



Brandon Harold and Mike Appel mix front of house for Fairview Baptist Church in Corryton, Tennessee, on the Allen & Heath dLive S7000.

# HOUSE of ROCK

By Alex Harrell

---

Forget Friday night rock shows — the latest place to see (and hear!) great gear is at Sunday Service. Looking to expand into this fast-growing market? A few retailers and suppliers share their tips for breaking into the worship world



Fuller's Music's Dave Rhodes



Sweetwater's Andrew Scriven

Going to church has changed. And not only is the experience different, the culture surrounding it has evolved as well.

Take Pope Francis for example. He has 17.4 million followers on Twitter and is gaining 15,400 more each day, according to social media analytics. With a prog-rock album titled “Wake Up!” and tweets like “inequality is the root of social evil” under his stole, he’s breaking the archetypal mold.

The way worship *sounds* has changed, too. Where once were organs or a cantor are projectors displaying block-lettered hymns while LED displays dance around the worship band musicians as they gracefully rock out on digital pianos and electric guitars.

“It used to be, you sit in this seat and you sit there and be quiet and don’t dare say, ‘Amen,’ and you don’t dare raise your hand to praise,” said Randy Conley, owner of Southern Music Company. “And to me, that isn’t worship. That’s boring.”

Conley’s quick to point out that while that style of worship definitely still exists and is a completely acceptable way of liturgy, it’s not *his* personal style. But not to fear: the Hartford Institute estimates that there are over 350,000 religious congregations in the United States. The 2016 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches lists

455 denominations — more than double what was listed just 10 years ago.

“Let’s face it: A church that looked one way 20 years ago looks *completely* different now,” said Dave Rhodes of Fuller’s Music. “[But] that journey is what keeps [church] doors open. If we can partner with them on that journey — and care about that journey with them — it builds what we all want, which is repeat customers.”

### SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE

It’s clear that the worship world is a profitable market. But it differs from other segments of the MI industry in a few sensitive ways critical for retailers to consider before capitalizing on.

“I feel like you have this opportunity to partner with a church, in the way that they deliver a message, that’s really important to them,” Rhodes said. “It has to be approached from that standpoint.”

The full-line music retailer in New Bern, North Carolina, is the oldest store in the state, dating back to 1905. And being nestled in the Bible Belt, Fuller’s Music has been involved with the worship market for nearly all of the 113 years it’s been established.

“You have to understand, on a very serious level, how important this is to *them*,”

Rhodes continued, referring to not only the religious institutions but the attendees as well. “You need to know your place and how your partner with them in that experience. You can’t just want to sell them something because it benefits you as a retailer; it has to be the correct solution for them.”

While this should be the case for *every* customer, houses of worship differ in that the entry point isn’t as obvious. Understanding and defining what the correct solutions for the worship world are requires speaking the language of the worship world.

At Sweetwater, for example, more than 60 of its 350 sales engineers are exclusively dedicated to the house of worship market, according to Andrew Scriven, Sweetwater’s director of house of worship marketing.

“Many of the HOW sales engineers are former worship pastors, worship leaders, or musicians who have previously served the church; not all of them are, but they are all good at communicating and understanding the felt needs of the worship community,” Scriven said. “So when a customer from a church or worship background calls, these guys can speak a common language and understand what it’s like to be in the trenches, so to speak, of Sunday morning worship service and what the goals of that customer are.”



## PRAISEWORTHY APPS

Breaking into the worship market can be daunting. Here are three smartphone apps that will make your transition into the transcendental a little easier.

Now, I know what you're thinking: Retailers can't sell apps. But they do sell the products that these apps are used on — such as the AirTurn PED and the iRig Blueboard — and they can provide support for them.

"A lot of people try to do this stuff without apps," said AirTurn's Karplus. "[But] the core of this whole thing is the apps."



### ONSONG

OnSong is the "most sophisticated app in the worship world," according to Karplus, as the Apple-friendly app "does everything." Developed in 2010 by Jason Kichline, the program is designed to replace sheet music with digital and interactive mobile solutions. It can be set up to trigger pedals — convenient when worship band volunteers can't make it to mass.



### MUSIC STAND

Launched in 2006, Planning Center Services has a separate Android- and Apple-compatible Music Stand, which is a tablet app for reading sheet music and taking notes.

"PCO is a whole worship service management service," Karplus said. "Music is only a tiny piece of it."



### EASYWORSHIP REMOTE

EasyWorship is a software plug-in (that retailers can sell!) that can be controlled and viewed from any Apple mobile device on the user's network. The church presentation software was created so churches can build entire services — including song lyrics, scriptures and sermon notes — in one place for ease and efficiency. **MI**



Allen & Heath's Jeff Hawley



Corey Moorehead mixes broadcast on the Allen & Heath GLD-80.



dB Integrations' Ronnie Stanford with Allen & Heath's dLive S5000.

There's also a compelling need for outside sales to be a part of what the retailer does, Rhodes explained, because it's difficult to understand how that product — be it a digital mixer or in-ear wireless system — interacts in the worship space along with all of the other equipment already housed in the, well, house.

"Having someone on staff who's an audio expert, willing to be an outside salesperson for your retail establishment, I think that goes a long way because a lot of these churches *are* reaching out a hand for help, and they do need that help," Rhodes continued. "And if you can answer that call for help, that starts to build really strong relationships."

