

FROM: Musical Merchandise Review (September 2009)

Article: "What's Right with Keyboard Sales: A Look at Eight Retailers Who Are Doing Well"

Steve Smith

Triune Music, Elmhurst, Ill.

Steve Smith says Triune Music has actually added staff and expanded business. They are on track to have their best year in history.

Out of college, Smith taught choral music at a local high school. Only four years older than some of the kids, the challenges of dealing with groups as large as 60 was daunting. Having one steal his car also contributed to Smith considering a career change into his family's construction business. Many were disappointed about his decision to leave teaching, perhaps most of all the local keyboard dealer who was negotiating with him to get the school a new organ and piano.

"They asked me to come in and we talked for two hours," Smith recalls. "Then they hired me on the spot. I wasn't sure about it because I was an educator, not a salesperson. But actually what I learned is what we do here is education. It's been a very good fit." Seven years after joining, the owner retired and Smith bought Triune, taking it over in 1987.



They sell full pipe, digital, and hybrids, working in three states. While Rodgers is their most prominent line, they also represent Walker Technical and Marshall & Olgetree, plus pipe maker Fratelli Ruffatti.

Smith says that while "there is no single reason for this upsurge in our 22-year old business, however there are many contributing factors." He recently made the decision to invest heavily in a new Web site. "When I looked at competitors in the area, the Web sites were sorely lacking. One didn't even have pictures." Max Longin, who previously worked for Yamaha, designed their site, and the results allow them to tell many stories. It's sophisticated, yet flexible enough that they can upload updates and new photos. "We started as an electronic organ company, but we've done over 70 pipe installations. We've become one of the largest organ dealers in the Midwest. There's no better way to communicate that than through the Web site."

And it's not just one-way communications: "We find that clients love staying in touch with us, and love talking to others about the superb way they've been treated by us."

They've launched a telemarketing program that is providing positive results, and they've lowered margins to be more competitive. Even making their office more energy-efficient has added to their bottom line. They also renegotiated their lease.

"For over ten years we have provided reasonably-priced rental instruments for the finest musical ensembles performing concerts, church conventions, and other special events," Smith says. This has given them priceless exposure, and The Chicago Tribune music critic noted in one of the reviews of such an event how "splendid" the pipe organ sounded. "You couldn't afford to pay for such an endorsement from such an expert."