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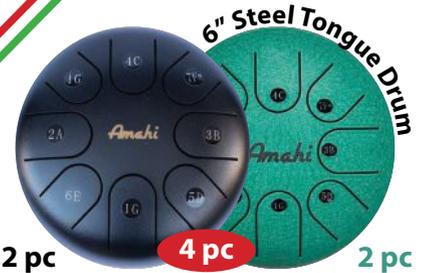


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FEATURES Vol.182 NOVEMBER 2023 No. 11



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Dealer Survey

'A Wide-Open Market' – MI Retailers' Thoughts on Sales of Headphones in 2023 Reveal Few Universal Trends 9

There wasn't much consensus amongst retailers in this month's poll, when it comes to current trends in headphones sales. Are sales up or down? Do most end-users seek out quality or bargain-prices? It really depends on who you ask. A few brands are clear market leaders, though...

Roundtable

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MMR speaks with reps from some of the biggest names in audio interface design and supply to learn if there's been a market correction after record-breaking sales during the pandemic and, if so, to what degree. We also get the inside scoop on new and recently released models, as well as some observations on what best practices are adopted by particularly successful retailers when it comes to this hardware.

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What were the best instruments, products, and MI suppliers in 2023? Cast your vote today!

Anniversary

'More than Just a Music Store' – Five Star Guitars at 25 24

2023 marks the quarter-century mark for celebrated Beaverton, Oregon MI retailer, Five Star Guitars. We talk with co-owner Geoff Metts about how the award-winning business (2020 NAMM Dealer of the Year, among other accolades) navigates an ever-changing retail landscape, while also continuing its steadfast commitment to community engagement.

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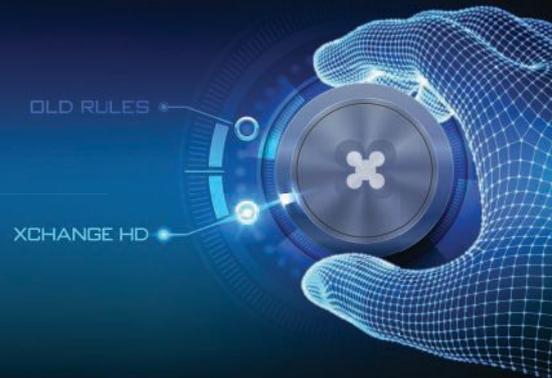


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Targeting a 'Strong Demand'

By
Christian
Wissmuller

Customers are seeking, "versatile audio interfaces with the maximum variety of features in an all-in-one, compact, portable, and durable package," says Adrian Haselhuber of PreSonus in this month's cover feature (page 10). Based on a number of metrics, as well as personal experience, today's suppliers are meeting those

needs – and then some.

My bandmate recently upgraded his previous audio interface (brand withheld in the spirit of being agnostic on the topic) used for recording demos and other, more "pro" projects, in favor a newer model (again, brand kept under wraps, though it's one of those included in this issue's article). To be clear, the older interface is from a well-respected supplier and was, for its time, fairly cutting edge. Although it's only a few short years later, after having used this newer unit, myself, all I can say is: Wow!

Low latencies, bundled software, amazing audio specs, and a downright simple "learning curve" – today's audio interfaces are amazingly potent, versatile tools that have become key components within the arsenals of not only home recording enthusiasts, but DJs, podcasters, educators, streamers, and more. The timing of all these recent advancements really couldn't have been strategically planned any better in ways that benefitted both brands and dealers.

“Low latencies, bundled software, amazing audio specs, and a downright simple ‘learning curve’ – today’s audio interfaces are amazingly potent, versatile tools that have become key components within the arsenals of not only home recording enthusiasts, but DJs, podcasters, educators, streamers, and more.”

"Interface sales went bonkers in 2020," observes MOTU's Jim Cooper when reflecting upon the boom in home-creation during COVID-related quarantines and the like. Again from Haselhuber: "During the pandemic, a lot of people turned to making music and home recording as a way to stay hopeful and feel fulfilled through their creative exploration. This in turn resulted in a very large uptick of sales in musical instruments and home recording equipment."

While very few look back fondly on the period of time defined by uncertainty, fear, and instability brought about by a mysterious global pandemic, there's no question that there were some byproducts that helped segments of MI (think fretted instrument sales, in particular – but also audio interfaces and other gear related to at-home creation of various types).

While most categories that experienced COVID-related booms have dealt with measurable market correction, sales of recording/streaming equipment – while also somewhat cooler than during the pandemic – remain very robust. As Proel North America's Antonio Ferranti shares, "As remote work, home recording, and audio production continue to enjoy sustained elevation, there remains a strong demand for audio interfaces. As such, competition will continue to intensify, pushing manufacturers and retailers to innovate and provide more value to customers. The market will also see a trend towards more feature-rich, compact, and highly compatible interfaces to cater to the incredible variety of customer needs."

Long story short? If your MI retail business isn't already stocking audio interfaces and other vital components to independent recording and streaming projects, you may well want to consider adding those items to your inventory!

Lastly, by the time you read this, we'll be very close to the final deadline for Dealers' Choice Awards voting (November 17). Again, the link to vote is under the AWARDS tab at mrmagazine.com, as well as pinned to our Facebook page, or you can visit here: <https://mrmagazine.com/site/2023-mmr-dealers-choice-awards-ballot/>

Best of luck to the 2023 nominees!

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NAMM Foundation Announces 25th Year of Best Communities for Music Education Program



For the past 25 years, the NAMM Foundation has celebrated communities throughout the country by honoring schools and their districts with The NAMM Foundation's Best Communities for Music Education award (BCME). During those 25 years, The NAMM Foundation has reached communities representing more than 43 states and 900-plus combined school districts and individual schools. Part of the organization's mission is to recognize the commitment and efforts of teachers, administrators, parents, students and community leaders nationally for their dedication to music education as part of a well-rounded school curriculum.

