



WORLD

Sunny Sides up

Jim Sides, a well-known figure in the world of live sound and loudspeakers, is about to make his next move. **Dave Wiggins** gets the angle

Co-founder of not one but two successful loudspeaker manufacturing businesses, Californian Jim Sides is one of the industry's most experienced entrepreneurs and business leaders. Between his two start-ups (Apogee Sound Inc in 1986 and Vue Audiotechnik in 2012) he has also held senior management positions with Nexo and Meyer Sound. Consequently, his perspective on the global pro-audio industry and especially those matters pertaining to loudspeaker design, development, sales and distribution is always interesting.

As Sides prepares to launch his new consultancy venture 'Eklektrik', PSNEurope talks with him about the past, present and future...

The pro-audio loudspeaker business is so different now to when you started with Apogee. What were your main challenges in those early days?

Yes, it is remarkably different! Remember, in those years, most big rental and installation companies were still making their own systems out of various components they were able to purchase easily, built up in their own woodshop and painting booth. The idea of buying a complete sound system from a manufacturer was really in its embryonic stage. What I miss from those days was the passion that many of us had for building reliable working PAs and our joy at having it all work!

You led Nexo's sales charge in the US for some years. What specific challenges did you face representing a European brand in the USA?

Well in the first place, it was the name 'Nexo'. Almost no one had even heard of the company in the US, and there was a famous cell-phone company around then called Nextel. When I did a cold call, people thought I was trying to sell them a phone! Another challenge for me was communications and company culture – the US is very different from Europe in basic company ethos and business concepts for our industry. My challenge was creating distribution and sales channels and creating a marketing message that would resonate in the US within the parameters I was given. It was difficult at times trying to articulate my ideas clearly. All that being said, it was great fun and (Nexo founders) Micky Johnson and Eric Vincenot are fantastic guys and remain friends to this day.

You successfully set up Meyer Sound Germany in 2006 and moved your family there too. Did you enjoy the change in culture?

That was a real eye-opener. By that point I had worked all over Europe for many years, but actually living there was very different. I think it was far more difficult for my family since none of us spoke a word of German and just getting by day to day (with) things like grocery shopping, was a bit hard. But it was and remains an amazing time for all of us. We still have many close family friends in Europe so our ties remain strong there.

The appearance of VUE Audiotechnik (in partnership with EAW co-founder Ken Berger) was perhaps unexpected by the global pro-audio community - what was behind it?

I know that most industry people who knew both of us thought it was odd that people with such different backgrounds and diverse philosophies could contemplate joining together and forming a company. My reason was quite simple: I was not fulfilled with what I was doing at the time and it seemed like a challenge that I was prepared to undertake. Starting any business is no small thing, especially when producing loudspeakers. I am pleased that the company is up and running quite well and that I helped in getting it established.

What have you learned about speaker design and business management that you will take into Eklektrik?

Principally that the pro-audio business is driven in large part by the passion and enthusiasm of the individuals involved. The application of developing technologies and forging new market segments still creates new products and services for reasons other than a quarterly balance sheet. This business – which began with a group of entrepreneurs serving regional market or specific market segment demands – has matured into something global. From a manufacturing and distribution point of view, client product education is paramount to gaining market share, as well as understanding and facilitating pricing structures and marketing endeavours that speak to each regional market and drive local supply and demand. It's also essential to embrace the technical and business differentials in the global market and to maintain and



Jim Sides: launching new consultancy venture 'Eklektrik'

grow relationships. At the end of the day, our industry is still a 'people' business.

Name one way our industry could be improved?

I still favour the nimble thinking of smaller companies in our industry as many opportunities require solutions that cannot be purchased as an 'off the shelf' product so must be designed, produced and brought to market quickly. Larger firms often miss opportunities because they (don't do that and) are not in touch with the end user's changing demands.

Looking back, as you prepare for your next chapter, what would you have done differently?

Well, hindsight is always good to analyse what one did right or wrong in a particular situation and hopefully learn something in the process. Mis-steps and successes are both part of the learning process. While some of my decisions have not produced the results I intended originally, these decisions often lead to other opportunities that might have been missed if I had taken a different path. Overall, my philosophy of embracing change has served me well in my career and will lead to more exciting challenges ahead. I am privileged to have worked in the entertainment industry for most of my life. I love this business! ■

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