education and application support for Canada and regional sales for the province of Quebec. An audio systems designer for more than 22 years, Gignac was previously an independent contractor hired directly by clients for his audio

engineering expertise and was also a key member of the Solotech design services team, where he was responsible for overseeing all design services for the Quebec City, Solotech office.

“We’re pleased to have Cameron assume the leadership role for the Canadian region and welcome Pierre-Paul to the d&b Canada team. Together, I am

confident they will continue to build on the success we’ve experienced in Canada over the last several years,” states Larry Italia, president and CEO, d&b audiotechnik – Americas. “I want to thank Francois for his leadership and tireless commitment in helping grow the d&b brand in Canada, he will be missed and wish him a happy and fulfilling retirement.”

Upfront Q&A:

Josh Vittek of Vittek PR – Part I

By Christian Wissmuller



Josh Vittek

Josh Vittek has spent his career helping MI brands cut through the noise. As the founder of Vittek PR, he works closely with musical instrument and pro audio companies to shape stories that resonate with dealers, artists, and players alike. In this Q&A, Vittek shares stories from his past, his perspective on today's MI media landscape, effective brand communication, and where smart PR can make the biggest impact right now.

For those unfamiliar with your background, can you walk me through the various MI and MI-adjacent roles you had prior to founding VittekPR?

Right out of high school, I went to work at Carvin Corporation where I started out taking apart their famous X-100B guitar amplifiers and the huge FX and MX mixing consoles. The X-100B's were a big part of the 80's, especially in LA. Eventually I moved upstairs where I started assembling chassis'. Lots of pots, jacks, PCB's, tubes, ribbon cables, and transformers. Then I moved back downstairs to start installing the chassis' into cabinets. Ultimately, I end up at the end of the assembly line with my own final testing room. My job was to final test all the guitar, bass, and PA products before final packaging. They would literally roll 50 of these X-100B guitar amplifiers into my room at a time and it was my job to play through every single one of them. Tweak every knob. Slide every slider. Frequency sweep every speaker. I took it very seriously. There was no way I ever wanted a product returned because I might have missed anything. Even back then, I had a lot of pride in my work. Listening for snaps, crackles, and pops along the way. Rinse and repeat every day. I played through and listened to thousands and thousands of product. It was awesome.

Parallel to all of this, I had always had an interest in business. I was mowing yards by age 6. I charged a quarter for the front. A quarter for the back. As a teenager, I had subscriptions to magazines like *Money*, *Worth*, and *Fortune*. And papers like the *Wall Street Journal* and *Investors Business Daily*. So, when I turned 21, I went and got my Series 7 and Series 63 licenses. I became a "financial advisor". That sounds more glamorous than it really was. I started off at a small firm. I was unaware of their notoriety at the time. Think *Boiler Room*. *Wall Street*. *Wolf of Wall Street*. It was amazing, in the most bizarre and wonderful way. It was a very fast way to learn how to become resilient and persistent. It also taught me that if I was going to be working 12 hours or more a day, that was not what I wanted to do with my life. I went back to

Carvin and beg for a job in a different department.

Now, back at Carvin, my goal was to work at the factory during the day and gig at night for the rest of my life. This time, I was in the speaker department, installing crossovers and speakers into cabinets. I learned a lot about frequency response and how speakers performed. But after about six months, I was getting bored and started sticking my nose in the sales room. That was a no-no. If you've ever worked in a factory environment, it is common policy for the people in the back not to talk to the people in the front. But I eventually convinced them to let me cross the line. I thought I had made it! But the curiosity kept me wanting more. After having success in the sales department, I transitioned into the international distribution department, then became their inventory manager, then the buyer, and finally oversee marketing and artist

relations. It was amazing. I had relationships with every magazine around the world, contacts for all of the raw material supplies needed to make musical instruments and audio products, international distributors, and had worked with and collaborated on product designs with the likes of Steve Vai, Alan Holdsworth, Tony MacAlpine, Frank Gambale, Bunny Brunel, Brian Auger, Derek Sherinian, Timothy B. Schmit and Joe Walsh of the Eagles, Mark Wills, Lit, Staind, and POD. Carvin was a family business. I was not a part of the family and changes were starting to become clear. By the time I was 28, I had climbed as high I could inside the Carvin business. Our daughter was now 10. Old enough to where we felt stable enough for me to leave and pursue a career playing guitar. I had to do it. We both knew if I didn't do it then, it would never happen, and I would regret it later. So, I went and chased that dream. I played relentlessly all over Southern California for a couple of years. Then the phone rang...



Kerry King, Josh Vittek, and Jim Marshall

In 2005, Gary Kahler of Kahler Tremolos and Brass Factory had acquired the rights back to his business, Kahler USA. He needed help putting it all back together. Initially, I started out just helping with artist relations so I could keep gigging. But I ended up coming in full-time as his General Manager. I rekindled the brands relationships with Kerry King and Jeff Hanneman of Slayer, Victor Wooten, Les Claypool, Glenn Drover of Megadeth, Les Dudek, and Jerry Cantrell and Mike Inez of Alice In Chains. We began selling bridges to Gibson, Fender, Peavey, BC Rich, Dean, PRS, ESP, Warwick, Framus, and Cort Guitars. I was crossing political lines. Then the smaller builders started coming on board. Fodera. Buddy Blaze. Rick Turner. Neal Moser. We were making waves.



Hap Kuffner and Josh Vittek

“ I have had the opportunity to work for, with, or represented some of the biggest brands in the business. ”

One of my early memories of you, of course, was your inclusion in MMR’s “40 Most Influential Under 40” feature in 2006. You and your company have rocked up quite a few other honors, as well — walk us through a few of the most significant and talk a little bit about how such accolades directly impact professional opportunities?

I was over the moon about that. To be recognized was fantastic and something I am still proud of to this day. Especially given that we were such a small company within the industry. In 2008, I was selected as a member of the Presidential Advisory Board for NAMM.

To help grow the Kahler business, I started helping the smaller builders with their own marketing. The more visibility they got, the more visibility Kahler got. It became a side hustle. That side hustle was becoming more profitable. The thought was crossing my mind to go out on my own. I bounced the idea off a couple industry legends to get their thoughts. Mal Stich had been a long-time part of BC Rich and was a key player in keeping that machine running throughout the 70’s and 80’s. Hap Kuffner gave the idea a thumbs up. Joe Lamond, CEO of NAMM said to go for it. At the time, Max Kay was really the only guy doing it independently and I knew he was phasing out of the MI industry and focusing more on other interests. But Elliot Rubinson of Armadillo Enterprises is the one who summed it up perfectly for me. We were sitting up in the Dean booth at NAMM, I presented the idea to him, he laughed, put his hand on my shoulder and said “the simple fact that you are asking me tells me you need to do it. If you don’t, you will regret it later. So, if you do, call me and I will be your first client.” In September of 2008 I started my own PR and Marketing firm and called Elliot.

On October 8, my first press release out of the gates was announcing Pantera’s Vinnie Paul leaving Pearl Drums for ddrum with a brand-new

signature kit. I’ve since represented brands such as Dean Guitars, ddrum, Cort Guitars, Aristides Guitars, Peavey, Trace Elliot, Crest Audio, Korg USA, Spector, Dean Zelinsky, Darkglass, Aguilar, Wizard Amplification, Albion Amplification, B.C. Rich, Dean Markley, Fargen Amplifiers, NAMM, and Sheptone. In addition to working on their public relations, I’ve assisted in product development and managed collaborations with artists such as the Rolling Stones, Michael Bolton, Bruce Springsteen, Toby Keith, Jason Aldean, Motley Crue, Duran Duran, the Misfits, Earth, Wind and Fire, Rush, Night Ranger, Los Enanitos Verde, Poison, Andy Johns, Los Tigres de Norte, Lita Ford, Judas Priest, Misha Monsoor, Warrant, Robert Fripp, Steve Trovato, Brian Kahanek, Jeff Richman, Walter Trout, and Richard Smith.

- In 2025, NAMM interviewed me as part of the industry’s Oral History Archives.
- I have had the opportunity to work for, with, or represented some of the biggest brands in the business.
- I have collaborated with, and chased tone with, some of the greatest musicians in the history of music.
- A few years ago, we were recognized as a Power Partner by Inc. magazine and a Business All Star. That really is cool as it comes from outside our industry.

Alongside all of it, there have been acknowledgements from Musicians Institute for contributions to music education, guest speaking engagements at USC to students in the music and business departments, and something of a mentor/speaker at Covenant House to the kids and young adults in the program. These are the ones that warm my heart. It is all a bit surreal.

REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN OF NAMM LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 2025

Empowering Women Leaders in the Music Industry

By Beverly Fowler, Director of Artist & Community Relations, PRS Guitars

In October 2025, I had the privilege of attending the Women of NAMM Leadership Summit—a gathering dedicated to fostering the growth and empowerment of women leaders in the music industry. This summit provided a unique blend of introspection, group learning, and actionable leadership training.

One of the first things that struck me was how straightforward and simple the application process was. Unlike some leadership programs that require lengthy essays or daunting prerequisites, the Women of NAMM Leadership Summit focused on accessibility. The application was clear, concise, and centered on genuine interest rather than exhaustive credentials, although there are a few required credentials to be considered for this. This approach immediately set a welcoming tone, encouraging a diverse group of women to apply and signaled that the summit was about growth, not gatekeeping.