These awards are based on a comprehensive online survey developed in partnership between the NAMM Foundation and the University of Kansas. The survey assesses alignment of graduation requirements with arts and music standards in the classroom and

community.

The schools and communities recognized by the Best Communities for Music Education demonstrate a commitment to ensure music learning opportunities are available for every student and provide an example for other communities to follow. The impact of The NAMM Foundation's Best Communities for Music Education award is unique and different for each recipient, although all recipients report the sense of pride, joy and respect it brings to their communities.

District officials, music educators and school staff in the domestic United States are invited to complete the survey until January 31, 2024 at www.nammfoundation.org/bcme.

In conducting the annual survey, The NAMM Foundation collaborated with advisory organizations in the fields of music and education, including League of American Orchestras; Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation; Music for All; Music Teachers National Association; Save the Music Foundation; Yamaha, and Young Audiences.

Tandem Drums Partners with B4 for EU Distribution

Tandem Drums has officially announced it has awarded B4 Distribution as its exclusive distributor for the EU market.

Tandem Drums selected B4 based on their proven track record, and the conviction with which they support and promote their brands. This partnership will enable Tandem Drums to extend its current product line to artists across the EU, while paving the way for future product offerings in that market.



Tandem Drums launched in 2023 following a successful crowdfunding campaign for its first product line, Drops. Drops are a collection of drum effects designed by the creator of MONO, the internationally acclaimed luggage and accessory brand. Frustrated by "those disgusting gels we all use", industrial designer and drummer Daniel Kushner designed Drops to enhance drum tone without the use of gels or adhesives. (tandemdrums.com)

B4 Distribution has been a tier one distributor in Europe for musical instruments and pro audio for over 35 years, building a reputation for carefully selecting products according to innovation and quality. Its current portfolio includes Strymon, MONO, DR Strings, CAD Audio, Heritage Guitars, and others. (b4-distribution.com)

traderegrets

Larry G. Volland, 81

Longtime MI industry vet, **Larry G. Volland** passed away on September 11, 2023. He was 81.



Volland was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota and as a young teenager moved with his family to Seattle where he finished high school. He started attending Western Washington University and simultaneously dusting shelves at LD Heater Music Company to support himself while in school. LD Heater evolved into Norlin Music and Larry soon found his passion in sales and segued into full time with Norlin.

His career grew quickly and over 40+ years in the industry he oversaw sales teams around the world with executive positions at companies including Gibson, Anvil Cases, Washburn, Baldwin Pianos, and his own Bay City Music, among others.

Volland is survived by his wife of 56 years Nancy, and his children Kelly Feldmeier and Lance Volland and their families. He always had a song in his heart and even near the end, just before he passed away from complications due to Alzheimer's Disease, he loved music and still sang some of his favorite songs.

MMRglobal

Peavey Selects Innovative Audio Solutions to Distribute in Saudi Arabia

Peavey Commercial Audio and Innovative Audio Solutions announce a new exclusive distribution partnership for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Well-established in the professional AV market, Innovative Audio Solutions is a diverse distribution and design business based in Riyadh, KSA uniquely positioned to effectively represent Peavey in the region.

An extension of Thomsun Group, UAE (est. 1976), Innovative Audio Solutions provides services meeting the needs of customers across a broad spectrum of audio requirements, from small-scale operations to the largest venues, making Peavey Electronics, MediaMatrix, and Crest Audio ideal fits within its brand portfolio.

Upon its introduction in 1993, MediaMatrix revolutionized the audio industry, representing the world's first digitally configured and controlled distributed audio system. MediaMatrix remains the most scalable, flexible, and specified option for digital audio distribution, processing, and control, providing operators the tools to configure and reconfigure audio and control systems in the most demanding environments, whether from a computer, touch screen, or mobile device. MediaMatrix serves the high-end audio market with the most powerful digital signal processors, software, and user-control tools for creating the most elaborate and advanced audio systems.



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On October 24, Roland Corporation U.S. posted the following:

*It is with a heavy heart that we announce the passing of **Mark Nelson**, our former vice president of product management for Roland Americas. Mark was not only a pillar in the MI industry, with an impressive career spanning 35 years, but also an integral part of our Roland family for seven wonderful years.*

Beyond his professional accomplishments, Mark was an accomplished drum-

mer and musician, leaving a lasting mark in the world of music with his contributions to 10 albums, movie soundtracks, appearances on American Bandstand, and more.

However, what truly made Mark special was his unwavering positivity, dedication, and willingness to always lend a hand. His leadership and the impact he made within Roland and the broader MI industry will be profoundly missed.



people

Steve Rorie, chairman and CEO of J.J. Babbitt Company, Inc. announces the appointment of

Trace Rorie as its new president and COO. With a distinguished education and background in leadership and organizational development, coupled with extensive experience in the music industry and creative leadership as a whole, Trace Rorie brings a unique blend of talents to this role.

Trace Rorie comes to J.J. Babbitt Company, Inc. with a wealth of experience in guiding teams and organizations towards growth, success, and health. As a leadership and organizational development consultant, Trace has worked with a diverse range of teams and industries – from Fortune 500 organizations to non and not-for-profits – helping them to achieve their full potential. His strategic vision, coupled with a deep understanding of human and organizational dynamics, has resulted in remarkable transformations, momentum, and success for numerous teams and organizations.

In addition to his expertise in people and business development, Trace Rorie is himself an accomplished creative and musician. Having served as a writing and performing musician throughout his life, his passion and talent for music gives him a unique understanding and appreciation for the mouthpieces that J.J. Babbitt manufactures, the incredible artists who play them, and the amazing music that they create. His hands-on knowledge of musical instruments will undoubtedly contribute to the company's commitment to producing top-tier mouthpieces that musicians trust and love for many more years to come.

Trace Rorie also brings a creative flair to the role, having served as one of the lead creatives, and ultimately, the executive director at Granger Community Church in Granger, Indiana; noted as one of the fastest-growing and most innovative mega-churches in America throughout its history. This experience has allowed him to develop innovative approaches to problem-solving, team collaboration, idea generation, and delivering exceptional results; qualities that will be invaluable in his new position.



