

FOR PROGRESSIVE MUSIC RETAILERS

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Best In Show Delivers Top Gear Picks at Summer NAMM in Nashville

NASHVILLE, TENN. — On the final day of Summer NAMM, held July 17–19, a panel of music retail experts presented some true gear fireworks during Best In Show, a NAMM University session. Six retail buyers, representing single-store operations, small- to mid-sized chains and e-tailing, offered their views on the best products and services they saw during Summer NAMM.

Nearly 300 attendees were treated to Best In Show. The panelists were asked to discuss their choices in four specific categories:

- Something Small — A great product that's either small in price or small in size.
- Gotta Stock It — A product that retailers want to stock right now, if they haven't already got it.
- Companies to Watch — An exhibitor that is making a difference with trendsetting products or services.
- Best In Show — The best product or service that panelists saw at NAMM.

This year's panelists included:

- John Grabowski, director of purchasing for Sweetwater Music, an e-tailing superstore based in Fort Wayne, Ind.
- Mike Guillot, director of purchasing for Mississippi Music, a four-store chain based in Hattiesburg, Miss.
- George Hines, owner and president of George's Music, a 10-store chain headquartered in Berwyn, Penn.
- Jim Rupp, owner and president of Columbus Pro Percussion in Columbus, Ohio
- Myrna Sislen, owner of Middle C Music in Washington, D.C.
- Todd Skaw, owner of Guitars Etc. in Longmont, Colo.

Something Small

Grabowski D'Addario EXP Strings

It's easy to take a staple accessory like EXP strings for granted, but D'Addario reduced the coating of EXP strings by 50 percent. Not only does this greatly improve the string's performance, but for customers who put these strings on an instrument, they can improve the performance of the instrument and the customer satisfaction related to that instrument, too.

Guillot Kelly Shu Microphone Shock-Mount and Isolation System

This product has an internal microphone mounting system for all bass drums, accepts any microphone, offers an easy adjustable position of the microphone, and doubles as an extra horseshoe on long and lonely road gigs. [The last part is a joke. The Shu has a horseshoe shape.]

GuitarGuard and NeverKink

GuitarGuard is a neoprene sleeve that fits over electric, acoustic and bass guitars to protect them from scratching and sweat. And the NeverKink cable clip keeps any size cable out of the player's way using a simple plastic device that clips to the player's guitar strap.

Hines Spider Capo

They call it "the ultimate alternative tuning capo." It capos each string individually, which allows for open-string tunings, and you can finger above and below the capo, allowing guitarists a new way of expressing themselves. I like the packaging, which explains the features and benefits effectively. It's something interesting to talk to our guitar customers about.

- Rupp Tama Cymbal Mate
- This replaces the wing nut on the top of a cymbal stand, and allows drummers to quickly and easily remove the felts and cymbals underneath it. Squeeze the two side buttons together with one hand, and off pops the Cymbal Mate. It's small, inexpensive, and it allows drummers to save time when packing up. These will sell at the cash register display.
- Sislen Score Marketing Squeeze Ball
- I picked it because it could help to build strength in the hand, but if it doesn't, it can't hurt you. I have had it in my store, and it sells well.
- Crafter Tuner
- I love this tuner. It is clip-on, and in the chromatic mode, it is orange and turns green when you are right. This tuner works, and I sell a gazillion of them.
- Skaw Peterson iPhone products
- I chose Peterson's iPhone products, which include an adaptor cable that allows instruments to plug into an iPod touch or an iPhone and a tiny external mic that plugs into an iPod touch or an iPhone. There are currently over 100 iPhone apps for guitar. With an MSRP under \$15, I thought it would capture purchases from students, parents and even non-musicians who will record speaking and singing into an iPhone and iPod touch.

Gotta Stock It

- Grabowski Alesis DM10 Pro Electronic Drum Kit
- It's an upsell from the rest of Alesis' electronic drum kit line, which means more money in the register. The real story with this kit, though, is the new DM10 drum module. Not only does it have an all-new sound set, but it also has a USB connection on the back, and there are going to be additional sounds that drummers will be able to buy and import into the module. This electronic drum kit also uses real drum heads, so it gives stores the opportunity to sell drum heads to the customer on an ongoing basis.
- Guillot BreezSong JamHub

It's a silent mixer with multi-input and individual mix control — five to seven inputs built in. JamHub includes XLR and other inputs on each channel, headphone outs, effects, metronome, phantom power, USB, a 4 GB disk recorder and more.

Hines

On-Stage Stands RS7500 Amp Stand

This stand holds amplifiers, big and small, at an angled height and has optional mic attachment. It's high quality, lightweight and can handle many sizes and weights. It's a mass-appeal product that should get great turn and profit.

Kala Ukuleles

This is a company that carries a great selection of quality ukes. I like their breadth of selection and quality of product.

Rupp

Future Percussion Concepts KickPort

As unbelievable as it sounds, this product really made a huge difference in the sound of a bass drum. It fits in the hole cut in the front bass drum head and works like a ported bass amp cabinet. We will sell these, as they really work, and they can be easily moved from head to head when changing heads.

Sislen

Souldier Guitar Straps

These straps are made using recycled seat belt, vintage fabric and salvaged vinyl and leather end tabs. Company owner Jen Tabor is very serious about having a green product manufactured in the U.S. She has the rare Neil Young strap fabric, and all her designs are very cool. I sell a lot of these straps.

Skaw

Pick Stick Guitar Pick Holder

It's a pick holder that solves an age-old stocking stuffer dilemma. The wife or mom walks in and says she wants to buy a stocking stuffer for the guitarist or bassist in her house. We, as retailers, all have the same dumb lines: "What kind of strings does he or she play?" or "What picks does he or she like?" The answer is always, "I don't know." The cool thing about this product is the buyer doesn't need to know anything about the musician's likes or dislikes. It appeals to a female buyer, as it is a classy, small item that can be purchased in a variety of woods to match the home.

