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SUPPLY

MAJOR MUSIC SUPPLY | BY ANDREW GREINER

UPSCALE WHOLESAL

Mike Mulqueen prides himself on doing things the wrong way. It's the reason Major Music Supply, the stringed instrument supply company he founded in 2006, is off to a roaring start.

Price, for instance, is the last thing he considers.

"I base the instruments we sell on how I feel about playing them," Mulqueen said. "I go play a model first, then we talk price. It's completely backwards, I know."

He went through three to four rejections with each guitar in Major Music's Revival acoustic line before settling on the final model. The same goes for each cello, viola, resonator guitar and ukulele made under the company's umbrella.

"The [Revival] RG-30 V took one-and-a-half years to get to production," he said. "My Chinese manufacturers tell me I have very high expectations."

Still, the San Francisco-based company manages to sell mid-level guitars at affordable prices. It's not easy. Mulqueen travels to Shanghai four times a year and has a hand in every stage of production and distribution.

There's something to be said about swimming upstream: The company has enjoyed 300-

From left: Major Music Supply's Mike Mulqueen, Jeremy Harris, Jim Bruno and Jake Flood



Distribution newcomer Major Music Supply aspires to raise the mid-level-instrument bar

percent growth since opening two years ago.

INDEPENDENTS ONLY

Mulqueen decided to bypass big-box retailers and only deal to independents when he started Major Music Supply. The company also adheres to a

strict minimum-advertised-price rule and lets dealers buy just one piece at a time.

"We saw an opening because these other companies were all catering to Costco," Mulqueen said. "I saw an opening at these smaller, independent stores."

Those mom-and-pop stores don't mind the 40-50-percent margins on Revival guitars. They also like that Major Music Supply listens. Customer and dealer service is a top concern at the company. Every staff member plays in a local band, from owner to receptionist.

"They just know gear," Mulqueen said. "And that's essential. When you call to ask a question about an instrument,

you want someone who knows the difference between how a rosewood guitar sounds and how a mahogany guitar sounds."

USER INPUT

Customer service isn't the only department with its ear to the ground. End-users help spur Major Music Supply's research and development. Mulqueen said most of its products are based on customer requests, such as the in-production Indian rosewood D28-style guitar. He added that quality and attention to detail make customer service easier and stressed that no plastic parts touch a Revival guitar. No ukulele gets made in a guitar factory either. He insisted that guitars are made in guitar-only factories, and the same goes for the company's violins.

No one at the company is naïve about maintaining 300-percent growth. Mulqueen said he believes its growth will remain steady, though, because his company tailors its product line to its customer.

"It's not like we have a whole catalog jammed full of gear," he said. "We do a few things in a quality way. People who play like our stuff, and they ask for new stuff. I think that innovation will keep our growth at a good rate." **MI**