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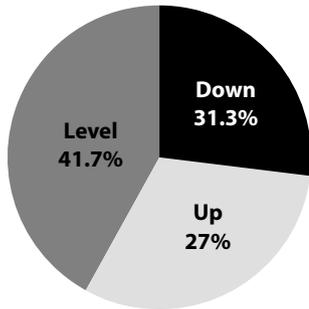
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'A Wide-Open Market'

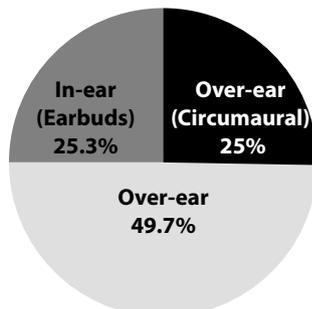
MI Retailers' Thoughts on Sales of Headphones in 2023 Reveal Few Universal Trends

By Christian **Wissmuller**

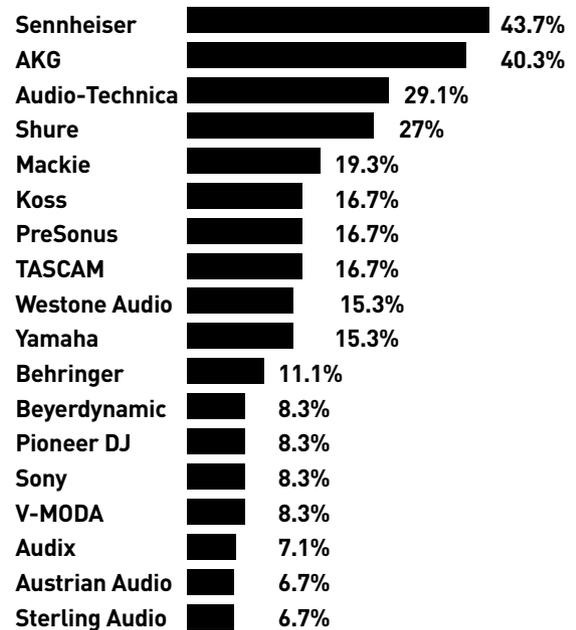
When compared to this time last year, sales of headphones at your store are...



What types of headphones are most popular with your customers?



Which brands are the top sellers for your store?



What trends have you noticed in this market segment of late (in-demand features, price points, size, et cetera)?

"People don't seem to be afraid of buying good headphones anymore. They're starting to realize that headphones – quality ones – work way better than ear buds."
Larry Gosch
 Encore Music Center, Auburn, CA

"As technology keeps increasing the efficiency of headphones, sales have strengthened over the past year. This is a wide-open market that almost anyone can use. Our market is pretty evenly split between the casual listener to the music creators."

David St. John
 Music & Arts, Glendora, California
 "The market has been quieter than I like."
George Rondinelli
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The Front End



Audio Interface Sales Remain Ascendant

by Christian Wissmuller

Home recording enthusiasts, professional recording engineers, live sound reinforcement engineers, podcasters, streamers, DJs, gamers – it'd almost be easier to list the types of professions and personal passions that *don't* require use of a reliable audio interface in 2023. These handy, versatile units are the front end of any computer recording system and are becoming more feature-rich and powerful every year.

During lockdowns a few years ago, this segment of MI absolutely exploded, with unprecedented numbers of folks taking up some variety of home recording, be it music, podcast, or anything else. *MMR* spoke with reps from some of the biggest names in audio interface design and supply to learn if there's been a market correction and, if so, to what degree. We also got the inside scoop on new and recently released models, as well as some observations on what best practices are adopted by particularly successful retailers when it comes to this hardware.

Sales of certain musical instruments and gear – including audio interfaces – soared during COVID-related lockdowns. Have audio interface sales levelled off in recent months, or are things still trending upwards?

Jim Cooper: Yes, MOTU interface sales went bonkers in 2020, especially because we had just released the M2 and M4 interfaces, which lit up the entry-level interface category with their unique, full-color LCD displays and superb, best-in-class audio specs. The M series continue to be widely acclaimed and remain best-sellers for us post COVID.



“COVID certainly provided an opportunity for many people to jump into home audio recording for the first time.”

– Herm Bellanton, Product Marketing Manager, Akai Professional/M-Audio, inMusic

Herm Bellanton: COVID certainly provided an opportunity for many people to jump into home audio recording for the first time. M-Audio was well positioned to serve a great number of new recording enthusiasts, given our selection of inviting entry-level offerings. While sales have returned to base level, the home recording segment is still very strong and we see only great things to come in the sector.

Dan Hughley: People are still excited to be making music and we're honored they overwhelmingly choose Focusrite. Sales numbers are very positive and they are in line with our expectations.

Adrian Haselhuber: During the pandemic, a lot of people turned to making music and home recording as a way to stay hopeful and feel fulfilled through their creative exploration. This in turn resulted in a very large uptick of sales in musical instruments and home recording equipment. Many consumers gravitated towards PreSonus products because of their versatility, sound quality, and accessibility for creators of all skill levels.

As the pandemic winded down in late 2022 and early 2023, many consumers started to put an emphasis on activities away from home. As a result, many MI manufacturers have seen sales volume return to more sustainable levels. While this market correction was inevitable, we believe that the audio interface market will continue to grow in the coming years due to the critical nature of these products in modern music production and recording workflows.

Antonio Ferranti: Audio interface sales globally experienced a tremendous surge during the pandemic lockdowns, particularly in the home recording, podcasting, music streaming, and remote-production markets. Though the protocols of the pandemic which contributed to this surge have largely passed, the ongoing effects of an elevated remote production market that it has left on our industry have not, and likely will not, for many years to come – perhaps forever.

For your brand, what is (are) the most popular model(s) of audio interfaces?

