

WALRUS AUDIO | BY ALEX HARRELL

EFFECTS OF STORYTELLING

Effects pedals are like trading cards, according to Colt Westbrook, president of the boutique pedal company Walrus Audio.

Though varying in price and participants, it's the same game: collect, swap, exchange and trade.

And just like trading cards, you don't just have *one* type of pedal.

"With pedals it's almost like a better together mentality," said Westbrook, who took over the company in 2014. "Nobody's only playing a JHS or EarthQuaker Devices pedalboard. They're mix and matching from all these different companies."

Because it's an oversaturated market and due to the nature of the pedal game, the Oklahoma City-based company focuses on dealer relationships. Dealers have a finite amount of open-to-buy dollars, Westbrook explained, which are spent on the bigger brands.

"[We're] trying to grow relationships so that people can trust the brand because they trust the people that they're buying from," he said.

So, Walrus has to find and create ways to stand out.

SHARING STORIES

"We're always trying to create products that are reliable — from a business standpoint, too — that are equally innovative for players and musicians but that are also good products that dealers can invest in and have good turn and good demand on," Westbrook said. "Our goal with pedals is that the user is able to understand it and get the hang of it in about five minutes or less of having it."

Walrus pedals are built in-house by a team of three or four builders that assemble and test the products before shipping them out. Featuring memorable names with congruous illustrations, each



Colt Westbrook

How Oklahoma City-based Walrus Audio became one of the most recognizable boutique pedal makers in the market

pedal has a backstory — previously pitched by one of the 10 team members via a whiteboard and a few Google images — before being given to an outsourced artist to design.

"Every effect kind of has visuals that go with it," Westbrook explained. "Delay is a real spacey, ethereal, otherworldly effect. Distortion is a representation of the pain of life so it's heavy and morose," he joked.

Essentially, Walrus takes themes that are already accepted and established in the industry that are already tied to the effects, and pops art out of those

boxes onto the pedals. Another distinguishing factor for Walrus is that its pedals are made in the United States.

"I think people buy Walrus because it's made in the USA," Westbrook said. "That's kind of how we've gotten our foot in the door with the dealers and the customers that we already have."

But he's quick to make clear that Walrus doesn't embody an "American or bust" attitude when it comes to using contract manufacturers overseas or importing products.

"I think people like the story that something was developed

and created here in America," Westbrook said.

Creating a product with substance behind it is the foundation of Walrus' branding and marketing strategy. While posting on social media is an obviously huge part of marketing for Walrus — which has 95,000 followers on Instagram and roughly 53,600 likes on Facebook — it's not the most important element. Just the easiest.

"To really get your roots into the fold of branding, you've got to be able to get people to fall in love with your product and the people behind the brand," Westbrook said. "Storytelling is essential." **MI**