Prior to the summit, each participant completed four pre-work assignments: a Strengths Profile, Coaching Mindset Index, Leadership Summit Bio, and Skillscope 360 assessment. These exercises were thoughtfully chosen to encourage self-reflection and honest assessment. Completing my Strengths Profile helped me to recognize not just my core strengths, but also those areas where I could continue to develop. The Coaching Mindset Index challenged me to consider how I approach team management and mentorship, and while drafting my Leadership Summit Bio, I was compelled to articulate my journey and aspirations. Finally, the Skillscope assessment provided valuable feedback from peers and colleagues, highlighting patterns I hadn't previously considered. Together, these assignments created a foundation of insight, self-awareness, and readiness for the experiences ahead.

As the summit approached, I found myself both excited and nervous. Excitement stemmed from the prospect of connecting with fellow women leaders and learning from industry experts. Nervousness surfaced in anticipation of stepping outside my comfort zone, sharing vulnerably, and embracing new leadership challenges. These mixed emotions, I soon learned, were shared by many attendees



Class of 2025 Women of NAMM Summit



Day 1 introductions and getting to know one another



NAMM executives Erin Block, Zach Phillips, John Mlynczak, and Julia Rubio welcome the group

and quickly became a bonding point as we embarked on our leadership journeys together.

From the beginning, the summit was masterfully facilitated by Dr. Jennifer Hall. Her expertise in fostering trust, openness, and authentic dialogue was evident in every session. Dr. Hall's approach encouraged us to move beyond surface-level introductions and quickly dive into meaningful conversations about our leadership styles, challenges, and aspirations. The group dynamics she cultivated made it easy to feel connected and supported, despite our diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Peer group break-out sessions were invaluable. In smaller groups, we explored real-world scenarios, practiced coaching techniques, and shared candid feedback. These sessions created a safe space for reflection and experimentation, where moments of vulnerability were met with encouragement, and challenges were reframed as opportunities for growth. The variety of perspectives and experiences in these peer groups expanded my understanding of leadership, revealing both universal themes and unique individual journeys.

What truly set the Women of NAMM Leadership Summit apart was its focus on practical, applicable leadership training tailored to the realities of the music industry. Sessions were engaging and dynamic, blending research-based methods with personal stories and interactive exercises. This thoughtful approach made each moment both meaningful and relevant.

My participation in the summit resulted in significant personal growth, and I highly encourage other women to apply. Throughout the experience, I became more self-aware, developed greater confidence in my leadership abilities, and learned to embrace vulnerability as a strength. The supportive environment and thoughtfully designed activities challenged me to step outside my comfort zone, leading to meaningful insights and a renewed sense of purpose in my leadership journey. Most importantly, the summit reminded me of the power of community: that true leadership is not a solo endeavor, but a shared journey supported by peers and mentors.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE NAMM SHOW 2026

By John Mlynczak, president and CEO of NAMM

THE NAMM SHOW 2026 IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING, AND WE CAN'T WAIT TO WELCOME VISITORS TO THE ANAHEIM

Convention Center for our 125th anniversary event. The 2026 show will once again be a showcase of the best the industry has to offer, with a packed education schedule, demos of every kind, performances that no one will want to miss and exhibit halls that will be filled with the latest technology. So, with so much to squeeze in, how can visitors get the most out of their time in Anaheim?

Planning is key, and the best starting point is to download the new NAMM Show app. For both Android and iOS, this new app is totally rebuilt for the 2026 show with a robust planner, detailed map, and easy search so you can see all the events that are taking place. Be sure to sign in with the email you have used to register for the show to customize your own schedule.



John Mlynczak

Personally, my strategy is to select everything I could possibly go to see and then narrow it down to remove clashes as we get closer to the show. You don't have to wait until you're on the flight or you arrive in Anaheim to scan a QR code and download the app, I think that's too late. You have more than 200 education sessions to look through, you have over 1,800 exhibitors to see who you



want to visit. You're never going to figure everything out if you plan to do it at the show, but you can start now and plan in your time to see everything you want to.

When it comes to planning your time, one of the biggest things to remember is that The NAMM Show is not just the three days of exhibits, it's a full week of events. For 2026 we are offering full and half-day summits that can really go in-depth on specific subjects, and we've made sure that we have a summit for every community at the show. We have five full days of education during the show as well as the three days of exhibits, and that should give everyone the opportunity to see and do everything they want to.

When it comes to planning your time, one of the biggest things to remember is that The NAMM Show is not just the three days of exhibits, it's a full week of events.

Also, visitors need to remember that they can get as much out of their evenings in Anaheim as they can from the show floor during the day. Whether it's through the awards shows every night, multiple networking events or countless concerts taking place across the campus, The NAMM Show offers visitors the opportunity to have high level conversations and build real relationships in the industry. We feel like this is a vital part of the show and we always encourage our visitors to make the most of the events away from the show floor.

Of course, while you can plan every aspect of your visit to The NAMM Show, you should always remember to embrace spontaneity as well. Some of the best memories people make at The NAMM Show come from getting caught up in the moment. The energy and vibrancy you find across the NAMM Show campus are what make The NAMM Show special, and why the global industry chooses to head to Southern California every January. I want you to experience that energy and have the best, most productive time you can.

BUNDLE UP: RECORDING EQUIPMENT PACKAGES THAT ADD UP

By Christian Wissmuller

Recording equipment bundles have become an increasingly important tool in the MI channel, helping manufacturers and retailers simplify the path to purchase while delivering clear value to end users. As home and project studios continue to evolve, bundled solutions offer a way to present complete signal chains at accessible price points. For dealers, they can drive higher ticket sizes, reduce friction on the sales floor, and create a more compelling story around system-based selling.

What is your current top-selling recording gear bundle, and what do you think makes it resonate so strongly with today's buyers and dealers?



*Rick Naqvi,
Senior Vice President, Sales
Solid State Logic*

Rick Naqvi: Our current top-selling bundle is the Solid State Logic SL 2+ MKII audio interface paired with the Slate Digital ML-1A modelling microphone. This package resonates because it delivers a professional-grade front end with SSL's legendary mic pres and converters, combined with Slate's virtual mic locker technology. Buyers appreciate the immediate ability to capture polished, release-ready vocals leveraging SSL's sound quality and the flexibility and different types of vintage and high-end modelled mic in the Slate Virtual Mic locker. Dealers value the simplicity of a single-SKU solution that's easy to demo and merchandise.



*Lev Perrey,
VP of Product
Universal Audio*

Lev Perrey: Currently, our top selling bundles are the Apollo Twin X Gen 2 for the serious desktop producer and the Volt 2 for someone looking to get started with producing music. These units resonate so strongly with today's market because they capture

the entire customer journey. Volt brings users into music production with class-leading tone and software at an accessible sub-\$500 price point, while the new Apollo Gen 2 offers elite conversion, Unison™ Mic Preamps, Assistive Auto-Gain, and a hybrid DSP/Native workflow that fits how modern records are made today. The magic lies in our "studio-in-a-box" value proposition; by bundling premium software suites like UAD Essentials+ (Apollo) or UAD Producer Suite (Volt) directly with the hardware, we remove the friction between buying gear and making music.



Sean Tokuyama: Our current top-selling recording gear bundle is the Yamaha URX-C Series audio interfaces. This series is designed to deliver professional-level performance in a compact, versatile package, making it an ideal solution for modern musicians, producers, and streamers. Each interface is bundled with a full suite of Steinberg music production

software (Cubase AI and Steinberg Plus) along with Yamaha's dspMixFX, which provides intuitive control of built-in DSP effects, Elgato Stream Deck integration, multi-stream audio drivers, and more.

What makes URX-C resonate so strongly with today's buyers and dealers is its balance of simplicity and capability. It empowers users to create with clarity and confidence, without complex operations. In a market where customers demand flexibility, reliability, and ease of use, URX-C stands out as a solution that meets those expectations.



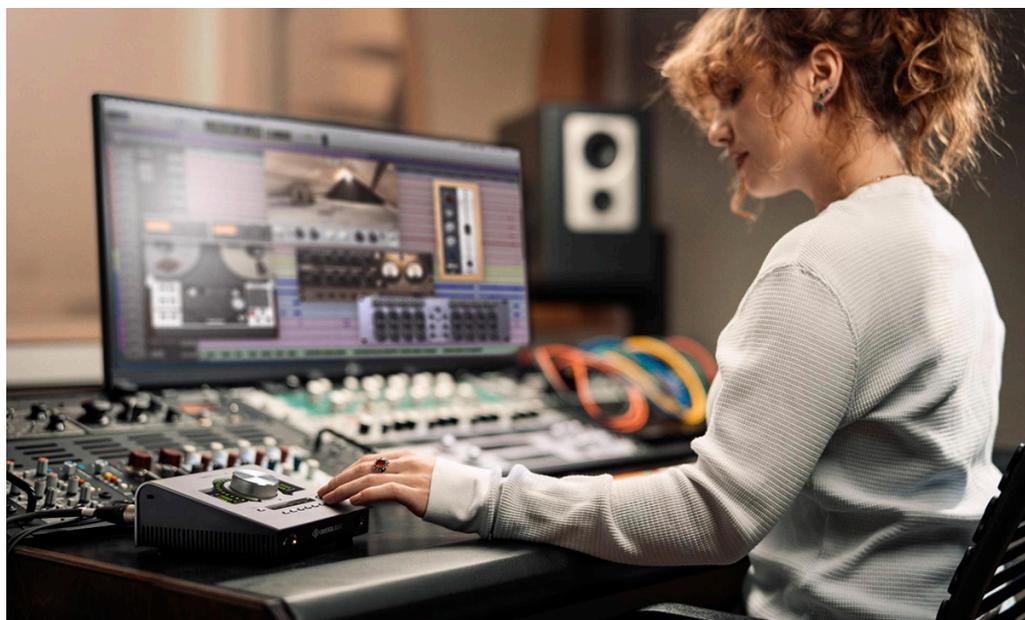
Joshua Claflin: The AKAI Professional MPC Live III hit the market early October 2025. The MPC Live III's musical heritage, iconic form factor, and future-focused tools connect with artists and producers of all genres. The Live III, and the MPC line in general, proves that platinum albums still start and end on these famous 16 MPC pads.