HB: The AIR 192 and M-Track Solo audio interfaces remain some of our best sellers. As efficient desk-top solutions with all the I/O options necessary to record solo recording projects up through individually tracking small bands, these audio interface lines have proven reliable workhorses for the modern producer/engineer. The crystal pre-amps of the AIR 192 series just can't be beat this price range and deliver fantastic results when tracking vocals, instruments, and beyond.

AH: We offer a wide variety of interfaces that fit almost any workflow and budget. Some of our most popular models include: Audiomob 96k, Studio 24c, and Quantum 2626. Our interfaces feature excellent audio specifications, solid build quality, and low recording latencies – especially with the Thunderbolt-enabled Quantum 2626.





“Innovative retailers with teams dedicated to identifying and utilizing the latest trends in marketing are the ones who are especially successful.”
 – Dan Hughley, Senior Manager, Brand Marketing, Focusrite, Americas

high IO count, and an included Pro Tools Studio license. Everyone who tries it just loves it. On the higher end, our MTRX Family is still by far the most flexible solution in the industry and the demand for these interfaces backs it up. With the introduction of the new Thunderbolt 3 module for MTRX Studio & MTRX II, users can now connect directly to their workstation with a low latency native connection or leverage the deterministic processing of HDX/DigiLink... or both, which just opens up a whole host of exciting workflows between Pro Tools and other audio applications.

What are some of the in-demand features customers are looking for: Connections (USB-C, USB, Thunderbolt, Ethernet, et cetera), Digital I/O (ADAT Optical, AES/EBU, Coaxial, Ethernet, et cetera), bit depth, sampling rate, size, and so on?

AF: Customers are increasingly looking for versatile audio interfaces with the maximum variety of features in an all-in-one, compact, portable, and durable package. In-demand features must include zero latency, limitless connectivity options including USB, TLR, XLR, Hi-Z switch for recording vocals and instruments together, high-definition preamps, high-speed data transfer, multiple digital input and output options, higher bit depth and sampling rates for better audio quality, compact and portable sizes for convenience, and again zero-latency performance. Addition-

ally, compatibility with all the popular digital audio workstations and quality preamps are a must.

AH: First and foremost, customers always look for best-in-class audio quality. High-quality mic/instrument preamps and A/D/A converters usually range at the top of the requirements list. A solid complement of additional analog and digital I/O, plus low latency and easy computer connectivity rank highly as well. The exact list of feature requirements depends on each person’s workflow and personal preference.

MC: Most of the requests have less to do with physical connections and more to do with deeper integration with ProTools and EUCON, which we are uniquely positioned to do. As we move forward with our hardware, we expect to see more seamless connectivity between hardware and software to allow users to spend more time being creative and less time being technical. That being said, there has been a tremendous shift in the industry to create within immersive formats, both in film and music. With that, we are again uniquely positioned to provide flexible immersive monitoring and room tuning.

DH: We’ve found that customers looking to buy an audio interface are generally looking for a few key things: high quality audio, a range connectivity for their studio equipment, reliability, and ease of use.

High quality audio: at Focusrite we believe this is crucial to a great interface, and ensure we are always pushing the limits of our technical designs to deliver the highest quality audio we can at every price point.

Connectivity: customers often need to connect a range of different equipment to their interface, from mics, guitars, keyboards, and synths, to speakers, headphones, and outboard effects. We cater to a variety of needs across the Focusrite ranges, with a range of different analogue and digital connectivity options.

Reliability: customers want to know their interface is going to be there for them when they need it, and stand the test of time. We ensure our products are built to the highest standards and are confident in our designs. Every Focusrite product comes with a 3 year warranty to ensure peace of mind.

Ease of use: with every product we make at Focusrite we want to make sure that customers can quickly and easily achieve the tasks they need to with our equipment. We often explore new ways of making tasks easier, ensuring that our customers can focus on what they’re really trying to do – make music!

JC: The M2 and M4 are USB bus-powered (over USB-A or USB-C), which customers expect in a compact audio interface. The M6 has four mic inputs, each with individual 48V phantom power, so it requires a USB-C host for bus power, but offers an optional power supply for legacy USB-A host connections.

The M series, UltraLite-mk5 and other USB-equipped MOTU interfaces are USB-audio class compliant, which means they are plug-and-play with no driver needed. However, we do offer custom drivers that provide excellent round trip latency (RTL) performance of just above 2 ms (using the industry standard mea-



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“We are seeing increased emphasis on audio quality, immersive audio production, and new technologies such as machine learning.”

— Adrian Haselhuber, Vice President Product, PreSonus Hardware



surement of a 32 sample buffer at 96 kHz). This rivals the performance of expensive Thunderbolt interfaces, which typically perform just under 2 ms, so the difference between MOTU USB interfaces and Thunderbolt comes down to a fraction of a millisecond. Latency performance continues to be very important to customers at all levels, and MOTU interfaces offer excellent latency performance.

Control room features are hot these days, including talkback and A/B speaker select. The M6, for example, provides an A/B button on the front panel, so users can connect two sets of speakers and compare their mixes with the touch of the A/B button. The M6 is the only entry-level interface that offers this feature.

At MOTU, what we see today is that audio interface customers are savvy: they know that analog audio quality is perhaps the most important feature in an audio interface. Even with the very best microphone and speakers, the A/D and D/A conversion in the interface is the crucial link to ensure that customers get the absolute best possible sound in and out of their computer. That's why MOTU interfaces offer ESS Ultra DAC Technology at all price points for superb sound and the best possible conversion, with dynamic range as high as 125 dB and THD+N pushing -115 dB.

HB: Traditional USB and USB-C are of course the most adopted, given most users still use one computer not just for music but for all their needs. A few in the marketplace have very specific needs but we find most fall into a simpler requirement. Above all, users want to be able to unpack their devices, get connected, and to start recording as quickly as possible. Having a good suite of bundled software and plugins is an essential part of getting users right into the creative flow as quickly as possible.

Have you noticed any best practices adopted by MI retailers who are especially successful in selling this type of

gear when it comes to promotion, display, and marketing?

