

By Alex Harrell

CONSCIENTIOUS COMMITMENT

Despite having three locations and a recording showroom in New York City, Alto Music doesn't neglect the online world

With four Excellence wins — including one Retailer of the Year award — over the past seven years, Alto Music's success can be boiled down into a simple not-so-secret formula: plain old hard work.

"I work like a dog," said Jon Haber, owner of the New York-based shop, with a laugh. "I really work hard, and I think my staff sees that. I wouldn't ask anybody to do something that I wouldn't do myself."

Which he means quite literally. Haber joined Alto Music in the 1980s as a teenager before taking over the company in 1989 and expanding the store into three full-line locations with a pro-audio showroom in New York City. As of print time, Alto Music was building additional space to its 32,000-square-foot warehouse and revamping its offices to organize and accommodate its growth.

"I have a great staff," Haber said, adding that many of his employees are long-term. "We've been doing this for a long time, so we have a lot of longtime relationships. We're getting better at what we do. If you work at something, you become better at it."

Getting better includes knowing when to shift gears. In previous years, Alto Music focused strongly on the brick-and-mortar aspect of the business.

But with the aggressive focus on online retailing that's been dominating the MI industry as of late, Haber and his team have worked hard to involve and intertwine the two worlds.

"Having a strong online presence is essential now, even for your brick-and-mortar store," Haber said. "Because the customers are — even the local custom-

ers — are accustomed to looking online first."

To cater to those customers, Alto Music invested heavily in advancing its software and has an in-house team building its online presence.

A strong website and strong social media visibility is a service to Alto's local consumers as well, Haber explained. Customers don't always have time to swing by a store but still want to shop locally in the event they need to return or swap out a product.

"And then by having a good store to take care of them when they come in," he continued, explaining that Alto Music's sales are split roughly down the middle, regarding being online or in-store.

By focusing on customer service — online and in-store — the pieces organically fall into place, according to Haber. As a result, he advised fellow retailers to think long and hard before telling a customer "no," even when it's the easier route to take.

"It's really important to go the extra step now; customer service is more important than it ever was," Haber continued. "Selling online doesn't require the same customer service — it requires *more*."

Taking extra initiatives to ensure quality customer service is something that voters recognized in the retailer as well.

"Alto Music is really ahead of the competition in terms of closeness to the customers, and I mean for real," one Excellence voter said.

"For real" is an understatement. For example, when a customer didn't receive a mixing board that he ordered online from Alto Music in time for a gig, Haber gave them his personal credit card to go buy the product from a local music store.

"That guy remained a loyal customer," Haber said nonchalantly. "You gotta work hard. I'm having fun. It's been good. I wake up every day, pop out of bed ready to rock, and never know what's going to happen. It's fun."

As far as Alto Music's future, Haber said he hopes to continue to see slow and steady growth.

"Just having a good place for people to go to work and make a good living," he said. "I haven't really given it any grand thoughts. I'm just happy to be doing what we're doing." **MI**



Jon Haber
Photo by Luis Peña

ALTO MUSIC

Middletown, New York

PRINCIPAL:

Jon Haber

FOUNDED:

1989

EMPLOYEES:

Approximately 100

LOCATIONS:

3, plus a showroom
in New York City

ANNUAL REVENUE:

\$50 million