*Laura Camacho,
Senior Vice President – Sales,
Marketing and Ops, Americas
Focusrite, ADAM Audio, Novation,
Sequential, Oberheim*

Laura Camacho: The Scarlett 2i2 Studio Bundle continues to lead the pack. It combines the world's best-selling USB audio interface with a high-quality matched condenser mic, headphones, and all the cables you need. It also comes with rock-solid drivers, low-latency performance, and a software suite that includes Ableton Live Lite and plug-ins to get creators started. Dealers love it because it's a proven SKU with minimal returns and maximum word-of-mouth. Buyers love it because it feels professional without feeling intimidating.

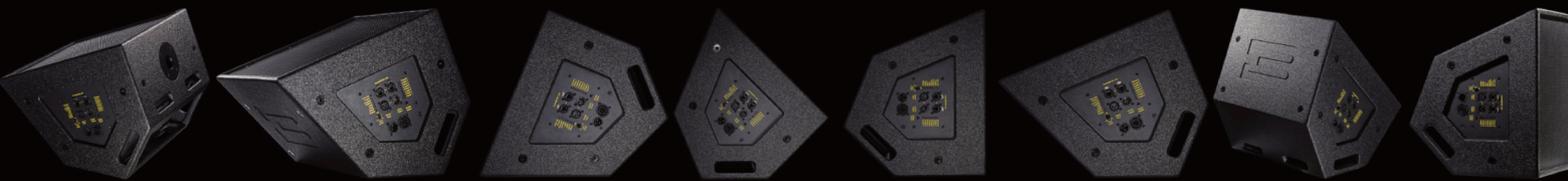
Are there any newly released or upcoming recording bundles you'd like to highlight for MMR readers, and what market needs or trends inspired their development?



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SCAN ME

■ roundtable

LP: We are incredibly excited about the newly released Volt 876, a USB recording studio developed in direct response to the demand of home recording musicians to track live drums, full bands, and connect multiple sources like synthesizers and drum machines. We recognized a significant gap in the market where creators were forced to choose between channel count and tone; the Volt 876 solves this by putting our analog 76 Compressor and Vintage Preamp circuit onto all eight preamp channels, giving users a rack full of outboard gear in a single USB-C interface. The system is also expandable via ADAT and allows for stacking up to 3 units via ADAT and USB-C, allowing for even larger recording setups.

Volt 876 also features an updated low latency audio driver for macOS and Windows and gives customers the ability to monitor through their DAW with ease or use the integrated digital mixer. This design allows musicians to capture punchy, "album-ready" sounds right at the source, while features like Assistive Auto-Gain and deep LUNA DAW integration allow for easier gain staging and monitoring.

Like our other Volt interfaces, the Volt 876 is bundled with our UAD Producer Suite which includes a full range of virtual instruments, plugin emulation effects, and a digital audio workstation (JA's LUNA workstation), so you have what you need to start making music right away. Volt 876 is perfect for anyone who has outgrown their 2-channel interface and is ready to capture more channels and the energy of a live performance with professional polish.

LC: Nothing new on the horizon in the form of bundles, but our latest evolution is the Scarlett 4th Gen Studio Bundle, designed for creators who want more I/O flexibility and next-gen features like Auto Gain and Clip Safe, which are still relatively new to the market. We're also exploring bundles that pair our interfaces with best-selling products from our other Focusrite Group brands.



Sean Tokuyama,
Product Marketing Manager –
Professional Audio
Yamaha Corporation of America

ST: We just launched several new

solutions that reflect the latest market trends toward flexibility, intuitive workflows, and hybrid production environments, bridging live, recording, and streaming applications and supporting audio/visual integration. In addition to our new MGX Series digital mixers, we wanted to highlight:

URX Series Audio Interfaces: URX represents a step up from the URX-C series, delivering even more powerful performance in a compact desktop form factor. These interfaces feature touchscreen/tactile control, robust onboard DSP tools, flexible routing, HDMI capture/pass-thru (URX44V model), and a comprehensive software bundle package – Steinberg's Cubase AI, WaveLab Cast, and Steinberg Plus, on top of a Yamaha FX suite.

CC1 USB Controller: CC1 enhances workflow efficiency with a high-definition motorized fader, responsive LCD keys, and seamless integration with Cubase, Pro Tools, OBS, and Elgato Stream

Today, it means hardware, software, education, and community. Creators expect plug-and-play simplicity, curated software that feels relevant, and learning resources that shorten the time from unboxing to first track. That's why our bundles include not just additional products but access to tutorials, sound packs, and ongoing updates. We see training and onboarding as non-negotiable, because confidence drives creativity.

JC: When contemplating a "complete" recording solution, my mind goes to "what helps artists and producers complete their recordings?" The Live III is just that; it has the right mix of tactile controls and integrated software to keep you intimately connected to and creative throughout the production process.

The team at AKAI Professional has done an incredible job at minimizing the distance to creativity. You can easily use the MPC Live III to jam just as much

URX Series, have become critical, ensuring users can get started quickly without external support, regardless of skill level. In short, a well-integrated hardware, software, and guided onboarding experience is now a non-negotiable element in any bundle or product design

RN: Customer expectations have shifted toward outcome-driven solutions rather than just hardware specs. Non-negotiable components now include:

Hardware: Pro conversion, tactile controls, and recognizable brand quality.

Software: Sophisticated Mix modelling software, Plug-ins, vocal chains, and presets that deliver high-quality, instant results.

Training: Quick-start tutorials and genre templates to shorten the learning curve.

Services: Easy registration, responsive support, and clear upgrade paths for growing studios.



Deck software. It's designed for creators who want hands-on control across music production, streaming, video editing, and hybrid live setups, enabling faster, more intuitive operation.

RN: We're excited to highlight the SSL x Slate Vocal Bundle, designed specifically for vocal-first creators in music, podcasting, and streaming. This bundle was inspired by the growing demand for turnkey vocal solutions that combine hardware, software, and presets to deliver professional results quickly. It reflects the trend toward creator workflows where speed, quality, and portability are essential.

How have customer expectations for "complete" recording solutions evolved, and what components — hardware, software, training, or services — have become non-negotiable in your bundle designs?

LC: Five years ago, "complete" meant hardware plus a DAW.

you can to record, sample, sound design, or control your musical ecosystem. That flexibility and functionality allow creators to capture musical moments with ease.

What customers have come to know and love is that the story is never over with their MPC after purchasing. The Live III continues that legacy with expandable storage, frequent firmware or software updates, and an ecosystem of instruments, plugins, and expansion packs from their favorite producers and software companies.

ST: Customer expectations have evolved alongside increasingly sophisticated workflows and the diversification of use cases. Today, seamless hardware–software integration is no longer optional – it's expected. Customers want systems that work together easily and intuitively, reducing friction in setup and operation. Assistive features, such as the Setup Assistant on the MGX and

LP: Customer expectations have fundamentally shifted from buying "hardware" to investing in a full "production ecosystem," where the path from plugging in to publishing is nearly instant. Today's creators view the interface as the gateway or lens; they expect a "complete" solution to include the same elite processing chains used on their favorite records, available immediately, which is why we now consider comprehensive software suites like Essentials+ for Apollo and UAD Producer Suite for Volt non-negotiable components of our bundle designs.

It is no longer acceptable to offer a "lite" version of a DAW or a single demo plug-in; Our LUNA Recording System integrates seamlessly with the hardware for near-zero latency tracking, while native UAD plug-ins allow that same polish to travel with the user on a laptop. Ultimately, the modern "complete" package must deliver professional results on day one, combining high-

performance audio conversion, assistive features like Auto-Gain, and a library of legendary UAD software tools that educates our customers on classic signal chains, simply by using them. We also partner with trusted educational content providers, PureMix.com to help customers on their journey to becoming better producers.

With nearly every major brand offering turnkey recording packages, how do you differentiate your bundles in terms of features, value proposition, or user experience to stand out at retail?

LP: While other brands focus on "starter kits" that users eventually outgrow, we design our bundles as "career launchpads" with a value proposition that's arguably impossible to replicate: sonic authenticity through deep integration.

Our primary differentiator for Apollo is Unison™ technology, which allows these interfaces to physically alter their mic/line impedance to match the vintage gear being emulated, like a Neve or an API preamp. This, combined with our LUNA Recording System, solves the biggest friction point in digital audio, latency, by unifying hardware and software into a single, intuitive workflow that feels like an analog desk.

Ultimately, we stand out because we don't sell "lite" versions of professional tools; we provide the same processing chains used on their favorite Grammy-winning



*Joshua Clafin,
Performance Marketing Director –
Channel Marketing
inMusic Brands and AKAI
Professional*

records, democratizing the sound of history rather than just imitating it.

JC: The journey from jamming to tracking is seamless. There's no need for constant employee oversight or the fear of an unlocked laptop to display the products' features. Instead, the MPC Live III lives much like an electronic keyboard in retail spaces; give it some power, and it will sell itself.