HB: Marketing pizzazz and glimmer definitely helps capture attention but at the end of the day it boils down to good old-fashioned information. It's important to present product knowledge

in thoughtful ways paired with inspiring performances that appeal to every applicable user case use. Making sure sales persons are adequately trained and familiar with the products is just as important to make sure end-users are empowered with product details they need, ensuring

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“Audio interfaces have become so elemental to music production that the future looks very solid, overall.”

— Jim Cooper, Director of Marketing, MOTU

they make the most informed purchasing decision.

DH: Innovative retailers with teams dedicated to identifying and utilizing the latest trends in marketing are the ones who are especially successful.

Those who create short vertical video content for TikTok and other social media platforms are the ones who are performing well, and leading the pack in terms of relatability and accessibility.

JC: Retailers do very well moving MOTU interfaces when they emphasize MOTU’s superb audio specs and excellent latency performance. For the M series in particular, the front panel LCD with full-color metering catches customers’ eyes and makes for an easy sale, given that no other entry level interface offers full metering like this.

AH: At PreSonus and FMIC, we believe strongly in community education and connection to the consumer through tailored marketing campaigns, artists, and social media experiences, creating an equation where the customer feels valued and informed, leading to increased sales and brand loyalty. I am sure that retailers who are connected to the needs of their customers in the same way will see a direct correlation as well.

AF: Successful MI retailers offer in-store selection, demos, knowledgeable staff who can guide customers in choosing the right interface for their production needs, and create in-store bundles with essential accessories. Additionally, a robust website with manufacturer’s complete metadata, photos, videos, and their own content which showcases the store’s staff and even user-generated content that demonstrates the interfaces in action. Effective marketing includes online promotions, social media engagement, and email newsletters are all key to funneling sales. We work with our dealers on all of these online and in-store elements to help them be successful with our products.

Does your brand have any new or upcoming audio interface introductions you’d like to draw MMR readers’ attention to?

JC: MOTU does have some exciting new products coming that we look forward to sharing with our retail partners and end-user customers! Please stay tuned!

AH: Our most recent release, the AudioBox Go is an interface with an excellent price-performance ratio. It’s jam packed with features such as a XMAX-L preamp, a combo jack that doubles

as a line-level input, and easy-to-use Mix control.

A free license for Studio One® Prime is also included, giving users a complete recording solution. Best of all, the AudioBox GO is small enough to toss into a guitar case or laptop bag making it the perfect choice for home recording and creating on-the-go.

AF: Yes! Or *Sì* (As our Italian engineers would say)! At Proel North America, our brand-new releases of Audio Interfaces are launching just now throughout the USA and Canada, which include our *EIKON EKSBI-POD* and *EIKON EKSBI-PRO Audio Interfaces*, which our dealers have been requesting. These models offer a robust set of features and connectivity, our high-quality Italian design, and remarkable affordability, making them excellent choices for both the home-recording and podcasting market [EKSBI-POD] and professional studio recording and production market [EKSBI-PRO]. In addition to our Q4 product launch, we will be showcasing these at the upcoming NAMM Show in January and invite dealers and producers to check us out.

MC: The two latest hardware products from us continue to be the new MTRX II and Thunderbolt 3 module (for MTRX Studio & MTRX II), giving incredible flexibility to user workflows from simple stereo requirements to complex immersive needs.

HB: My lips are sealed! I will say M-Audio is always paying attention to trends and the evolution of recording. Originally, this is what made M-Audio such a leader in the home recording space, and why we continue to be a leader in recording. We’re very excited with the changes in technology, especially as computers and smart devices continue to get more powerful, new music consumption platforms emerge, and music creation continues to grow across all backgrounds and sub groups.

DH: Scarlett 4th Gen is the newest product range for Focusrite and will undoubtedly make its way to the top of any recording musician’s wish list this holiday.

Expectations for this market segment in the coming year?

DH: With a strained economy, the student loan payment COVID-19 pause coming to an end, multiple devastating wars, and rapid global inflation post-COVID, the next year may be challenging. But Focusrite Group is primed for success with a collection of superior quality brands, industry leading offerings at many price points, a global Mission to make music easier to make, and a seasoned team of professionals working around the clock to provide for our customers. We’re well prepared to weather these and most any other storm that comes our way.



“As we move forward with our hardware, we expect to see more seamless connectivity between hardware and software to allow users to spend more time being creative and less time being technical.”

— Mark Corbin, Senior Principal Product Manager for Audio Hardware Systems, Avid Technology, Inc.





“We are proud to announce here first in *MMR Magazine* that we are launching our brand-new releases of Eikon audio interfaces: EIKON EKSBiPOD and EKSBiPRO audio interfaces.”

— Antonio Ferranti, President, Proel North America



AF: Proel North America’s expectations for the audio interface market segment in the coming year are very positive. As remote work, home recording, and audio production continue to enjoy sustained elevation, there remains a strong demand for audio interfaces. As such, competition will continue to intensify, pushing manufacturers and retailers to innovate and provide more value to customers. The market will also see a trend towards more feature-rich, compact, and highly compatible interfaces to cater to the incredible variety of customer needs. Additionally, sustainability and eco-friendly practices may gain even more importance in the market.

HB: It’s always hard to predict especially with uncontrollable external circumstances but we’re passionate music product creators who serve an equally passionate musical creator community. We’re ready to deliver cutting-edge solutions that continue to eliminate the barriers in the creative process and help people create amazing music faster, and with that in mind, we’re very excited for the road ahead.

AH: Given most recent macroeconomic and world events, 2024 may continue to present challenges for the MI market. That said, we are seeing increased emphasis on audio quality, immersive audio production, and new technologies such as machine learning. We believe that these macro trends will continue to generate demand for high quality audio interfaces and integrated software solutions. Additionally, we anticipate increasing competition and innovation in the space, with a stronger emphasis on sustainability and eco-friendly audio solutions to align with broader market trends. We expect producers, musicians, podcasters, and content creators to remain as some of the key marketing segments in the coming year.

