

The Street

(Circ. Online)

September 12, 2007

How to Pick the Right Music for Your Store

By Annika Mengisen

Woe to any business that isn't rocking out the right way.

Just ask former Olympic figure skater Rosalynn Summers. Known for her creativity on the ice, Summers' choice of music would make or break a performance. "Music is the first thing the audience goes toward," she says.

Similarly, "It's something about the mood that drives you in [or out] of a store," she says.

For her new high-end home decor boutique, Bella Tesori, in Kirkland, Wash., set to open in the next month or so, Summers is carefully developing a playlist of music that makes you feel good but won't put you to sleep, including artists like [singer](#) and actress Minnie Driver, instead of the overplayed Nora Jones.

Downtown Frequency

Summers says most New York City stores understand their audiences, so I took a walk through Soho to see for myself.

Armani Exchange on Broadway delivered the expected wall-shaking bass that thumped its brand too loudly for my tastes and eardrums. In contrast, I was pleasantly surprised by the **Adidas (ADDYY)** store's melodic indie rock, which made it feel like less of a branded wonderland.

Specialty boutiques on side streets ranged from crackly [stereos](#) playing oldies stations to quality speakers hooked up to iPods. My conclusion: Some business get it, others need sound schooling.

He's Got the Beat

During his 25 years in the music industry, disco-era pioneer and DJ Barry Lederer has worked for the who's who in the fashion world and all the big-name department stores, including **Macy's (M)**, **Saks(SKS)** and **Bloomingdale's**, helping them create the ideal aural environment.

In the mid-'80s, MTV drastically changed the way stores presented music, Lederer explains. Store owners and designers alike became more aware of new music because it was presented visually through music videos. Emerging brands like **Calvin Klein** began avoiding overly-commercial Muzak and dated artists.

Business owners may not go as far as Ralph Lauren, who reportedly told Lederer he wanted to see women cry with joy when they saw his clothes, but even the small shop's business plan should take music selection into account.

One in three retail customers says the in-store music influences his or her decision to purchase, according to the Gallup Organization, and 76% of retail managers believe their customers bought more as a result of the music, claims the *Journal of Marketing*. On the runway, Lederer believes, "The little black dress becomes hotter with a Macy Gray song."

"The type of music playing can give insight into if the store is cool or not," adds Kevin Lyons, creative director for **Urban Outfitters (URBN)**. "It sounds corny, but so much of what we do is tied directly to the music we listen to."

Today, atmosphere is everything, so use the following guidelines to get your customers into the groove.

1. Keep Your Playlist to Yourself

Don't take your personal music preferences into the business world. "The audience [or customer] won't get it," says Lederer.

Just because you have a vast gangster rap collection on your iPod doesn't mean your shop's customers or employees want to hear it. Paying a company like [DMX](#) \$30 to \$60 a month to design a custom-music program fitted to [your business](#)' needs will provide the necessary objectivity. Clients like **Starwood Hotels (HOT)**, **Nike (NKE)** and **Victoria's Secret** have used its services. "If the music is not right, people notice it," says Brian McKinley, vice president of DMX marketing.

2. Watch the Language

Lederer didn't realize Amy Winehouse could be quite so explicit until her voice came blaring through the speakers of one of his clients' stores. Prescreen your music before you include it in your playlist. Cursing or explicit lyrics can offend or even drive away many customers.

3. Leave the Crackling to Your Cereal

"[In skating] nothing ruined the program more than bad sound," says Sumners, who prefers the ease of iPod programming over the unreliability of scratched [CDs](#) for her store.

Even if [your small business](#) doesn't have the cash for a flashy sound system, a good set of speakers can make your selection sound fantastic, says Lederer.

Darrell Champagne, senior vice president of systems integration for [PlayNetwork](#), a company that creates customized playlists for businesses, says that for a small boutique, a 70-volt amplifier and a couple of speakers at around \$2,000 should suffice. Sound from a typical bookshelf speaker will reach about 20 to 25 feet, he says.

Opt for mono instead of surround sound, which won't work well in a small store environment. Surround sound plays different sounds out of each speaker, while mono plays the same exact thing out of each.

4. Set the Mood

A simple set of songs can change the way a customer perceives [your business](#), says Lederer.

If your demographic is upper-middle-class baby boomers, you probably don't want to be blasting hip hop. When in doubt, ask your staff, says Lederer. They have to listen to it all day, so they'll be happy to tell you, bluntly, what they think of your selection.

Leanne Flask, vice president of music design for DMX, stresses the importance of defining your music's aims in the beginning and putting together your business' "musical DNA." But keep your selections varied, cautions Lederer, especially in a business like a restaurant, where customers will notice repetition over time. To keep things interesting, mix contemporary and classic artists.

In general, stay away from dated artists like Rod Stewart and don't play rap or metal, no matter how much you love to rock out to it on your own time, unless your store caters to a very specific lifestyle. Lounge music can be played in almost any store, says Lederer, who recommends groups like Ursula 100 and Stereolab.

Indie rock resonates with the typical Urban Outfitters customer. Like Dryw Scully, the company's music director, seek out fresh tunes by searching industry magazines and combing MySpace.

Be aware, says Champagne, that certain types of music can direct the actions of your customers. In a fast-food restaurant, for example, upbeat music is played to help turn tables more quickly. Slow, relaxing music at a fine restaurant can increase the bar tabs significantly.

And what about [radio](#)? It's a poor choice, says Flask. A DJ's strong persona or the tone of the station can be too easily associated with the store environment.

5. The License Police

Most larger stores Lederer has worked for are sticklers for licensing, but it's unlikely performing rights associations like ASCAP, BMI or SESAC would spend time and money to bust your shop for playing unlicensed music.

If you are worried by stories of licensing organizations that may target more prominent [small businesses](#), keep in mind that services like PlayNetwork and DMX can take care of the legal angle for you, as all the songs they choose are properly licensed.

Music is a powerful tool to get your customers singing [your business'](#) tune, but you do need to rock out responsibly.