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# SUPPLY

BLUE MICROPHONES | BY ALEX HARRELL

## BROADCASTING BLUE

Established in 1995, Blue Microphones has long been known for its funky style. And just two years into its second decade, the company continues to push the (sometimes rigid) boundaries of the aesthetics of professional-grade microphones, headphones and accessories.

Take, for example, a raspberry red, rectangular electret condenser microphone appropriately named after the tangy berry. Then there's Cactus: A desert brown vacuum tube condenser that looks prickly to touch. And, of course, the first professional USB microphone, Snowball: an icy white, custom cardioid condenser shaped like — you guessed it — a snowball.

"The idea of having a boring, gray stick in front of you doesn't make much sense when you're trying to create music," John Maier, Blue Microphones' CEO, put simply.

"Our mics have [always] had cool colors and designs so we really try to keep that [legacy] alive, which is why we have mics called the Kiwi and Dragonfly."

But Blue Microphones is more than just fun names and shapes. What's behind the surface has been keeping up with technology and trends, too.

"The first 10 years of the company were really focused on



John Maier with the Sadie headphones.

**By adding wireless headphones and stylish updates to its lineup, Blue Microphones continues to keep up with market trends**

building out this idea of great performance combined with a nice aesthetic," he said. "The theory is to not only have innovative design for functionality, but we want these mics to inspire and help creators create," he said.

### THE INS & OUTS

And Blue Microphones is so well known for its exciting exteriors and innovative interiors that when Maier joined the company in 2009, an investor asked him how he'll maintain the

company's strong brand identity, especially since the founders are no longer involved.

His response? The mix of performance and design.

"We just saw the marriage of those two as critical to who Blue is," Maier said. "We can grab you with a funny or inspiring look and feel but want to blow you away with the performance. That combination of the two is really what's opened things up for us."

And that combination, he continued, has seriously broadened Blue's scope. In 2008, the company had about 15 employees. Now, the head count hits about 60 team members.

"I'm definitely not a guy who hires 20 people and crosses my fingers; I'm more of an organic growth type of guy," Maier said, explaining how the team grew 25 percent since he became CEO. "Let's build great products, talk to our customers and grow things, and then we'll support that as we grow."

So for the past eight years, that's what Blue has done.

What began in a fairly small space in Westlake Village, California, has expanded to three more warehouses in Los Angeles, Amsterdam and Hong Kong with third-party partners. For seven of those eight years, Blue's average annual growth rate has been around 40 percent.

While this success is due to the marriage of performance and design, it's also thanks to Blue's latest product offerings targeted toward emerging demographics and types of consumers.

"There's an interesting crossover between pro- and semi-pro consumers," Maier said. "There's a blurred line of people who understand that with a great mic and a laptop, they can create interesting things and broadcast it out via social media or other applications."

#### THE NEW BROADCASTERS

Blue first launched into this expanding market with the mid-2000s release of Snowball, a USB plug-and-play microphone. Developed in response to Apple's GarageBand coupled with the rise of the internet and thus spawning a new type of user, Snowball gained popularity with what Maier calls "the new broadcasters," a group that encompasses YouTubers, podcasters, bloggers, *everyone* on social media, Voice Over Internet Protocol programs (i.e., Skype) and even video gamers.

To further cater to these new broadcasters, in the past year alone, Blue launched its re-invented Essential Series SL microphone line (including the Spark SL, Bluebird SL and Baby Bottle SL) and released the Raspberry Studio mobile-recording system (complete with custom-recording software from PreSonus and advanced mastering software from iZotope).

And lastly — after years of "staying on the sidelines," according to Maier — Blue Microphones added headphones to its lineup. The models unveiled include the high-fidelity Sadie, the planar magnetic Ella and the wireless Satellite. All three come with a built-in audiophile amp.

"We had our biggest 'pro' customers and our biggest 'consumer' customers come to us a few years back and say, 'You should do headphones, you're the only ones who can be stylish and have the design element but also have high performance and quality sound,'" Maier explained. "That really motivated us to dig into that space."

#### STEADY & STABLE

Despite digging into these new spaces, keeping true to Blue's roots is also critical for the company.

"I've tried to stay true to the retro modern [look]," Maier said. "So far we've been able to evolve it and make it our own but still stay true to

the original vision."

And even though the word "authentic" has become a victim of semantic satiation, being authentic has paid off regarding stable, long-term growth for Blue Microphones, according to Maier.

"If you stay true to your vision, strategy and who you

are as a company, I think it really does matter," he explained. "Customers can see through trying to fake it. We really are a bunch of people who admire and use these products and are always trying to find ways to make them better and solve problems for the customers." **MI**

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