RN: We differentiate by focusing on SSL's sound quality combined with Slate's mic modelling gives users a noticeable upgrade from day one. At retail, we emphasize



hands-on demos—showing customers how they can record a vocal in 60 seconds with professional polish, using Slate's extensive mic locker. Our value proposition is accessing some of the rarest, most sought after mic models, right in your home or project studio.

ST: Our bundles stand out for combining innovation, uncompromising performance, and intuitive ease of use with the reliability users trust. Every solution is the result of decades of Yamaha's expertise - not just in audio technology, but in musical instruments - giving us a unique perspective on what customers truly need. We design products to meet users wherever they are on their creative journey, delivering tools that inspire confidence and creativity. No other brand can match our depth of experience and commitment to empowering musicians and audio enthusiasts.

LC: Focusrite stands out by prioritizing experience and extras. We don't just throw in more and more plug-ins; we ensure every element, from mic voicing to driver stability, works seamlessly. Our value proposition is reliability and longevity: gear that scales with the user, not gear they outgrow in six months. Plus, our customer support ecosystem and global service network give dealers peace of mind. At retail, that translates to fewer headaches and happier customers.

What feedback are you hearing from dealers regarding price points, merchandising, and SKU complexity, and how is that shaping the direction of your bundle strategy moving forward?

JC: The MPC Live III effectively sold-out globally in the first week of launch, for many retailers it was gone on the first day. The overwhelming feedback was "build more!" The team is hard at

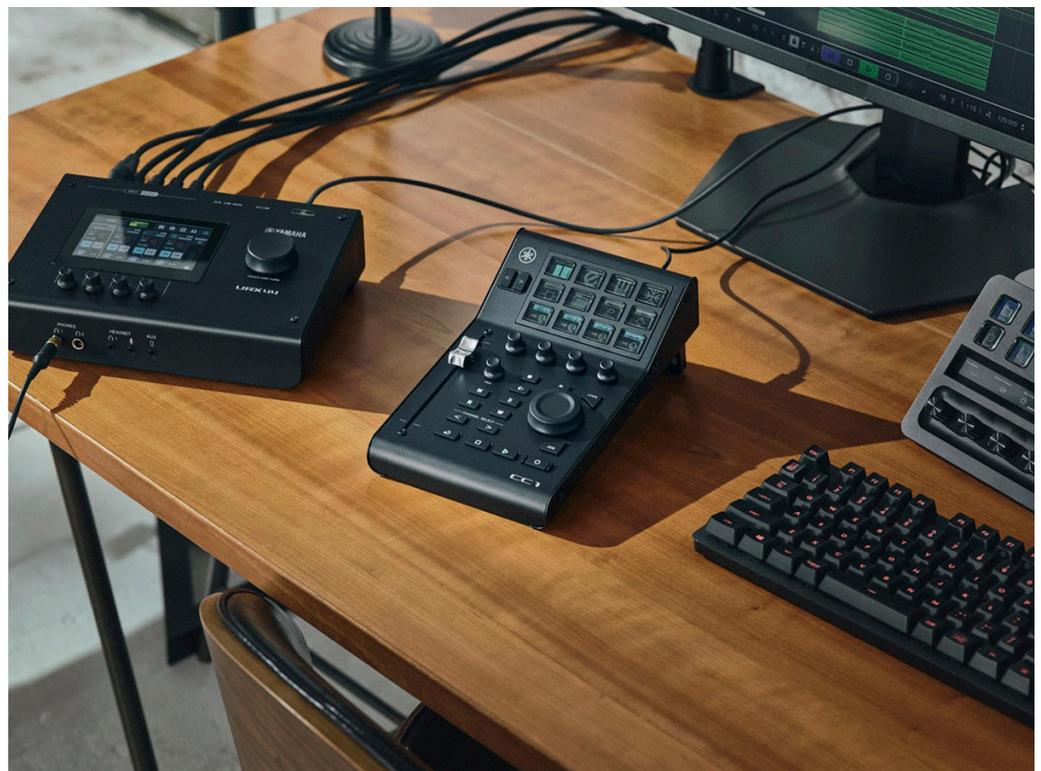
work to support our retail partners meeting the massive customer demand they're experiencing.

RN: Dealers consistently highlight three areas: Price points: Mid-tier bundles that deliver clear sonic improvement are the sweet spot; Merchandising: Demos and sound examples outperform spec sheets in driving sales; SKU complexity: Fewer, more focused bundles increase sell-through and reduce confusion.

LC: Dealers want reasonable price points and easy merchandising. We've responded by streamlining our offerings to ensure each step-up feels meaningful without confusing the buyer. We're also investing in packaging that tells a clear story — what's inside, what it does, and why it matters — because informed customers make confident purchases.

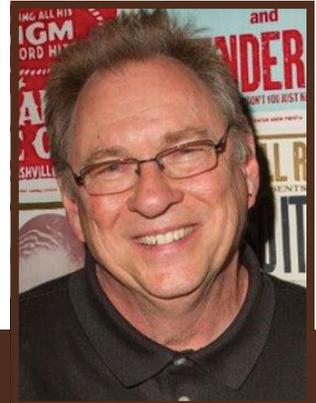
LP: Dealers consistently tell us that SKU complexity creates friction at the counter or online, so we have tailored our bundle strategy to match the buying psychology of two distinct customers. For our premium Apollo line, we utilize a clear "Better, Best" merchandising model with our Essentials+ and Studio+ editions, which lets customers to select based on thousands of dollars in added software value.

However, for the entry-level Volt customer where "option paralysis" can stop a transaction dead in its tracks, we've simplified into one "complete" software package across all Volt models, the UAD Producer Suite. So whether customers are getting a Volt or Apollo, they feel they are making the obvious, high-value choice without navigating a confusing maze of options.



The Ever-Changing Game of The Music Business: Reading the Tea Leaves

By Menzie Pittman, Author of *The New Musician*



“ *Back in the heyday of independent music retailers, as you grew as a musician, you developed a trusted relationship with your favorite music shop.* ”

No matter your role in the music industry, I think we can all agree that the profession has changed dramatically. Some would say it's for the better, and some would disagree with that assessment. We could all sit around and talk about it incessantly, or we could actually attempt to understand the changes in trends, and make the necessary adjustments to put us in the best position to succeed. It's important to remember that we, too, can affect change.

In today's market, the changes continue to become more and more widespread. They affect every aspect of the industry from retail products to music education to performance, and most importantly, the music itself. Don't believe me? Take a look at what is quietly happening to the format of popular songs. The percentage of one-tempo, pop tunes has been inching closer and closer to 100%. Short snippets of the songs that stand out go viral on platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, encouraging the listener to seek out new artists and learn more about the music that catches their attention. This process used to happen through 45 RPM records. There was one noticeable difference though, the songs on 45 RPM records were complete works. They were songs, not snippets of songs.

Don't get me wrong — I'm okay with the idea of advertising, but lately, video ads have become the product. So instead of "watching the show," consumers are in it for the commercials. Sounds like a Super Bowl mentality. But the truth remains: the format is definitely changing.

Sting said it best in his interview with Rick Beato, when he shared that the critically important role of the Bridge of a song has all but been eliminated. The new formula is more of a punch and run approach — a quick attack, followed by a fast escape. When I heard that, I immediately thought of Led Zeppelin. They tried to tell us in their 1973 song "The Crunge": *Ah, excuse me, Oh, will you excuse me? I'm just trying to find the bridge, has anybody seen the bridge? I ain't seen the bridge, where's that confounded bridge? I guess we didn't listen.*

As a music retailer, the changes I have witnessed are just as extreme as the ones happening within the recording industry. As crazy as it sounds, some folks are just fine buying an instrument they haven't played,

and our industry seems to be okay with that as long as the sale is made. It's difficult for me to wrap my head around that, but in comparison, some people today buy cars without ever having test driven them.

Back in the heyday of independent music retailers, as you grew as a musician, you developed a trusted relationship with your favorite music shop. You knew that the prices you were quoted were based in that trust, and the prices were dependable and fair. One secret that was known among the high profile players was that the better you played, the higher your visibility, and the lower your prices. There was mutual respect in the relationship.

Today's most successful independent music shops are well aware that this old trend is worth revisiting. Some aspects of independent retail have disappeared, but I see the phoenix as rising. Strong independent dealers have invested more in the customer experience. They have to in order to survive.

Consumers are bored with swimming in the kiddie pool. Have you been to a big-box chain lately? And I don't just mean music retail; I am referring to all big-box experiences. It doesn't matter what industry it is — bigger, less personalized experiences are like a syringe of filler. It's alluring at first, but the appeal pales over time. Bed Bath & Beyond anybody?

Want an example of where I believe we are headed?

Look up Old Music Friday with Owen Cutts, or @owencutts on Instagram. His page is followed by artists like Jacob Collier, Seal, and J-Dash. Cutts is dedicated to reviewing music that played well, back in the days of feel. He dives deep into the idiosyncrasies of great musicianship, brilliant writing, earthy production, and why these songs and artists continue to speak to audiences today. His personal style is hysterical, and he's a great musician and producer in his own right. It's Old School meets New Platform. It's funny, yet historically accurate and informative. The reason it's relevant is simple: it's about artists who broke the rules, and set new trends. Those artists took the music business in new and expanded directions. They used the latest technology, even inventing it as they went, and the music was a playground for creative thinking. What's more exciting than that?