JC: We see growth in the audio interface market in the coming year, as the economy continues to settle into its post-pandemic groove. Audio interfaces have become so elemental to music pro-

duction that the future looks very solid, overall, especially for strong, established brands like MOTU.

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The 2023 Dealers' Choice Award Nominees

Submit your vote for the 31st Annual MMR Dealers' Choice Awards. Only subscribers to *Musical Merchandise Review (MMR)* magazine qualify to participate.



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PARIS

ClariMate

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THE FUTURE OF THE PIANO
Novus NV55

 **YAMAHA**
DM3




BUFFET CRAMPON
PARIS

ICON accessories

 **D'Addario**

Fender

On-Stage




EST. 1833
D-28

Ibanez
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Acoustasonic

 **YAMAHA**
FG9




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THE FUTURE OF THE PIANO

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Allen & Heath Avantis V1.2 – Product of the Year *Nominee*
Nord Stage 4 88 – Home Digital Keyboard of the Year *Nominee*
Nord – Pro Digital Piano Line of the Year *Nominee*
Focusrite – Recording Equipment Line of the Year *Nominee*
Allen & Heath – Sound Reinforcement Line of the Year *Nominee*





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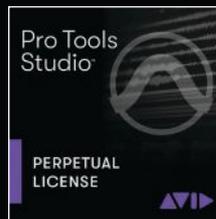
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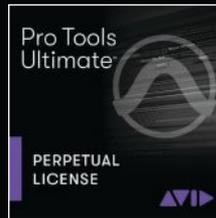
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Dom Famularo

Enrich, Educate, Empower



By
Menzie
Pittman

If ever there were a role model for the music industry to enshrine, it would be Dom Famularo. For those that didn't know Dom, you might ask, "Why?" That part of the story is easy to tell.

Dom Famularo was the embodiment of leadership. As someone I would call "The Ambassador of Drumming," he set the example for that which every young musician should strive. I could list all his accolades, but that list would take up the entire magazine, so let me focus on a few outstanding achievements and reflect on his unique career, and the multifaceted approach he took in attaining mastery.

Let's start with Dom's prowess on his instrument – the drums. His expert technique was a blend of charming, "old school" showmanship and the belief that students were best served by an educator's voice. It was this combination of elements that made his drum clinics so infectious and memorable. He could have stopped at master musician, but not Dom. He also could have stopped at mesmerizing performer, but not Dom and, surely, after attaining his master educator status, he could have stopped there. But again, not Dom. His persona was infectious, and his intent was to inspire you! Dom never felt that he was above anyone. Rather, his passion in life was to elevate others. He walked that walk and lived that passion; and that is the takeaway we need to learn from him.

Dom revered the masters. He was almost kid-like about it. When he spoke of his relationships with other drum masters, he became animated as he shared his amazing stories. Yet, as connected to the greats as he was, he never forced ego on anyone. In fact, he did just the opposite. When you would share time with him, he made sure that you became the story. That is mastery! Dom's great secret was to make you the star. He was gifted at that skill.

I will share a personal story that I don't often tell, but now seems like the right time and place. I was at a NAMM Show, and while visiting the cymbal section, I crossed

paths with Dom at his Sessions booth. Earlier, I had attended "The Sessions: Jeff Beck Tribute," and I wanted to say hello and tell him how great the seminar was. Dom was as gracious as ever and, as always, we began swapping drum stories and sharing humor for a good bit. As we continued, Peter Erskine saw Dom and walked up to say hello. Imagine if you were a football fanatic and while you were chatting with Tom Brady, Patrick Mahomes walked up and joined the conversation. Anyone who knows me knows that I am a huge Peter Erskine fan and, as the next few minutes unfolded, Dom did the simplest thing and, by doing so, he took the need for any introductions away. He simply said, "Menzie, you're great with a camera. Will you catch a picture of this moment, and send it to me?" The "old school" skillset is that Dom made the moment inclusive! That was always Dom's way. He never failed to lift everyone up! Dom didn't do hierarchy, and he always made the whole room a stage, and anyone standing in the room was part of the show and, therefore, deserved respect.

I will close by sharing thoughts on Dom's work with The Sessions Panel. As most folks know, The Sessions is an educational platform led by author and photog-

rapher Jules Follett. Her coffee table book, *Sticks 'n' Skins* is a unique photojournalistic work that features over 500 pages of the music industry's most notable drummers. Dom was the lead voice for The Sessions panels. The Sessions interviews and YouTube videos have always been some of the best educational material available to all rising musicians, especially drummers. Whether The Sessions panels were held at a NAMM Show, or at a leading university, the quality of the educational content was elite, and will fortunately be memorialized for young musicians to steal from for years to come. The Sessions team took the careful steps to preserve The Sessions interviews. You can find them all on The Sessions website and on YouTube.

The music industry and the drumming community have lost a unique voice, and one not easily replaced. But the humor here is that Dom was so brilliant, and such a unique educator, that he left us a road map to excellence with his body of work. He penned several drum methods and recorded countless "artist interview" videos. He was revered by all the greats, be they fellow musicians, educators, or manufacturers.

Dom – you were an irreplaceable gift, and you will be missed! 🎶

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anniversary



The Five Star Guitars team at a 25th anniversary celebration in July of 2023



Mark Cuban, Johnpaul "Jeep" Simonet, Geoff Metts, Jeremie Murfin, and Maria Contreras-Sweet, administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration at the 2016 SBA Persons of the Year awards ceremony in D.C.

'More than Just a Music Store'

2023 represents the quarter-century mark for celebrated Beaverton, Oregon MI retailer, Five Star Guitars. For 25 years, the dedicated employees at this store have supplied their loyal customer base with repair services, lessons, and – of course – outstanding instruments and related gear.

Aside from being a go-to destination for area musicians, the stellar product offering has made Five Star a Mecca for players and collectors from all over. The business has been honored with a number of awards, including NAMM Dealer of the Year (2020) and recognition from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) as Persons of the Year.

