

> **Center of the Storm**

GC employees move to unionize, while the company expands  
**PAGE 16**

> **Rochester Rocks**

Green Day guitarist in the House  
**PAGE 18**

> **In Memoriam**

George Quinlan, Sr., and Daniel Palen, industry titans  
**PAGE 19**



# RETAIL

AIMM | BY JOHN JANOWIAK

## AIMM MARKS 15 YEARS

It was the late 1990s, and retail was entering a new phase. E-commerce blossomed, competition from other industries burgeoned, and consumers suddenly had more choices than ever before. Three veteran retailers — Skip Maggiora, Bob Bankston and George Hines — knew that the changing landscape posed a challenge to their businesses and to the whole music products industry. This was no time to reminisce about the glory days of rock 'n' roll retail. As innovative retailers who shared a passion for their industry, they leapt into action.

“If we were going to grow as an industry, everyone in it needed to work closer together to succeed against the challenges ahead,” said Maggiora, owner of Sacramento, Calif.-based Skip’s Music. “We simply needed to do all we could to meet the higher expectations of our evolving customer base and retail in general.”

And so AIMM, the Alliance of Independent Music Merchants, was born. The goal was simple: to create a group of some of the sharpest retailers and manufacturers in the industry. They intended to work more efficiently and effectively to bring consumers the best products and retail experience possible.



Maggiora, Hines, and Bankston

Since its founding in 1998, AIMM has expanded to include 60 independent retailers, representing close to 200 storefronts throughout the nation (and, according to Hines, between 8 to 10 percent of the industry’s sales volume). “The list of members is made up of a very diverse group of some of America’s best independent music dealers,” Maggiora said. “All share that same passion for the industry as the three of us.” AIMM hand-selects dealers who are progressive, creditworthy, proactive and willing to embrace new ideas. They are larger independents who tend to be the most high-profile dealers in their markets, and many have been in business for three decades or more.

All that experience adds up

to a wealth of expertise, which members readily share. Through regular meetings, conference calls, webinars and a weekly newsletter, they empower each other to provide better value to customers. “No matter what new project or program you’re undertaking, chances are a fellow AIMM member has already been there and done that and is willing to share their experience and knowledge,” said Bankston, a veteran Colorado retailer. “As a result, AIMM members can avoid a lot of trial and error.”

Members share best practices in areas such as operations, finance and sales management. They learn about operational efficiencies to promote growth, hiring the best employees, purchasing and choosing product,

building effective email marketing campaigns, managing inventory and utilizing social media. “And of course working on the e-commerce challenge, helping each other transition and accept the inevitable,” said Hines, CEO of George’s Music, which has 10 locations, in Pennsylvania and Florida. “We have partnered with the NAMM technology committee to help develop XML standards to handle data feeds and speed up the quality and standards for e-commerce growth.”

### STRENGTH THROUGH DIVERSITY

AIMM’s membership is a diverse lot, starting with the three founders, who form the group’s executive committee. Prior to starting AIMM, the three met on manufacturer-sponsored trips. “We found ourselves heading to NAMM Shows a couple of days early just so we could spend a few days of quality time together learning from each other,” Maggiora said. In the process, they became fast friends. “Anyone in this industry that knows the three of us may never have guessed that we would be working so closely. We’re three very different individuals with very different strengths and weaknesses. It’s been those unique strengths and

characteristics that have made us stronger as a whole.”

Hines is known as a detailed, strategic planner with a fondness for financial and operational issues. Describing his partners’ strengths, Hines said: “Skip is the ultimate social personality who develops the market. He knows everyone, develops programs like the Stairway to Stardom initiative and is generally a large personality to put a face on AIMM. Bob is the marketing and product development individual who knows how to get the message out and how to think like a consumer.”

Together, they make for a strong team. Meanwhile, all 60 retailer members lend their own areas of expertise to the alliance. “We’ve really expanded our

footprint on the school service side and have learned a great deal from those retailers,” said John Anning, AIMM’s executive director. “That’s been very positive. We have guitar- and drum- oriented stores, we have pro audio oriented stores, we have band and orchestra stores, and we’ve learned best practices that translate very well from one to the other.”

Maggiore echoed that thought. “I was able to comfortably commit to entering the band and orchestral segment because of the opportunity to learn from some of the best band and orchestral AIMM dealers in our industry today,” he said.

Rounding out the picture, AIMM’s membership includes a select group of manufactur-

ers as well as retailers. “We’ve never seen business as dealer-versus-vendor, but instead as dealers and vendors working together with the common objective of best serving the customer,” Bankston said. “With our preferred vendor members, we have created countless high-value proprietary products. This has been a big win for everyone, especially our customers.”

AIMM dealers have participated in more than 30 trade show events with manufacturers. In hundreds of presentations, they’ve shown each other ways to address a changing market. “We have met with dozens of suppliers to learn about their challenges and understand how they do business,” Hines said. “We even spent time with a

few suppliers explaining how retailers look at the industry and consumers, and it builds respect between both parties.”

AIMM members are not the only retailers to benefit from these efforts. Members openly share their experience and knowledge by participating in a variety of industry groups. You’ll see AIMM members giving keynote presentations at industry events, serving on boards and participating in panel presentations.

“In fact, AIMM has hosted events that include retailers other than those in AIMM,” Maggiore said. “AIMM believes that our [future] depends on the ideas and passion of all dealers to help promote a thriving industry for the good of all.” **MI**

## First and Foremost

The first reed designed specifically for beginners - immediate response, beautiful sound

The first reed designed for beginners by Vandoren - extraordinary quality

The first student reed designed to turn you a profit

- No Internet sales
- No catalog placements
- No tiered pricing

To become a dealer contact  
[stephaniem@junoreedsusa.com](mailto:stephaniem@junoreedsusa.com)  
 or call 855-724-JUNO (5866)

Designed and Manufactured  
 by Vandoren SAS France