Hybrid Models, Intelligent Automation, and a New Generation of Music Makers in 2026

By Taylor Harnois, General Manager, Music Shop 360

As the music industry prepares for another year, 2026 is shaping up to be pivotal for music retailers navigating shifting consumer expectations, technological disruption, and the fast-evolving nature of music creation itself. While 2025 brought challenges, there are opportunities ahead for the retailers willing to adapt.

Three major trends are poised to shape the year: the rise of hybrid retail, the rapid expansion of AI and automation, and the evolution of how younger musicians define and invest in music-making.

Adopting Hybrid Retail as the New Standard

2025 was difficult for brick-and-mortar retailers, with the top 200 U.S. music stores seeing revenue declines and drops in headcount. Foot traffic became more unpredictable, margins tightened, and competition from e-commerce players intensified. These forces are expected to remain prominent in 2026.

In the next year, hybrid retail will move from competitive advantage to operational necessity. The most successful stores will be the ones that treat online and offline channels as extensions of one another, rather than independent silos. This means consistent pricing, real-time inventory visibility, unified loyalty programs, and cross-channel services that allow customers to start a journey online and complete it in the store, or vice versa.

Equally important is the in-store experience itself. Music retailers that invest in hands-on demonstrations, knowledgeable staff, music lesson programs, product demos, and community-building events will see higher conversion rates and repeat visits. When physical store engagement mirrors the convenience of a retailer's online offering, customers respond.

Stores that will thrive in 2026 will not be defined by square footage, but by how effectively they blend their digital footprint with a human-forward experience.

Leveraging AI and Automation To Transform the Retail Experience

Artificial intelligence is no longer a futuristic add-on for music retailers; leveraging AI is now a necessity for brick-and-mortar stores that wish to operate better online.

Today, online music retailers outperform physical stores by more than threefold in sales per employee: \$685,000 versus \$210,000. This gap largely comes down to areas like inventory management or personalized experiences where technology – including AI – can be better leveraged to support both physical and online stores.

As AI becomes more accessible, smaller retailers can begin to automate critical operational tasks that previously demanded increased staffing, time, and guesswork. For example, intelligent inventory systems can dynamically adjust product availability, pricing, and promotional displays based on real-time sales data and seasonal patterns. Instead of relying on manual resets, inventory decisions can be guided by predictive analytics. At the beginning

of the school year, for instance, retailers may stock more instruments that align with school music programs, such as trumpets, violins, and flutes compared to other times of the year.

AI is also transforming the customer experience. Consider a scenario where a first-time guitar buyer leaves the store with not only an instrument, but also a personalized beginner's practice plan curated with AI. They can start their music journey off right, complete with video tutorials, service reminders, and progress tracking. This type of enrichment builds customer loyalty, strengthens the retailer's education offerings, and may even increase the likelihood of accessory and upgrade purchases in the future.

Similarly, online shoppers are beginning to receive AI-driven product recommendations. For example, they may be browsing for a synthesizer and receiving recommendations for products at different price points. Or perhaps they're exploring digital audio workstation software for certain types of editing. As consumers continue to grow more comfortable with AI-assisted shopping, they will expect this same level of intelligence for their music needs as well.

AI is no longer an optional experiment. Its ability to enhance staff productivity, drive potential sales, and help smaller brick-and-mortar shops optimize their in-store and e-commerce offerings will be essential in the years ahead.

Adapting to a New Generation of Music-Making Behaviors

One of the most profound shifts we will see in 2026 is that younger consumers are redefining what it means to make music, and these evolving behaviors will directly shape purchasing trends.

Today's emerging musicians are increasingly gravitating toward creative approaches centered on loops, beats, samples, and digital manipulation. This will influence what retailers stock and how they market to these new audiences. Because of this, they should expect to see software, interfaces, portable recording devices, and hybrid analog-digital products competing directly with mid-tier traditional instruments like guitars and keyboards for consumer spending. While this evolution won't replace staple instruments, it will diversify the retail landscape.

Offering starter production bundles, hosting beat-making workshops, and curating hybrid tools that merge tactile performance with digital capability will resonate with younger buyers. Retailers that acknowledge and encourage this will be best positioned for growth.

Preparing for a Transformative Year in Music Retail

2026 will be a year defined by the integration of online and in-store experiences, staffing, AI, and the joining of long-standing music traditions with the emerging digital creative culture. Music retailers that embrace these shifts will find new opportunities to differentiate themselves from big-box competitors, connect with their customers, and grow their businesses.



2025 was difficult for brick-and-mortar retailers, with the top 200 U.S. music stores seeing revenue declines and drops in headcount.



Taylor Harnois is the General Manager of Music Shop 360, where he oversees all aspects of the Music Shop 360 brand, including sales and marketing, customer experience and support, and product and development. Prior to his time at Music Shop 360, Taylor spent many years in the retail and education industries. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a Master's degree in Business Leadership.

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NAMM SHOW BUYER'S GUIDE: PART II

New and notable introductions that will be on-hand in Anaheim in January – either as part of the NAMM Show, or at nearby events

Fretted

New Electrics and Acoustics from Ibanez

New for 2026, Ibanez just announced one of the latest additions to its esteemed Prestige line for 2026: the RG653DX.

The RG653DX blends classic RG visuals with modern performance. This model features throwback design elements that pay homage to the line's history, including a classic pickguard and striking Acrylic & Abalone block inlays.

The visual design is further enhanced by two distinct finishes: White Flat and Transparent Deep Blue Flat. These finishes complement the vintage-inspired design scheme, resulting in a pair of high-performance contemporary instruments that lean into the inherent history and heritage of the Ibanez RG line.

Built in Japan with Ibanez's renowned Prestige craftsmanship, the RG653DX is engineered for the modern player who also seeks dynamic classic aesthetics.

Key features include:

- A powerful pairing of DiMarzio Air Norton (neck) and DiMarzio Tone Zone (bridge) humbuckers, offering versatile tonal options.
- The Edge tremolo bridge, for exceptional tuning stability and expressive performance.
- A resonant Ash body for clear, punchy tone and a Rosewood fretboard for smooth playability.
- This new RG653DX is ideal for players

seeking a blend of classic aesthetics and high-end, modern playability.

- Features
- RG653DX
- Super Wizard HP 5pc Maple/Walnut neck
- Rosewood Fretboard
- Ash body
- Bound Rosewood fretboard w/Acrylic & Abalone block inlay
- Jumbo frets
- DiMarzio® Air Norton™ (H) neck pickup
- DiMarzio® The Tone Zone® (H) bridge pickup
- Edge tremolo bridge
- Black hardware
- Hardshell case included

Finishes: White Flat, Transparent Deep Blue Flat

LIST PRICE: \$2,533.32

ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: \$1,899.99

Ibanez has also announced two distinctive new acoustic models for 2026, both featuring eye-catching Art Grain tops beneath dynamic transparent burst finishes.

Leading the release is the AEWC160A. This model showcases a stunning Quilted Maple Art Grain Basswood Top complemented by a Nyatoh neck, a Rosewood fretboard, and sturdy chrome die-cast tuners. Optimized for plugged-in performance, the AEWC160A

includes Ibanez onboard electronics and an undersaddle pickup. This attractive instrument is available in a selection of four vibrant transparent burst finishes.

The second new offering is the ALT50FA, an evolution of the popular, shred-inspired Altstar acoustics. Designed for enhanced playability and a sharp stage appearance, this model features a Flamed Maple Art Grain Basswood top and Sapele back and sides. The comfort grip satin-finished neck provides a fast, comfortable playing experience. It is also fully equipped with Ibanez onboard electronics and an undersaddle pickup, and its profile is defined by a redesigned, sleek single-cut body shape. The ALT50FA makes a bold statement with three high-gloss "Doom Burst" finishes: Blue, Red, and Transparent Violet.

Features

- AEWC160A
- AEWC body
- 634mm/25" scale
- Quilted Maple Art Grain (Basswood) top
- Sapele back & sides
- Comfort Grip Nyatoh neck (satin finish)
- Rosewood fretboard & Rosewood AEWC original top loading bridge
- Chrome Die-cast tuners (18:1 gear ratio)
- Ibanez Undersaddle pickup
- Ibanez AEQ-2T preamp w/Onboard tuner

- Ibanez IACS6C coated strings
- Recommended case: AC100C/MAP: \$199.99

Finishes: Transparent Emerald Burst High Gloss, Transparent Black Sunburst High Gloss, Transparent Blue Sunburst High Gloss
LIST PRICE: \$599.99

ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: \$399.99

ALT50FA

- Altstar body
- Flamed Maple Art Grain (Basswood) top
- Sapele back & sides
- Body depth: 90/110mm at neck joint/body end
- Comfort Grip Maple neck (satin finish)
- Purpleheart fretboard & bridge
- Sharktooth inlay
- Black Die-cast tuners (18:1 gear ratio)
- Ibanez Undersaddle pickup
- Ibanez AEQ-2T preamp w/Onboard tuner
- Ibanez Advantage™ bridge pins
- Large frets
- Recommended case: GA50C/MAP: \$199.99

Finishes: Blue Doom Burst High Gloss, Red Doom Burst High Gloss, Transparent Violet Sunburst High Gloss

LIST PRICE: \$569.99

ESTIMATED STREET PRICE: \$379.99



Fretted

Taylor Guitars Kicks Off 2026 with Two Major Launches

Taylor has announced its most ambitious tonal expansion to date with two key launches: a Next Generation evolution of its flagship Grand Auditorium guitars and the growth of its heritage-inspired Gold Label Collection to include a trio of deeper-bodied square-shoulder dreadnoughts. This dual launch underscores Taylor's commitment to offer players the industry's widest spectrum of acoustic tonal possibilities, from cutting-edge modern acoustic performance to time-honored traditional tonal character.

