The Arrogance of Complacency

By Jeff **Mazza**

To Paraphrase...

Retailers, manufacturers, and the rest of the music products industry, lend me your ears.

I have come to bury home organ retail, not to praise it. I speak not to disprove what happened, but here I am to speak what I do know.

Twice I have pontificated on the state of the home organ business. For brevity I will avoid restating what I previously published: "Home Organ Retail: The $64,000 Question" (*MMR*, October 2000) and "The Last Dinosaur" (*MMR*, November 2016).

Today I eulogize the home organ segment of the music products industry and explore the lessons learned by the deterioration of this once-profitable market niche.

Our industry is stagnant due to a multitude of factors both from within and from outside pressures.

During my years as a NAMM member I have often attributed the lack of industry growth to poor focus at NAMM's level. Experience has taught me it is not the job of a trade association to grow the industry. Their job is to help us connect so that we can communicate with like-minded professionals and collaboratively grow our businesses (the best way to begin this process is to attend The NAMM Show).

What Really Matters?

30 years ago the high school closest to my store had 1,600 students with 200 of them playing instruments in the marching band. Today that school has over 2,500 students and fields a band of 80 players. I offer this example not as a school music dealer, but as an indication that music plays less of a role in people's lives

As an industry we need to encourage more people to play music. It is the responsibility of everyone, at every level.

What Business Are We In?

Any successful home organ retailer was in a hobby business. The most successful dealers promoted the hobby of playing music. The brands they stocked and sold were less important than developing music as a daily habit. The organ in home-organ retail was a vehicle for sales, not the impetus. Ironically, most manufacturers never understood this dynamic, which is one the reasons for their demise.

Who Can You help?

Zig Ziglar famously said, "You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help enough other people get what they want." Manufacturers and distributors could dramatically improve the stability and profitability of their companies if they focused on helping the dealer network grow their businesses. The caveat is the manufacturer must have people capable of teaching a dealer how to be successful. I said in my 2016 article that I believe our industry suffers from a talent drain. I shared how I owed my career to a cadre of industry professionals who taught me, mentored me, and showed me I could be successful.

When I opened Royal Music in 1993, I would often see not just my reps, but the reps for competing brands. My store was the fourth piano and organ store in my town; today I'm the last. While I was never a Baldwin dealer, I usually saw the rep once or twice a year. It's a small industry and it's important to know who's doing what with whom. Over the last ten years or so I've been lucky to have seen a rep once or twice a year for a company whose products I carry. I've heard many excuses about the cost of sending someone into the stores. I'm s urious why Gibson purchased an iconic brand, Baldwin, a n allowed it to wither away. It's akin to buying a farm tha en seeded and then not watering its plants. And the in y wonders where Gibson went wrong.

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What Are the Metrics?

In my 2000 article I highlighted the need for tter data to manage our businesses. It is shameful that companies routinely invest a lot of money in R&D and manufacturing based upon faulty data. With erroneous average sales data, the or-

gan manufacturer built and marketed instruments into im-per price points. Accurate data is a product of good com-nication. When there is a disconnect in the supply chain mptions will be made.

o Do I Compete With?

Home organ manufacturers faced a critical challenge com-peting with their own used products. From the trade news it seems there are similar challenges in the guitar market. While not a guitar retailer, I am sure there is a balance managing new and previously owned inventory.

In the early '90s we taught a remote intro keyboard course at a local senior center. We brought a lot of people into the hobby of making music. In the later '90s the same center started offering computer classes. Those classes quickly overtook music as the most popular. I guess screen-time isn't just for millennials.

Let Us Learn From Other Industries

If we believe there is value in selling instruments to new musicians and growing our market, then we can learn a lot from other hobby industries. A review of the metrics for the golf industry shows not just the amount of gear that is sold, but also the participation in golf, as well as the number of courses being built.

Many people play only a few rounds per year, but consider themselves golfers. They talk about golf. They dress in golf attire. They might even spend a fair amount of money on gear, but they don't golf much. They can buy clubs online, from a big box mass merchant, or at a pro shop/driving range. Each is a viable marketing channel for the club manufacturer, but none is a panacea. Regardless of where they get their clubs the industry is better served if they go golfing (even if it's just burgers and beers at Topgolf). What are we doing in our businesses that equates to Topgolf?

My October 2000 article was a warning to the organ manufacturers and retailers that the internet would become the great equalizer. It was. My November 2016 article was an attempt to form a think tank of like-minded industry professionals who wanted to improve personally, professionally, and hopefully leave the industry a little better than we found it when we arrived. Certain home organ wholesalers mistakenly assumed I was trying "to kill the business." It takes a lot of chutzpah to watch a market segment shrink from 20,000 units a year to 2,000 and treat your dealer network like it's the heyday. That is the arrogance of complacency.

(Anyone wishing to re-read my previous articles, email me and I'll send them to you. jeffmazza@royalmusic.com)

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