

| BY ALEX HARRELL |

MAINTAINING CONSTANT GROWTH

St. Louis Music's burgeoning business doesn't sacrifice service

St. Louis Music (SLM) continues to expand its brand and maintain healthy relationships with dealers, all while growing and pushing profit margins high. This year, SLM acquired nearly a dozen new lines — increasing revenue by 16 percent from 2015.

“We have grown by double digits for nine consecutive years, and the new lines have helped again this year; our sales are up from 2015, which was our record year,” said Mark Ragin, president, CEO and owner of SLM. “If we keep doing this well, the SLM brand will continue to grow, and we will become more important to more dealers.”

2016 has proven to be a busy year for SLM. “The past 12 months have been very special,” Ragin admitted. The company bought Alvarez Guitars, E.K. Blessing’s band instrument line, Hamilton Stands, and Compass Ligatures, landed a distribution deal with Elixir Strings, and extended its Sabian offerings after being named a distributor for both its marching and drum cymbals.

But these are just some of the highlights, according to Ragin. There’s more to come. “We will continue to obtain the best-distributed lines in the business and develop our instruments to be unparalleled in quality and value,” Ragin said.

Expansion Without Forefeit

But these acquisitions and expansions aren’t out of the ordinary for SLM. St. Louis Music, a division of U.S. Band & Orchestra Supplies, was founded in 1922 by Bernard Kornblum, who built a successful distribution company on the back of importing violins from Europe. His son took over the company in the 1960s, and went on to develop Crate, Ampeg, Alvarez, Knilling, and SLM Market Place into worldwide brands.

In 2008, Ragin’s company — U.S. Band & Orchestra Supplies — bought the accessories division of SLM, Knilling violins and Austin Guitars. While the supplier has a long history of expanding, what makes it unique is its ability to expand rapidly without sacrificing service.

“SLM is our one-stop-shop for band and orchestra needs,” said one Excellence voter. “Great customer service, excellent prices, fantastic selection and fill

rates ... It’s all I can hope for.”

“Sincerely, looking after the dealer is at the very heart of SLM,” Ragin said. “We make sure we’re easy to deal with and easy to contact; we listen to our customers and — without a doubt — this communication [process] can help shape the way we do things or what we sell.”

The supplier has experienced “proactive sales activity” and as a result, this year has been full of innovations. SLM implemented a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to help keep the company organized, and its team continuously strives to improve internet-technology tools.

Despite its growth, Ragin still feels the “family vibe” in his company.

“We’re ambitious, but we’re also humble and thankful for the success we’ve seen,” he said. **MI**



Mark Ragin