"As guitar makers, we see the ever-wider variety of players and styles," said Andy Powers, Taylor's chief guitar designer and CEO. "This means different types of sounds, feels and aesthetic presentations — all in step with the creative world of today's players."

EVOLVING A MODERN FLAGSHIP: Next Generation GRAND AUDITORIUMS

For more than 30 years, the cutaway Grand Auditorium body style has defined the Taylor brand — comfortable, musically versatile, and equally at home in living rooms, pro studios, and on big stages. Yet in keeping with Taylor's ethos of continuous improvement, Andy Powers has continued to bring voicing enhancements to Taylor's most popular body style. The latest refinements arrive as a potent trio of performance-enhancing, "Next-Generation" innovations that fundamentally transform the feel, sound, and live performance utility, all while retaining the core identity that players love. Debuting in Taylor's best-selling 300, 400 and 800 Series, including both Standard and Builder's Edition models, the Next Generation Grand Auditoriums

combine Taylor's patented Action Control Neck, a new scalloped variant of Andy's V-Class bracing, and all-new Claria System electronics—with all three design breakthroughs working in harmony to inspire players by offering a richer, more expressive musical experience.

ACTION CONTROL NECK — The patented Action Control Neck features a long-tenon joint extending deeper into the guitar body for dramatically enhanced sustain, warmth, and resonance, while allowing instant, precise string height adjustments directly through the soundhole—with no string or neck removal required.

SCALLOPED V-CLASS BRACING — Working in harmony with the neck, a new scalloped V-Class bracing pattern lightens key brace zones for increased top movement and responsiveness, delivering the warmth and richness players crave with enhanced low-end response while preserving V-Class's renowned pitch accuracy, projection and sustain.

CLARIATM PICKUP SYSTEM — Finally, Taylor's all-new Claria System electronics revolutionize amplified performance with an improved under-saddle piezo pickup paired with a proprietary onboard preamp that eliminates traditional piezo harshness. Discrete soundhole-mounted Volume, Mid-Contour, and Tone controls enable a wide range of tone-shaping—players will find it easy to quickly dial in their preferred sound in any type of performance venue, offering remarkable plug-and-play utility.

Next Generation Grand Auditoriums start at \$2,499 and include:



- 314ce
- 414ce
- 814ce
- Builder's Edition 324ce
- BE 814ce Indian Rosewood/Adirondack Spruce
- 324ce
- 454ce*
- 854ce*
- BE 814ce Honduran Rosewood Rosewood/Sinker Spruce
- BE 814ce Indian Rosewood/ Adirondack Spruce Blacktop

*These 12-string models feature standard V-Class bracing.

GOLD LABEL GROWTH: SQUARE-SHOULDER DREADS + NEW 900 SERIES MODELS

One year after its debut, Taylor's Gold Label Collection, which draws inspiration from past eras of traditional, non-cutaway guitars, welcomes another body style to the family: a square-shoulder dreadnought with a deeper body that creates an acoustic powerhouse with pronounced warmth and projection. The new dreadnought models include three tonewood pairings: the mahogany/torrefied Sitka spruce Gold Label 510e, the Indian rosewood/torrefied Sitka spruce Gold Label 710e, and the Honduran

rosewood/torrefied Sitka spruce Gold Label 810e. (One other dreadnought that sits alongside these models is the Trey Hensley Gold Label 510e, introduced in Q4 of 2025.)

The new Gold Label Collection guitars start at \$2,799 and include:

- Gold Label 510e
- Gold Label 710e
- Gold Label 810e

Additionally, a pair of new Gold Label models debut at Taylor's 900 Series level, featuring an ultra-premium blend of materials and aesthetic refinements. Models include two body styles: the Super Auditorium Gold Label 914e and Grand Pacific 917e. Both pair Honduran rosewood with Adirondack spruce and feature exquisite paua-shell trim along the top, fretboard and headstock, in natural or golden-brown sunburst finishes. All Gold Label models feature the collection's signature innovations: Fanned V-Class Bracing, the Action Control Neck, and heritage-inspired aesthetics.

"It's like players are stepping into a different musical skin with our Gold Label guitars," says Powers. "Songwriters, bluegrass players, Americana players, rhythm players, weekend strummers, worship leaders, all kinds of different players saying, 'Wow, I love this sound. This is a whole different face of Taylor.'"

Gibson Partners with Keith Richards to Release Signed 1960 ES-355 Models

Gibson announces its partnership with Keith Richards — one of the most influential musicians in history and co-founder of the legendary Rolling Stones. This collaboration introduces two extraordinary instruments: the Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector's Edition, Signed Guitar and Label, and the Keith Richards 1960 ES-355, Signed Label — both handcrafted by Gibson Custom in Nashville, Tennessee, and strictly limited. Developed in close collaboration with Richards himself, these guitars represent a rare opportunity for fans and collectors alike to own a signed replica of one of Keith's best-loved and most recognizable guitars.

Only 50 of the Keith Richards 1960 ES-355 Collector's Edition, Signed Guitar and Label have been produced and will be available exclusively worldwide on Gibson.com and at the Gibson Garage in Nashville and London. These guitars have been signed both on the f-hole label by Keith Richards and on the back of the headstock. Additionally, 100 of the Keith Richards 1960 ES-355, Signed Label — signed by Keith Richards on the f-hole label only — will be available at Gibson Garage locations, authorized Gibson Custom dealers, and globally on Gibson.com.

For more than six decades, the "Human Riff" has been the heartbeat of The Rolling Stones, inspiring millions of fans and



musicians the world over to get out of their seats and rock 'n' roll. It's difficult to imagine the landscape of popular music without the monolithic presence of Keith Richards looming over it with impossible cool, godlike nonchalance, and, of course, impeccable taste in guitars. Ask any guitarist which of Keith's instruments they desire the most, and we're willing to bet his black 1960 Gibson ES-355 will top the list. Keith first used an ES-355 back in 1969, taking it out on the road and into the studio during the legendary recording sessions for Sticky Fingers and Exile on Main St. His black 1960 model has been a staple of every planet-straddling Rolling Stones tour since 1997.

Gibson Custom now proudly introduces two meticulous recreations of the ES-355 that Keith made famous. Handcrafted in the Gibson Custom Shop in Nashville, Tennessee, these models aren't just a tribute; they are exact replicas, crafted using advanced 3D scanning, period-correct materials and construction techniques, with Murphy Lab hand-aging to mirror every detail of the original, including its distinctive tone.

"This is my standard-tuning six-string; this is the other side of my thing," Keith Richards explains, "My six-string stuff has always been, you know, a great Gibson — that's where I feel the most comfortable. And also with the sound. Put it through just about any amp, and it will sound the way you want it, because this has so much more room for expression."

Accessories

Graph Tech Launches the 7-String UN-LOCK Nut at NAMM 2026

Graph Tech Guitar Labs proudly announces the release of the UN-LOCK Nut for 7-string guitars, expanding the groundbreaking UN-LOCK platform that has transformed tuning stability for modern players. After the huge success of the 6-string UN-LOCK Nut lineup, and overwhelming demand from artists, builders, and extended-range players, the family is growing again.

The new 7-string UN-LOCK Nut joins the four existing UN-LOCK Nut models for 6-string guitars, completing a full upgrade system for today's tremolo-equipped and high-performance instruments.

Traditional locking nuts changed guitar history but also introduced familiar frustrations: restricted tuning at the machine heads, slow string changes, mismatched radii, added weight, and reliance on fine tuners and Allen keys. With locking tuners now standard on many performance guitars, players have asked: Why are we still locking at the nut like it's 1979?

The 7-string UN-LOCK Nut is Graph Tech's answer, a modern, player-centric upgrade designed for extended-range performance.

Modern Engineering for Modern 7-String Players

The new UN-LOCK Nut features:

- Precision-engineered string ramps for smooth return-to-pitch and perfectly matched 10", 12", and 16" neck radii.
- 300% more internal lubrication, allowing tremolo players to return to pitch with unmatched consistency.
- Over 80% less weight than a traditional locking nut for improved resonance and reduced headstock mass.
- Full tuning freedom at the machine heads, no clamps, no Allen keys, no fine tuners required.
- Floyd-ready compatibility, unlocking the full potential of double-locking bridges.

Crafted from Black TUSQ XL, the UN-LOCK Nut delivers Graph Tech's signature clarity, ultra-low friction, and modern tuning stability—built for aggressive tremolo use and expressive 7-string playing.

Pairing it with Ratio® Locking Machine Heads creates the fastest, most intuitive tuning system available.

New 7-String UN-LOCK Nut Models and Specifications

Graph Tech introduces two 7-string models to match the most common locking-nut footprints:

- Model #6521 — 7-String UN-LOCK Nut
- Length: 48.01 mm (1.890")
- Width: 15.50 mm (.610")
- Height: 8.55 mm (.337")
- String Spacing: 41.50 mm (1.634")
- Model #6522 — 7-String UN-LOCK Nut
- Length: 48.00 mm (1.890")
- Width: 15.50 mm (.610")
- Height: 8.55 mm (.337")
- String Spacing: 41.50 mm (1.634")

Both models are drop-in replacements for many popular 7-string locking-nut footprints.

Built for the Brands Players Love

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Accessories

ACT Entertainment Showcases RAT Sterling Vermin Pedal at NAMM 2026

ACT Entertainment's iconic RAT brand brings its latest creation, the Sterling Vermin, to the 2026 NAMM Show (Booth 5227). With a new take on RAT's unmistakable sound, this boutique distortion pedal blends heritage tone with modern refinement and delivers an improved level of precision and versatility.