Companies to Watch

Grabowski Akai Professional

A lot of dealers may hear “Akai” and immediately think of kids making beats on MPCs, but Akai Professional has a strong, expanded direction that includes a full range of keyboard controllers. Most notable, though, is the APC 40, which they developed in cooperation with the software manufacturer Ableton. Going forward, I think the integration of hardware and software is going to be an important trend to watch.

Guillot Music Freight

They have unheard of customer service, and this company saves retailers money on freight — that goes straight to the bottom line. You can also get online access to freight quotes and comparisons. And did I say *unheard of customer service*? Try it. You won’t believe it.

Hines Hoshino

Hoshino is a company that always stays fresh, looking for market niches and opportunities through constant research of industry trends. They are always introducing new products that create markets or meet needs, like new ukes and the Mikro Short-Scale Bass package for beginners. They pay attention to details, like the new quick-set Cymbal Mate product they’re offering. And they have exciting introductions, like the limited-edition Mike Portnoy Tama drum set.

Rupp Meinl

This company, against formidable competition, has become a player, first in the hand percussion arena and now with cymbals. They have created and dominate the cajon market. They have brilliant and creative leadership, and they think outside the box. Their marketing is very creative, and they work with their dealers very closely.

Sislen Freehand Systems

Freehand Systems Sheet Music on a Stick is a nifty flash drive that plugs into your computer and allows you to play along at your own tempo with MIDI tracks, change instrument sounds and change keys, and you can print each title twice. Freehand was the first company to have retail

downloadable sheet music, and they are very innovative. This is a brand-new product category.

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, free advice at their booth. I wanted to let everyone know about the service since we all have patent and trademark issues.

Skaw

Sensaphonics Hearing Conservation

They are the makers of innovative, state-of-the-art, in-ear monitors; custom ear plugs; and hearing protectors. These guys have some awesome products and are led by mad scientist Michael Santucci with sales being handled by industry veteran Mike Adams. The company has a genuine, heartfelt concern for protection of hearing. The products are great for churches, schools and live acts in concert and club settings.

G-Wiz Foot Loose

It's a wireless footswitch for any amp. Musicians have been freed by wireless instrument systems for years. However, they are still trapped by the fact that their footswitch can only reach 10 feet from the amp. This system can recognize up to 12 wireless footswitches, and the system even includes a wireless switcher that can be attached to your instrument's strap. Due to poor economic conditions, the company has lowered its price by 50 percent, and the retail is \$129 and \$119.

Best In Show

Grabowski

BreezSong JamHub

The JamHub really is one of those why-didn't-someone-think-of-this-before products — an answer to a question that's been asked for a long time that we didn't have a good solution for. It has all the features customers will want, without a bunch of extras that they won't want. Anyone should be able to find one of the three versions that suits their needs. Another thing I really like about the JamHub is it increases the times and places that people can play — and the more they play, the more they'll want to buy more music gear.

Guillot

Yamaha S70 and S90 XS

These retail at \$3,699 and \$3,799, respectively. The S70 XS is a 76-note, balanced, hammer-action synthesizer, and S90 XS is an 88-note, balanced, hammer-action synth. Both offer easy operation for split points, layering and transposition and include Automatic Percussion Patterns.

Hines

BreezSong JamHub

This is a portable and affordable mixing console that allows musicians to practice in virtual silence, and each musician has his or her own private sound mix. It's a unique product that looks to solve an age-old problem for practicing musicians who need to control practice volume. And it's good for old guys, too. It's great for dorms, apartments, music rooms and bedrooms.

Rupp

Zildjian Z3 Cymbal Line

Zildjian took their already established Z Custom heavy hitter — read “metal drummer” — line of cast cymbals, and R&D head Paul Francis has done a complete overhaul. These new cymbals really open up and are much more musical than the old Z Customs. Drummers' tastes have changed in this heavy hitting arena, and Zildjian has changed to match what these hardest-hitting drummers wanted.

Sislen

Badwater Single-Cutaway Guitar by The Music Link

It's a great-looking guitar at a reasonable price from an excellent company. It has an MSRP of \$299. The Music Link has given me excellent service for the past five years. They would sell me guitars when no one else would talk to me, *and* they came to the show.

Skaw

Honorable Mention: Bourgeois Guitars

In my opinion, the best guitars in the world are being made by smaller builders, and the high-end buyer is much more savvy and does not necessarily default to the two or three age-old, iconic manufacturers. Bourgeois builds an extremely high-quality product out of a small facility where they are able to build only a few hundred guitars each year. Dana Bourgeois and Bonni Lloyd have a real passion for both their instruments and their dealers.

Collings Guitars

If Bill Collings were to die today, I believe the industry would say we lost *the* greatest builder of guitars in the world. Collings is spearheaded by Steve McCrary who with Bill Collings are

producing the greatest guitars the world has ever seen. Recent additions over the past couple years are electrics, mandolins and ukuleles. Collings uses the finest materials available. Hands down the best in show.

“This panel represents such a wide array of successful retailers in America — from single stores to chains to Internet e-tailing experts,” said panel moderator Frank Alkyer, publisher of *Music Inc.*, *UpBeat Daily* and *DownBeat* magazines. “And once again they proved that the common denominator is gear. New and exciting products will always be the lifeblood of musical products retailing. Luckily, Summer NAMM proved to be a small-but-mighty source for those new innovations that will help propel retailers into what we all hope will be a strong fourth quarter.”

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