

MORLEY | BY ALEX HARRELL

# KICKING IT UP A NOTCH

After being purchased on September 1, 2016, by contract manufacturing company M-Wave International and relocating to Glendale Heights, Illinois, to entering a distribution deal with Hal Leonard on June 15 and revamping its branding as well as releasing a slew of product design plans, it's safe to say that Morley Pedals has had a busy year.

But the prevailing pedal company — established in the late 1960s by two brothers in Southern California that has since gone through six different owners — is used to being busy.

What makes the M-Wave International acquisition different is three partners — CEO Joe Turek, President Bob Duke and Managing Partner and Vice President of Sales Scott Fietsam — motivated to give Morley's turbulent timeline a break.

## PEDAL PROTECTION

"Morley is my baby," Fietsam said. "It needed to be paid attention to. Thank God for Bill Wenzloff and Scott Flesher. Without them, this thing would've fizzled out a long time ago."

So, the three partners along with Morley vets Wenzloff and Flesher — who have been with the company for 30 years and wore hats from owners to engineers and graphic designers to marketers — have spent the past year giving Morley that attention.

The first order of business was relocating Morley from Cary, Illinois, to M-Wave's 50,000-square-foot factory in Glendale Heights. The next step was organizing sales (and everything else).

"Who are our distributors? Who are our dealers?" asked Fietsam, going down a checklist of



From left, M-Wave's CEO Joe Turek, Managing Partner Scott Fietsam and President Bob Duke.

## A strong business model and even stronger legacy leaves Morley revival-ready

questions including topics such as what do people need, what do they want more of, and what can M-Wave do to make Morley better.

The team took to the streets and did a road tour of due diligence, meeting the industry's top dogs and attending trade shows.

"I'm new to NAMM, and I'm the type of guy that will walk up and say, 'Listen, I'm a newbie,'" Fietsam said. "We've done a lot of listening and now we're starting to implement."

Implementations include updating the antiquated website to be mobile friendly and establish-

ing MAP pricing. "We needed to get the pricing structure sorted out so that everybody is singing off the same sheet of music," he said.

Through this gumshoe researching, Morley was referred to Hal Leonard (a company M-Wave never heard of before), which led to the distribution deal. Since M-Wave typically only deals directly with its larger accounts, that model was applied to Morley. Enter Hal Leonard, who took over all of Morley's rest-of-world customers as the master distributor.

"[Hal Leonard] can cover that

way better than we can," Fietsam said. "Ultimately, it will fuel our growth, but it should help them with a new product line."

## PEDAL PROTECTION

Once Morley had a cohesive business plan, the focus shifted to the products themselves.

"All of our pedals have a trapezoidal treadle on them — that's kind of our trademark — and our mini [pedal] was square," Fietsam said. "It didn't look right. So we did a redesign, and we're launching a full series of mini pedals."

Though the trapezoidal shape is signature to Morley, it wasn't trademarked.

So, the team trademarked it.

"This is some of the stuff that the previous owners didn't find value in or just didn't want to spend time on, whereas we're looking at it as intellectual property we should be protecting," he said. "As businessmen in a manufacturing environment, we recognize those things have value, and we jumped right on them."

This recognition also led to trademarking the slogan "vintage as vinyl," filing patents for Pedal Glow, focusing on artist series pedals, and remembering that success is achieved best when it's fun.

"The days of me pounding a square peg into a round hole are over," Fietsam said. "I always tell [Wenzloff], 'No matter what, we have to have fun.' And if we're not having fun, we're doing the wrong thing."

So far, the combination of three business-savvy manufacturers and two pedal-passionate individuals seems to be working.

"Morley's back," Fietsam said. "It's taken us a better part of a year to do all of this, but we're hitting our stride now." **MI**