

By Alex Harrell

'WE HAVE THEIR BACKS'

Keeping communications strong and morale high helps Sam Ash Music sail smoothly into its 94th year

"We aren't trying to reinvent ourselves," said Sammy Ash, chief operating officer of Sam Ash Music. "We're trying to hone and improve what we've got."

Which is something that the Hicksville, New York-based company works on every single day, according to Ash. As a result, the third and fourth generations running the family-centric retailing operation today understand Sam Ash Music better than ever before in its 93-year-old history.

"The same people who won the first [Excellence Award] are still here today to help win this award; there has been no change in attitude, in direction, or, most importantly, the players," Ash said. "Our formula hasn't changed except to improve where we see fit. The industry isn't changing much, so you have to change; you have to improve to stand out in this crazy business."

The biggest improvement for Sam Ash Music has been in the area of communications. Internally, the company holds regular meetings with its managers and keeps its staff — all 1,800 employees — in the loop.

"The staff knows what's going on," Ash said. "When things are good, we let them know. When things are bad, we spread the news. We all figure out a way to fix it together. Our leadership team is old enough to know we are not smart enough. And if you don't listen to other people, you might as well crash and burn now."

External communication has been a mainstay of the company for years; voters continue to recognize Sam Ash for its family business feel.

"I'm impressed with how Sam Ash maintains an indie store feel for the size company that it is," commented one voter.

Ash attributed this to handling all comments, questions and concerns with a personal touch.

"Customers know they can reach us," Ash said. "The stores know they can reach us. My guys aren't afraid to call us to say, 'Look, I've got a situation, can I have some advice?' Sure you can."

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Not only can customers and manufacturers reach the executives of Sam Ash Music with ease, but employees can, too.

"The word we use is 'justice,'" Ash explained. "Customers can



From left, Sammy Ash, Stu Leibowitz, Howie Mendelson, Richard Ash, Barry Horowitz, John Pereksta and David Ash.

SAM ASH MUSIC
Hicksville, New York

PRINCIPAL PLAYERS:

Richard Ash, Sammy Ash & David Ash

FOUNDED:

1924

EMPLOYEES:

Approximately 1,800

LOCATIONS:

46

ANNUAL REVENUE:

Undisclosed

come to us for justice, manufacturers come to us for justice, and the associates can come to us for justice. They also know we have their back; we make sure they *understand* we have their backs."

Voters continue to pick up on the family vibe of Sam Ash Music because it's not a vibe, but a reality. And the family mentality extends well beyond the family members. The majority of Ash's managers have been with the company in excess of 20 years — a few have been with the company for more than 40.

"Everybody has respect for everyone else's job. After 93 years, you get into a certain groove. It could be good, it could be bad. Our groove is pretty good right now." **MI**