



From left, Al Stumpf, Joe Leach, Ellen Leach and Ben Poorker.

RIFF CITY GUITAR
St. Joseph, Minnesota

PRINCIPAL:
Joe Leach, Ellen Leach,
Nick Eveslage, Ben Poorker,
Leslie Rich & Al Stumpf

FOUNDED:
2012

EMPLOYEES:
15

LOCATIONS:
2

ANNUAL REVENUE:
Undisclosed

By Alex Harrell

STREAMLINING SUCCESS

With its foundation in place, Riff City Guitar switches gears to focus on growing dealer relationships and bolstering customer service

Riff City Guitar is the self-proclaimed biggest music store in its area and one of the fastest growing online MI operations as well. It's a bold statement, but owner Joe Leach is well aware of his place in the industry.

"We're humble enough to know that we're just the little guys yet," Leach said. "But the benefit is that we can go out and kick some butt by eating up market share."

Last year, the St. Cloud, Minnesota-based retailer grew by 50 percent over the previous year and is on track to do it again. Riff City opened its second location in August and now has a 17,000-square-foot warehouse and a combined 5,600 square feet of showroom space. However, nearly 70 percent of its business is done online.

"Each is a separate entity from a numbers standpoint," Leach said, regarding balancing the two realms. "There's a tremendous amount of communication between the directors of each entity to make sure they support each other; it's a natural flow."

The flow results from the 15-person team that operates without titles. Voters praised the staff for creating an experience based on customer service and marketing that's apparent both online and off.

"We put all our resources into consumers that value service," Leach said. "We make diligent efforts to spend the time on the clients that appreciate what we do the most."

And now with five years under its belt, Riff City Guitar is ready

to focus on doing just that.

"Our direction is going to be to partner with the brands that offer us the best support and to widen our selection with those brands and to drop other brands," Leach said. "We're not going to grow the selection anything like we had the first five years."

Which was extensive, he explained. Each year, Riff City Guitar's dealer list grew by 20 percent — resulting in over 400 brands. It's a lot to manage, according to Leach, which led to the company's newfound focus.

"You're going to see far more of a commitment to the brands that work and a dropping of the brands that don't," he continued.

Voters commended Riff City for getting behind the brands it stocks and stocking deep, and

Leach doesn't plan on breaking the habit of working with manufacturers to create promotions and interest. Rather, Riff City will use the data it's collected over the past five years to help determine what suppliers to continue building relationships with.

"We're focusing on information," Leach said. "We've given up making decisions based on what people say and are only making decisions based on what they do."

As a result of being less emotionally-driven in favor of tangible results, Riff City has been using tools like Google Analytics to determine how to appeal to a broader market.

"Efficiency applies to way more than processes," Leach said. "You can't be too efficient. There's always a better way." **MI**