

- > **Harman**
Private-equity buyout collapses
PAGE 32
- > **Wegner**
Resolves trade dress lawsuit
PAGE 33
- > **GAMA**
Completes Teacher Guitar Workshop
PAGE 33
- > **Rodgers Instruments**
Names Robbins as president
PAGE 34

SUPPLY

MEL BAY PUBLICATIONS | BY SARA FARR

MEL BAY'S NEXT PHASE

Rock singer-songwriter John Hiatt told a reporter in a recent interview that all he needed to get started in music was “a Mel Bay chord book and one month of guitar lessons.”

That sentiment speaks volumes about how closely Mel Bay Publications has been associated with legions of aspiring rock stars throughout the years, and it doesn't come as a surprise to Mel Bay Marketing/Sales Director Jeff Ponte.

Ponte said that up until the last days of his life, Mel Bay himself would hold court at his Kirkwood, Mo., store, playing host to any number of musicians — famous and not-so famous — who would stop by to talk music and jam. It's a tradition carried on by Bay's son, William, now the president of the Missouri-based company whose *Modern Guitar Method* has sold close to 9 million copies since it was first released in 1949.



William Bay

The publisher that brought us the 'Modern Guitar Method' has turned 60 and launched a record label

“the books were stored in the basement of our house. It was truly a family company.”

That family feeling persists, despite the overwhelming numbers: Mel Bay now employs approximately 75 people and occupies a 55,000-square-foot facility with more than 3,500 titles to its credit, as well as instructional DVDs, CDs and a new record label,

Mel Bay Records.

Mel Bay launched the record company to showcase works from both its own authors and other musicians. “It gives us a broader market for reaching out into other categories because we have other artists [on the label] that wouldn't traditionally have time to write a book,” Ponte said.

The push into new areas reflects an overall shift in the market during the past 10 years, according to Ponte. The rise of the Internet and nontraditional retailers, such as Borders and Barnes & Noble, has created new opportunities, which Mel Bay has embraced and responded to with increased, aggressive marketing.

“There [are] a lot of different things we're doing with digital printing, with the Internet, with DVD content,” Bay said. “The way the product is presented and delivered on a worldwide scale is going to look different in five years.”

However, Mel Bay also has a number of initiatives geared toward traditional music product retailers, including discount programs, inside sales reps, flexible terms and no commitment to purchase new titles. It has also created a dealer-access Web site that lets retailers obtain information on new products, including sam-

21ST CENTURY MARKETING

Despite the phenomenal growth of the company, which marked its 60th anniversary this year and recently opened offices in Europe and Asia, Bay recalled that when his father started out in 1947,

ple pages, WAV files and footage from available DVDs.

“We do whatever we can do to help the dealers sell our product and make it work for them,” Bay said.

EDUCATION FIRST

Bay and Ponte believe the company’s success is based on its philosophy of emphasizing long-term education and keeping players committed to music.

“When my father wrote the original methods, he wanted to make the guitar taught like any legitimate instrument,” said Bay, an accomplished trumpet player who taught himself how to play the guitar using his father’s methods. “He wanted guitarists to be able to read music and to learn the elements

of music. We want people to learn quickly and easily, but we want them to be good musicians first.”

Continuing instructional materials are a cornerstone of the company. “We want to have a catalog with an offering for all guitar players, from someone who just picked up the guitar yesterday to the seasoned pro who wants to learn a new style or take a refresher in something like gypsy jazz,” Ponte said.

When considering new books to print, the company’s selection process begins with an editor and a product meeting. Each book is evaluated through a series of criteria, such as what the finished product would look like, how it would fit in with an existing series, whether it’s marketable and whether it

**‘The way the product is presented and delivered on a worldwide scale is going to look different in five years.’
— William Bay**

would fit into a niche in the Mel Bay catalog.

“Then there’s the intangible,” Bay said. “How many people do we think would be interested in it? Is the writer difficult to work with? I’d say

something like that happens very rarely, but it does happen.”

Bay estimated that only 10 percent of submitted titles make it through the selection process.

The end result, though, is another intangible: customer loyalty. “It goes back to our beginnings,” Ponte said. “It’s about truly wanting to educate someone on [an] instrument. If you have that understanding, those students who came up with the brand now have children and grandchildren who want to learn instruments. They come back to us because they know we have strong education-based material that is truly going to teach them how to be proficient at whatever instrument they want to learn.” **MI**

A Simple Formula For Success

eAmp + iPod = Sales



As an MI dealer, every new product generates the same question, “What’s in it for me?” If you carry Eleca’s new eAmp, the answer is simple: Sales.

Designed for today’s avid guitarist, the new eAmp integrates a rugged, versatile practice amp with an iPod® interface... making guitar playing more exciting than ever. It’s a great practice tool for students as well as adults seeking to re-connect with their music. The eAmp makes it a snap to play along to one’s favorite tunes. With dual cabinets for true stereo separation, a headphone jack for privacy, built-in Overdrive, and a soft case for easy transport, Eleca’s new eAmp delivers... at a price that won’t alienate your customers. Best of all, you’ll be rock’n all the way to the cash register.

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