The Sterling Vermin, which features premium components, deliberate design and a focused feel, opens an exciting chapter for the RAT brand. From low-gain tones that are reminiscent of a Klon or Bluesbreaker and high-gain settings similar to Big Muff pedals, to a tight and controlled pattern, the Sterling Vermin perfectly embodies the future of dynamic distortion.

With the LM741 Op-Amp and a pair of selectable clipping diodes, players can toggle between the traditional RAT silicon diode configuration for a punchy, mid-range bite or the BAT41 option for a smoother, more balanced response. The result is a pedal that's equally at home delivering snarling distortion or articulate, low-gain overdrive, with a wide, usable tonal range throughout the entire gain spectrum.

The pedal also features CTS pots and oversized knobs for even, responsive control that affords a satisfying smoothness to the rotation, with just the right amount of tension. Additionally, the polished stainless-steel enclosure with laser-annealed graphics showcases the merging of the pedal's vintage flavor and striking design.

"The Sterling Vermin embodies what RAT has always stood for: character, creativity and great tone, now with a boutique approach that emphasizes feel and craftsmanship," says Shawn Wells, market manager — Sound, ACT Entertainment, who designed the pedal along with his colleague Matt Gates. "It's meant for players who appreciate the nuance in their sound and the detail in their gear."

The RAT Sterling Vermin is available immediately and retails for \$349 USD.



Accessories

D'Addario Introduces the XPND Pedal Pry Bar

D'Addario announces the launch of the XPND Pedal Pry Bar: a compact, XPND-branded tool designed to make pedal removal faster and easier than ever for musicians. Say goodbye to screwdrivers and improvised tools to wrestle pedals away from tightly packed boards. The ergonomically designed XPND Pedal Pry Bar provides a clean, reliable way to lift pedals secured with hook-and-loop or other strong adhesives, without damaging your gear.

The XPND Pedal Pry Bar joins D'Addario's growing XPND ecosystem of modular pedalboard and power solutions, reinforcing the brand's commitment to providing flexible, musician-driven tools for modern guitarists.

Key Features

- **Effortless Pedal Removal:** Safely lifts pedals secured with hook-and-loop or strong adhesives.
- **Pedalboard-Friendly Form Factor:** Compact and lightweight; stores neatly underneath virtually all pedalboards.
- **Compatible with Any Board:** Perfect for XPND, but compatible with all pedalboards and adhesive types.
- **Built for Players Who Tinker:** Perfect for musicians who frequently swap, test, or reorganize pedals.

Availability & Price

The XPND Pedal Pry Bar is available now through daddario.com and authorized retailers

Street Price: \$9.99



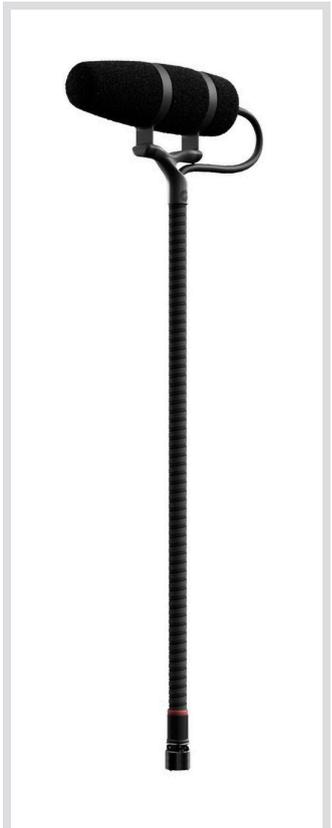
DPA Showcases Enhanced 4099 CORE+ Instrument Mic and Clip System at the 2026 NAMM Show

DPA Microphones will present its 4099 CORE+ Instrument Microphone and redesigned instrument clip solutions to 2026 NAMM Show audiences at Booth 16102. As the next generation of the brand's renowned instrument microphone, the 4099 CORE+ sets a new benchmark for clarity, control and versatility. It features the industry's most advanced distortion-reduction technology, which delivers a wider dynamic range, enhanced sonic transparency and improved authenticity for microphones that don't just meet expectations—they redefine them.

With a design based on years of refinement and user insight, the 4099 CORE+ introduces groundbreaking advancements that push performance to unprecedented levels. Featuring 10 dB of added dynamic range and a higher clipping point than the previous generation, the 4099 CORE+ captures the full nuance of every instrument with precision and authenticity. Incorporating CORE+ by DPA technology, a groundbreaking, patent-pending innovation, the mic virtually eliminates the non-linearities that can occur in the microphone membrane and circuitry, resulting in remarkably transparent and distortion-free sound.

"The original DPA 4099 has long been the go-to for professional musicians and sound engineers around the world," says Helga Volha Somava, product management director, DPA Microphones. "The 4099 CORE+ carries forward that legacy while elevating the microphone with next-level performance, maintaining the iconic tonal characteristics that users love, but

introducing new technology that pushes the boundaries of studio and live sound. We first introduced CORE+ by DPA technology at last year's NAMM, and we look forward to showcasing the 4099 CORE+ to audiences at the forthcoming show."



Drums & Percussion

TAMA Releases New Limited-Edition Mike Portnoy Signature Snare Drum

New for 2026, TAMA has unveiled a brand-new signature snare drum developed in collaboration with long-time signature artist, Mike Portnoy. This snare combines striking aesthetics with a unique set of specifications, meticulously designed to put Mike's signature tones into the hands of drummers worldwide.

The snare features an 8mm, 9-ply Bubinga shell, offering a finely-tuned balance of power, projection, and focus. This shell composition ensures the drum will speak with authority and cut through any mix with an unrestrained presence. Complementing the shell are 8-hole, chrome Die-Cast hoops and TAMA's iconic Starclassic lugs. Other notable features include 20-strand

Starclassic Carbon Steel snare wires and a reliable Remo Coated Ambassador batter head.

Finally, the snare drum is finished in an energetic, one-of-a-kind cascade that blends white and metallic purple. This singular and unique aesthetic is offered on no other TAMA snare drum, making it visually compelling and instantly recognizable.

Features

- 8mm, 9ply Bubinga
- Chrome Die-cast hoops (8 hole) (MDH148 / MDH14S8)
- Starclassic lug (MSLSCT)
- Strainer (MCS100A) & Butt (MLS70B)



- 20-strand Starclassic Carbon Steel snare wires (MS20SN14S)
 - REMO® Coated Ambassador / snare side
 - Limited Qty: 130pcs (US/CA Market)
 - MP1455BUN
- 14"x 5.5" Mike Portnoy – Dream Theater Signature snare drum
LIST: \$1,615.00
MAP: \$1,049.99

Pro Audio

Yamaha Launches MGX Digital Mixer Series, URX Series Audio Interface, and CC1 USB Controller to Empower Musicians, Performers, Streamers, and Content Creators Worldwide

Yamaha has announced the global launch of its MGX Series digital mixing consoles, URX Series audio interfaces, and CC1 USB controller.

Designed for musicians, performers, streamers, podcasters, and content creators, this innovative lineup delivers studio-quality sound, intuitive control, and seamless integration for a wide range of applications – from live performance and music production to podcasting and streaming.

The new products will be showcased at The NAMM Show in Anaheim, California, January 22–24, 2026, with interactive demos and detailed product walkthroughs.

MGX Series: Digital Innovation Meets Trusted Heritage

Acclaimed for exceptional sound quality and intuitive design, the Yamaha MG Series mixers have become an industry standard. Building on this legacy, the MGX Series introduces advanced digital technology for superior sound and flexibility. With support for 32-bit/96 kHz audio, multi-channel streaming, and HDMI-USB video/audio interface on select models, MGX mixers deliver “true sound” and proven performance for live sound, hybrid audio-video mixing, recording, and streaming.

MGX Series Lineup:

- MGX16 B/W
- MGX12 B/W
- MGX16V B/W
- MGX12V B/W

Available in Black and White finishes.

URX Series: Professional Audio Interfaces for Creators

The URX Series offers class-leading audio performance with 32-bit/192 kHz support, ultra-low noise operation, and integrated mixing and routing. The URX44V adds HDMI-USB video/audio interface capability, making it a powerful hub for recording, streaming, and production.

URX Series Lineup:

- URX44 B/W
- URX22 B/W
- URX44V B/W

Available in Black and White finishes.

CC1 USB Controller: Streamlined Workflow for Modern Creators

The CC1 controller features a 100 mm motorized, touch-sensitive fader, 12 LCD keys compatible with Elgato’s Stream Deck app, and integration with leading DAWs such as Cubase, Nuendo, and Pro Tools. Designed for music production, live streaming, and hybrid workflows, CC1 enables precise control and fast adjustments across multiple platforms, including OBS Studio.

Controller Lineup:

CC1

Available in Black finish.

Seamless Integration and Partnerships

Yamaha’s new lineup integrates with Steinberg software and leading streaming tools like Elgato Stream Deck and OBS Studio, delivering unmatched convenience and flexibility for creators worldwide.

Pricing and Availability

MGX Series: Starting at \$799.99

URX Series: Starting at \$399.99

CC1 Controller: \$399.99

Available now through authorized Yamaha dealers.

“We’re not interested in adding digital features for their own sake – we’re focused on what truly helps engineers, musicians, and creators deliver great performances,” said Preston Gray, director of marketing, Professional Audio for Yamaha. “The new MGX mixers extend the trusted MG family into the digital space with the same priorities: a musical, natural sound, straightforward operation and the confidence that comes from using a Yamaha console. Paired with the new interfaces and controller, this lineup gives performers, streamers, and creators a complete ecosystem they can trust – no matter the size of the gig or workflow.”