We recently connected with co-owner Geoff Metts to learn more of Five Star Guitars' history, how they've grown the business, and how the adaptable and creative team continues to forge paths to success amidst an ever-changing retail landscape.

What was the catalyst behind launching Five Star Guitars back in 1998? Had you or anyone else on the team had previous MI retail experience? Was there a specific need that wasn't being met for musicians in the Beaverton area?

Five Star Guitars founder, Ken Potter went from owning an optical clinic in the D.C. area to founding a guitar store in Oregon in 1998. Ken was a lifelong music fan, guitarist, and skilled instrument repair person when he decided to make a new start in a new industry. Along with his love of music, he had an entrepreneurial spirit and years of experience operating an independent business.

In those early days, can you describe the first location?

The original location was a 2,000 square-foot ranch style home that had been zoned for retail. It definitely felt cozy and had charm. For example, the "amp room" was a living room, complete with fireplace. Having been designed for residential, the building also had its limitations in parking, ceiling, height, and floor plan.



Co-owners Johnpaul "Jeep" Simonet, Geoff Metts, and Jeremie Murfin (far right) with Five Star Guitars founder Ken Potter (second from right).

Five Star Guitars at 25

by Christian Wissmuller

Again, back in the beginning, how many employees were there in 1998?

Initially, it was just Ken and his wife working open to close, Tuesday through Saturday. Within a month they started offering guitar lessons from Dany Oakes, who is still teaching at Five Star Guitars to this day. There were three full-time employees plus a couple of

guitar teachers when I got the job in February, 2001. Jeremie Murfin got hired in the spring of 2001 and Johnpaul "Jeep" Simonet in January 2004. The three of us partnered to buy Five Star Guitars from Ken in February of 2012.

Cue to the present day: how many employees? How large is the store?

We just hired our 23rd employee! Our current location is 7,500 square feet with 12-foot ceilings. The building was effectively a blank canvas, and for the first time we had enough room to build out the floor plan we'd always wanted, including six lesson studios, a repair facility, a web content room, warehouse space, offices, and a shipping/receiving station. There's plenty of parking and we have signage on the back of the building facing the highway which has proved to be quite valuable.

We consolidated two locations into this building in 2017 and purchased the building in 2022.

You mentioned Danny Oakes. Can you talk about the evolution of the lesson programs and repair offerings at Five Star Guitars? These days, how many other teachers do you currently have and are lessons taught on-site? How many repair technicians are on staff?

Lessons were offered within the first month or so of opening the store. Instrument repair was available from day one. Ken had a lot of experience with guitar maintenance, repair, and modification. In the early days there were just a few employees, so everybody did a little of everything. Ken would train the staff on guitar repair and made time after hours to help us work on our own instruments.

Currently we have nine instructors teaching a total of 250

“The importance of community to Five Star Guitars’ overall business model cannot be overstated. We recognize that our success is intertwined with the well-being and vibrancy of the local music scene.”

to 300 lessons per week. All lessons are available online or in person in one of our six lesson studios. Our repair department has grown to two full-time luthiers and two part-time amp repair technicians. We offer certified warranty repair for most of the brands that we stock as well as repair, restoration, and modification on instruments and amplifiers.

You have a healthy stock of both vintage/pre-owned and new gear. What would you say the overall breakdown is in terms of total sales (volume), between new and used gear?

New gear sales account for about 60 percent of our sales, while used and consignment sales make up the other 40 percent.

Of the many – many! –lines you carry, what are your top-sellers?

The legacy brands represent the majority of gross sales including Fender, Gibson, Paul Reed Smith, and Taylor. That said, we have a great relationship with a lot of smaller companies around the country, as well as many local manufacturers.

Five Star Guitars clearly has a very strong sense of its place in the area. Can you talk about the importance of “community” to Five Star’s overall business model?

The importance of community to Five Star Guitars’ overall business model cannot be overstated. We recognize that our success is intertwined with the well-being and vibrancy of the local music scene. By actively engaging, supporting, and nurturing our community, we not only build a loyal customer base but also contribute to the enrichment and growth of the musical culture in our area, making Five Star Guitars more than just a music store, but also a pillar of the local music ecosystem.

We support music programs in local school districts and parks & recreation department as well supplying gear to musicians, studios and venues. We are supporting members and donors to local music advocacy groups and education nonprofits.

We are also working with local manufacturers to provide a showcase for locally produced instruments, amplifiers, and accessories.

We are also working at the national level to support the music community. Our website and social media channels feature not only product listings

but also content that educates, inspires, and connects with musicians and enthusiasts. This online community engagement extends the reach beyond our physical location. We’ve also participated in the NAMM D.C. Fly-In, speaking with Congress to advocate for increased federal funding of music education. In November, 2023 my partner Jeep will be returning to D.C. for the Fly-In event.

In the business community we are active in the local Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Development Center and Entrepreneurs Organization.

Other than being recognized as Dealer of the Year by NAMM in 2020, what other milestones and achievements stand out when you look back at the first quarter-century of Five Star Guitars?

We’ve been recognized as a Top 100 Dealer by NAMM for 10 consecutive years. In 2018 we won NAMM’s “Best Store Turnaround” award. My partners and I were named the “Business Persons of the Year” by the Small Business Administration in 2016. We were the first music store to receive the award since its inception in 1965. It was almost surreal being in Washington D.C. for the

first time and having guest speaker Mark Cuban hand us the trophy at the United States Institute of Peace.

I can only imagine! Do you have, or have you already had, any special events or promotions to mark the 25th anniversary?

We’ve been celebrating all year, telling our story on social media and hosting in-store events. We recently hosted a dinner for all of the employees, past and present. We had an incredible turnout, with some former employees traveling from out of state to help us celebrate. It was a very special evening of music, friends and reflection. It’s not often that we “stop and smell the roses,” so it meant a great deal to all of us.

Expectations and hopes for the coming months and years for the business?