Which is why Southern Music of Cordele,

Georgia, does everything in-house.

"It's one thing to sell the equipment, and it's another thing to go and install it," Southern Music's Conley said.

And that equipment has only gotten more diverse as the digital revolution continues.

## THE DIGITAL TAKEOVER

"Digital pianos have just about taken over," Conley continued, stating that he doesn't even sell acoustic pianos anymore.

Various factors have led to the worship market favoring digital over acoustic, including the cost of on-going maintenance.

"With a digital piano, you can move it around, the sounds are fantastic," said AirTurn's CEO Lester Karplus. "These people have to deal with capital budgets;



## QUALITY BAND INSTRUMENTS FROM HUNTER



Provide your customers with the highest quality instruments and the best possible price points. Hunter offers a full line of instruments that are made to the best standards.

Call us today to find out how you can profit from Hunter Musical Instruments.

Fast shipping available from our New York warehouse.

### HUNTER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

3300 Northern Blvd. Long Island City, NY 11101

(718)706-0828 ■ FAX (718)706-0128

[www.huntermusical.com](http://www.huntermusical.com)

## For 38 years, the leader in custom pickguards.

Since 1978, we've been hand-making custom pickguards for the music world, offering hundreds of colors and material combinations for every brand of guitar!

Expertise? You bet. And we offer the fastest turnaround time because we make everything right here in the USA!



For information, go to [wdmusic.com](http://wdmusic.com) or call 1-800-449-9348



From left, Southern Music's Randy Conley and Matt Varnadoe.

now you can get a heck of a sound for a lot less money.”

And not only are digital instruments such as pianos and drums taking over, but upgrading technology in other elements is on the rise as well.

“The latest and greatest thing — just like you’re able to stream live on your Facebook or YouTube, you can do that with a church now,” Conley said. “You just set them up with a nicer camera and use whatever medium you want to do the stream with.”

Sweetwater’s Scriven agreed, stating that online and “portable” churches are on the upswing.

“Churches are looking to better steward their resources by utilizing existing spaces — such as a movie theater or an abandoned strip mall store — where they can go in and set up the space for worship on Sundays and then quickly break it down, put it all in the back of the trailer, and store it over the week,” Scriven said. “So, guiding them to gear that works well together while also being hardy, road-worthy pieces is an example of something that is unique to a church trying to accomplish that particular task.”

While portable churches are on the rise for various reasons, a big factor is cost-effectiveness.

“Again, we have to be the right solution for them; right out of the gate that means being price competitive,” Rhodes said. “If they’re going to spend a lot of money with your facility or retail company, they’re going to make sure they’re stretching those church dollars as far as possible.”

Which has led manufacturers to make products hyper-specific to the worship market.

### DETAILS & DISCRETION

“I think from the manufacturer side, the trick is to realize there are certain niche players in the market,” said Jeff Hawley, Allen & Health’s marketing manager.

“It’s this cohesive system and how all the bits and pieces play together is so much more important. For me, one of the



big things that stick out is just how interconnected all of these things are and how you have to think about it much more holistically.”

These tiny moving parts lead to Allen & Heath releasing products such as the ME Personal Mixing System — which, from a product development standpoint, came partly from listening to the worship market’s desire for a more flexible personal monitor system.

“The focus isn’t the same as it is with rock shows, where the goal for everybody in the audience is to be focused on the stage and on that artist; it’s quite the opposite,” Hawley said. “They really *shouldn’t* notice that anything is happening up there. If the worship aspect is working, they shouldn’t be focused on the stage.”

AirTurn’s Lester Karplus echoed similar sentiments.

“I think the importance of the fit of the AirTurn products is that you’re providing support to the worship service and you’re not just the focus of the worship service,”

Karplus said. “It made the worship music part of the service more unobtrusive, and enhances the service instead of distracting from it.”

### SPREAD THE WORD

All in all, the worship market really isn’t *that* different from the rest of the MI industry. Advertising and marketing are still crucial elements to success.

“Church is a business, just like anything else,” AirTurn’s Karplus said. “You’re in the God business, and how do you get your customers to come [back]?”

For Southern Music, it’s via direct mail advertising.

“You can buy mail lists now,” Conley said. “So you can decide on an area that you want to target — that you want to service — and buy a mail list of the churches in that area, draw up a flyer or pamphlet of what it is that you do, and get it started that way,” he continued. “What I’ve seen a direct result from was direct mail.”

But what’s been standard for the worship

world — and continues to be — is good old-fashioned guerrilla marketing.

“I think I continue to be blown away by how strong word of mouth is, particularly with worship leaders and with the tech community *within* the worship space,” Allen & Heath’s Hawley said. “There’s a lot of communication between worship leaders and between church musicians; getting in front of these folks and if they have a great experience with your brand, that seems to go a *long* way.”

As a way of advertising, Hawley recommended attending the large worship conferences such as WFX, the Worship Facilities Conference and Expo. Offer training and resources for the products you make and sell. Acknowledge that some operators are volunteers; some are professional audio engineers.

“Word of mouth is where it’s at with churches,” Fuller’s Music Rhodes said. “If you’re doing these major marketing campaign targets, then you’re probably missing the boat, anyway.” **MI**

## A strong foundation begins with Blessing.

Introducing the BBTB-62R Bass Trombone

[www.blessingbrass.com](http://www.blessingbrass.com) or visit your local retailer



**BLESSING**

EST. 1906