Takatsuna Maeda, senior general manager of Yamaha’s Creator & Consumer Audio Division, added: “These solutions build upon the long-standing legacy of the MG Series and Steinberg’s trusted hardware products. By empowering creators worldwide, we aim to support their creativity and success through integrated hardware, software, and services.”



USB CONTROLLER

CC1

DIGITAL MIXING CONSOLE

MGX SERIES

AUDIO INTERFACE

URX SERIES

Fender Introduces Fender Studio – Releases First DAW

Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC) has announced a significant milestone in its evolution of creative tools, introducing Fender Studio as a new brand and unifying PreSonus® Studio One Pro and its renowned recording interfaces together under the Fender name. Starting this year, Studio One Pro becomes Fender Studio Pro, while the Quantum and AudioBox Go lines transition to the Fender Quantum Series and Fender AudioBox Go.

“For more than a decade, Studio One Pro has set the standard for modern music production,” said Max Gutnik, chief product officer, FMIC. “Its balance of power, creativity and ease of use has inspired countless artists and shaped how music is made today. With Fender Studio Pro, we are taking those celebrated features and enhancing them with a modernized interface, Fender’s award-winning amp and effects models and new intuitive workflows and capabilities that make creating music faster, more inspiring and more connected than ever.”

The reimagined Fender Studio Pro environment introduces an updated visual design, native Fender amp and effects plugins, a new channel overview for faster mixing workflows, updated samplers and AI powered audio-to-note conversion for layering sounds and inspiring intelligent chord technology for creative songwriting. For artists, producers and engineers, this move represents more than a name change. It brings together the trusted performance of PreSonus hardware and software with Fender’s deep legacy in tone and musical expression.

Combining Studio One Pro’s celebrated features and trusted performance with a new modernized interface and intuitive workflows, Fender Studio Pro 8 features Fender’s renowned amps and effects models that make creating music faster, more inspiring and connected than ever. Available exclusively in the Fender Studio app and Fender Studio Pro, the Mustang and Rumble Native plugins offer 57 guitar and bass amp models and hundreds

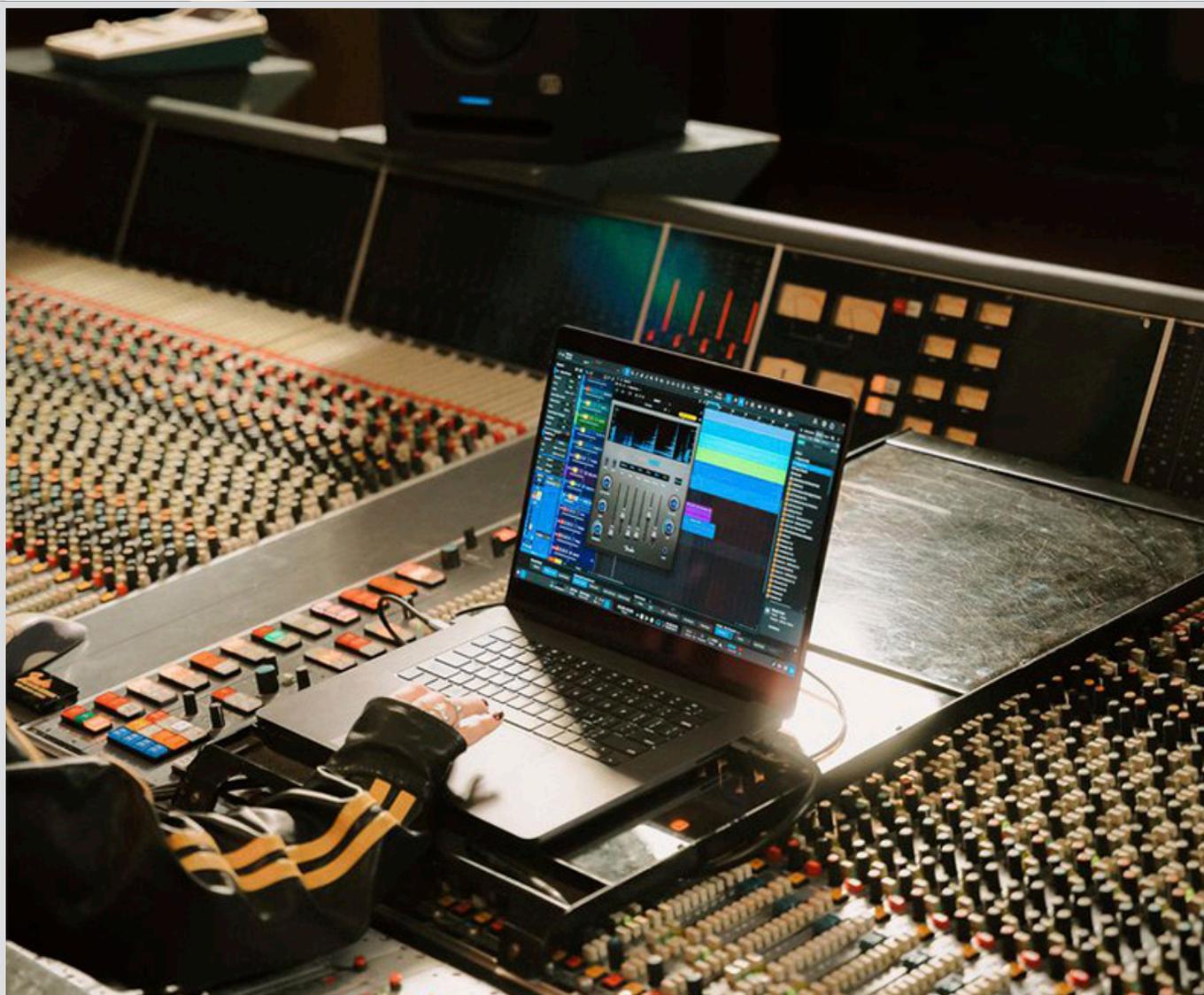
of effects for players to find their sound.

From iconic instruments and amplifiers to award-winning digital platforms like Tone Master Pro and Fender Play, Fender remains dedicated to inspiring generations of artists and creators through technology, tone and timeless design. The new Fender Studio brand represents the next evolution of that vision, where tradition and innovation meet in the service of creativity. Anchored by Fender Studio Pro and the Fender Quantum Series Interfaces, this next-generation lineup delivers reliability, premium sound quality and seamless integration across hardware and software, from the studio to the stage. Built for artists, producers and engineers, Fender Studio enhances the creative process and brings ideas to life without disrupting the flow of inspiration.

“Having authentic Fender amps and pedals built straight into the DAW is a game-changer,” said Alissia, GRAMMY®-Nominated Producer of the Year, Bassist and Artist. “Fender Studio Pro delivers true analog warmth with a seamless workflow.”

All existing PreSonus customers will continue to be served through the new MyFender platform effectively replacing MyPreSonus. This exciting new platform will not only serve software and hardware customers but the wider universe of Fender customers who purchase guitars, amps and effects.

In parallel, the PreSonus brand will continue to serve creators with industry-leading audio solutions like the acclaimed Eris® Monitors, StudioLive® Series III SE Mixers, Air XD Loudspeakers and more. As part of the FMIC family, PreSonus remains committed to its core mission of democratizing music creation and making professional-quality tools accessible to artists at every level. PreSonus customers will continue to receive full support and updates. Stay tuned for more exciting announcements to come in 2026.



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- ✓ Spot trends before they hit
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Every open. Every click. Every conversion.

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Honest advice on where to spend your budget.

- ✓ Budget-based recommendations
- ✓ Compare ROI across channels
- ✓ Unbiased advice (really)
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- ✓ Manufacturers: find dealers
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- ✓ Direct introductions
- ✓ No trade show required

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Federal data translated for music industry.

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Get your news directly to editorial teams.

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Hal Leonard Releases Composer-Approved Matching Folio to *Wicked: For Good*

Hal Leonard is proud to announce the release of the official matching folio for “Wicked: For Good,” created in close collaboration with legendary composer Stephen Schwartz, who personally reviewed and approved every arrangement in the collection.

This highly anticipated songbook features piano/vocal/guitar arrangements of eight songs from the blockbuster film adaptation of the beloved Broadway phenomenon. Highlights include the new songs “No Place Like Home” and “The Girl in the Bubble,” along with the previously unprinted Broadway favorite “The Wicked Witch of the East” and the movie-version arrangement of “Wonderful.”

“Wicked: For Good” has made a massive cultural and commercial impact, debuting with a record-setting opening weekend of over \$150 million domestically and more than \$225 million worldwide, making it the largest opening ever for a Broadway musical adaptation. The film’s ongoing box-office success continues to fuel renewed interest in *Wicked* across generations of fans, performers, and educators.

By working directly with Stephen Schwartz, Hal Leonard’s editorial team ensured that every note, lyric, and musical nuance reflects the composer’s original artistic vision — a level of authenticity and accuracy that teachers, performers, and serious fans trust and expect from the Hal Leonard name.

Songs included:

As Long as You’re Mine • For Good • The Girl in the Bubble • I Couldn’t Be Happier • No Good Deed • No Place like Home • The Wicked Witch of the East • Wonderful

Beautifully produced and designed for ease of play, this folio is a must-stock title for retailers looking to capitalize on the film’s continued success and the enduring popularity of one of musical theater’s most iconic works.

The book retails for \$22.99.





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