



P E R F E C T S Y N E R G Y

A new page where we celebrate the career of a mover and shaker in the bass industry. We kick off with Alan Greensall, the man behind Synergy Distribution, which brings Sandberg, Phil Jones Bass and Basics products to the UK and Ireland

I was a guitarist in a few bands in my early days, but moved into heavy industry in 1978, where I worked in marketing. I hated it and switched to a sales position at Rose

Morris, because the musical instrument industry was where my passion was. We were representing Marshall, first and foremost; MXR; Ludwig Drums; and Ovation, which was great because I was a John McLaughlin fan. It was a good portfolio. I was quite successful with them - in fact, I was their salesman of the year - but I found that my real forte was in technology and moved to Roland, where I was really happy because it was a great time for the company.

I became the Boss sales manager and then Roland's UK sales manager, and after 15 years I was running their sales force, doing all the buying and basically being sales director designate. A new regime arrived and I left Roland in 1996 to join Sound Technology as MD, to run the company. They were at a crossroads, because Roland had just launched all the VS recorders and Sound Tech were selling ADAT recorders and needed a shakeup. We took on G&L basses, which was the first time I really focused on bass, followed by Taylor Guitars and then Line 6, when they had just one amp.

In 1999 Line 6 wanted someone to set up their European operation and I was interested because I'd been working in the UK for 20 years, and it felt like an interesting challenge to go and find what France and Germany were like. After that I set up Synergy Distribution as a partnership while working with NESTA, the government's National Endowment for Science and the Arts, on all their music projects. I was also chairman of the MIA's Statistics and

Trends committee. I mentored various music projects and I advised companies - Future Publishing was one of them, back when they were looking for a direction. I told them: "Bass guitars are going in this direction, guitars are going in this other one: these are the trends to help you bring your magazines in line with the market."

Peter left Synergy about four years ago and I continued the company: we've hit a sweet spot lately with Sandberg, which we started 11 years ago when Holger Stonjek approached me. It wasn't a well-known brand back then. What I've learned is that with any new product, it takes you six months to understand it, another six months for the dealers to understand it, and then another six months to a year or more for the public to understand it. Marketing is a long-term thing, so we've been selling the Sandberg name and the image as much as the basses themselves. I think there will be very few bassists in the UK now who haven't heard of Sandberg. Holger's online configurator was a huge bonus: I'd say 95 per cent of our sales come through it, whether from customers or dealers. It offers over 30,000 different bass guitar configurations, so the bass on your wall won't be the bass that's on your competitor's wall, which is how we've driven it. Sandberg sales here have grown by 50 per cent in the last year.

I first met Phil Jones in 2004. Back then, Phil's amp range was quite different to what it is now - non-European in some ways, with lots of big amps and cabinets - but there were gems in there like the Briefcase, which is still selling now. He's a speaker designer first and foremost, and unlike any other manufacturer who will design an amp and then find a speaker that fits their requirements, Phil designs the speaker

from the ground up. No one else does what he does: in China, they've bought his amps, stripped them down and tried to emulate them, but they can't get their copies to handle the bass, so they're calling it a guitar amp! He's now moving back to his roots and manufacturing monitors again - and the first ones (called Monitor -1) sound phenomenal.

Basics is the brainchild of Malcolm Toft, the legendary Trident Studios engineer who worked with the Beatles and David Bowie and then went on to launch Trident mixing desks. He came to me via LinkedIn and told me he'd created a product called the BPA-1 after being with bassists in the studio who couldn't get the right sound that was in their head. He'd taken the functions of one of his mixing desks and put them into a unit tweaked especially for bass, with a compressor added. His history impressed me, of course, but so did the fact that he knows what he's doing, and the BPA-1's sound quality is phenomenally good. It's not an effects pedal: it's purely designed to get you the tone that you've always wanted, no matter what bass you may be playing. In the days of bands playing with no amps on stage, it's a way of going straight into the PA and your in-ears with a tone that's as good as you'd get in the studio.

The future is bright. Synergy is in the best position it's ever been in. I'm in a zone where I can handle four or five companies, and do a good job for those people. In life, it's easy to take on too much, but my view is that you should do the best you damn well can with your core manufacturers. I focus on the bass market, because it's more open-minded than the guitar market. What are we selling? We're selling an image, and, in my opinion, bass players are more open to a different image than any other musicians. ■