Our expectations and hopes for the business are centered on growth, continued community engagement, delivering exceptional experiences to our customers, and providing meaningful careers for our employees. We base every decision on what will make Five Star Guitars a better place to shop and a better place to work – so far so good. 

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BAND & ORCHESTRA

Buffet Crampon Introduces Prodiges Pocket Clarinet

Buffet Crampon USA, North American distributor for Buffet Crampon Group Wind Instruments, announces the launch of the Buffet Crampon Prodiges pocket clarinet to the United States and Canada markets. The pocket clarinet is the culmination of three years of acoustic research and development and is an exciting and innovative instrument designed primarily for young pre-band students.



The Prodiges pocket clarinet is intended to facilitate young beginners' introduction to the clarinet and woodwind instruments in general. Utilizing a traditional clarinet mouthpiece and cane reed, the pocket clarinet allows the young student to begin developing a proper woodwind embouchure (how one forms their mouth and lips to produce sound) with a simplified diatonic fingering system (suitable for smaller hands) and lightweight design. Unlike other beginning wind instruments, the pocket clarinet produces a characteristic clarinet sound in the key of D, due to the bore design and use of African blackwood (Grenadilla) for the body and bell. The bore was designed by Buffet Crampon French and German acousticians with the support of the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), and in association with the LIAMFI joint laboratories in Marseille. The pocket clarinet is a unique collaboration of acousticians, psychologists, and ergonomists, and was tested by Buffet Crampon Clarinet Artists to create the ideal simplified, one-octave clarinet for young musicians.

With beginning players in mind, the pocket clarinet features an African blackwood bell encased in a rubber sleeve, providing an extra layer of durability and protection. The pocket clarinet also has a thumb rest, allowing the beginning student to acclimate to the feeling and weight of the instrument on the right-hand thumb. The Prodiges pocket clarinet outfit includes the clarinet body, removable bell, Prodiges student clarinet mouthpiece, ligature and reed, cleaning swab, fingering chart, and QR codes linking to a quick start guide and ensemble scores to start playing music right away.

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ACCESSORIES



On-Stage's New MWS D1 Drumsticks Excel in Range of Music Styles

On-Stage has released its new MWS D1 Drumsticks, which deliver the versatility to play instruments ranging from percussion for concert band and orchestra to drum kits for rock, jazz, and pop. These sticks' shortened taper and small spherical tip produce definition and clarity on snares, toms and cymbals, providing transparent tone that's great for development of technique and musical expression.

Crafted from select maple, they possess lightness, flexibility and rebound for quick, agile and articulate playing. Their balanced feel enables a comfortable grip for pinpoint control, perfect for covering a wide range of music genres, playing styles, live performance settings, and recording applications. These all-purpose sticks come in a compact "brick" of 12 pairs, providing a long-lasting supply of 24 sticks that's easy to store and transport.

<https://on-stage.com>

FRETTED

Fender Launches All-New Acoustic 'Highway Series'

Fender announces the launch of The Highway Series, the newest iteration in Fender's investment in the acoustic category. Comprised of two different models, the more compact Parlor and the classic and fuller bodied Dreadnought, these acoustic guitars have been finely tuned for performance on and off the stage. While the designs of these instruments harkens back to a more traditional style, the technology and specifications are a nod to the future of acoustic guitar playing.



While Fender's Acoustasonic series pushed the boundaries of acoustic-electric design, the Highway Series strikes a harmonious balance between modern innovations and the timeless appearance of traditional guitars. It embraces the best of both worlds, combining cutting-edge acoustic-electric technology with the classic and familiar look of a traditional guitar. The result is an instrument that not only stands out on stage but also inspires musicians to explore their creativity in more intimate, quiet settings.

Both models in this series feature an ergonomic and lightweight body to ensure optimal comfort and precision. In addition, an exclusive Fishman Fluence analogue acoustic pickup comes fully loaded at no additional cost giving player's the ability to plug in and turn up at any given moment. Thanks to the Highway Series' thin silhouette and fully integrated pickup system, long gone are the days of having to rapidly adjust your stage volume to avoid distracting feedback while strumming on an acoustic.

Highway Series Dreadnought (\$999.99 USD, £949.00 GBP, €1,099.00 EUR, \$1,699.00 AUD, ¥143,000 JPY)

Crafted with either a solid sitka spruce or genuine mahogany top inlaid into a fully chambered mahogany body, The Highway Series Dreadnought is engineered with a proprietary internal architecture including a tapered floating X bracing pattern and inventive thin-line design, producing remarkable resonance and dynamic, organic tone. With fidelity and performance at its core, the Fishman Fluence acoustic pickup system incorporates an elegantly curved magnetic Fluence Core pickup with innovative all-analog technology to deliver pure and truly musical amplified tone with astonishing sonic realism, clarity and feedback resistance. The Fender Highway Series Dreadnought represents a re-imagining of the acoustic experience, inviting players to throw away the map and get lost on the open road of creativity. Available in natural and all-mahogany.

Highway Series Parlor (\$999.99 USD, £949.00 GBP, €1,099.00 EUR, ¥143,000 JPY)

Crafted with either a solid sitka spruce or genuine mahogany top inlaid into a fully chambered mahogany body, the Highway Series Parlor is engineered with a proprietary internal architecture, including a tapered floating X bracing pattern and inventive thin-line design, producing remarkable resonance and dynamic, organic tone. With fidelity and performance at its core, the Fishman Fluence acoustic pickup system incorporates an elegantly curved magnetic Fluence Core pickup with innovative all-analog technology to deliver pure and truly musical amplified tone with astonishing sonic realism, clarity and feedback resistance. The Fender Highway Series Parlor represents a re-imagining of the acoustic experience, inviting players to throw away the map and get lost on the open road of creativity. Available in natural and all-mahogany.

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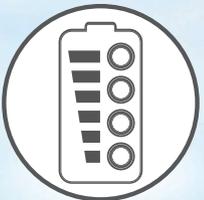
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