Selling Business Music Solutions

Who is the real customer?

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When developing products for a market category, a manufacturer always looks to define product features based on customer needs. But that begs the question: Who is the actual customer?

Let's focus on business music installations, which are defined as commercial venues that use licensed music reinforcement to enhance the customer experience. These venues include coffee shops, restaurants, bars, fitness clubs and retail stores, just to name a few.

In the world of AV, we are used to dealing with the systems integrator and, sometimes, with the end user. The typical customers are the ones installing the product, and the manufacturer creates solutions that have features to make their lives easier. Looking at business music, however, the customer has shifted; now, that category includes four key stakeholders that the manufacturer essentially has to win over.

Customer #1 – Architect/Interior Designer

The architect or interior designer hired by the owner or franchise has one overarching goal: to make the finished venue look good. Aesthetics are paramount to satisfying these customers. They are looking for industrial design that can easily blend, without looking obnoxious. They seek out elements like paintable loudspeakers, Decora wall plates, RAL color listings and available Revit libraries for BIM modeling. Ultimately, they are looking for the tools to achieve a holistic design that enhances their "art."

Customer #2 – System Designer

The designer could be a consultant or work directly for the AV integrator. Designers are highly specialized individuals who have to review the plan/elevation drawings of the venue, map out the quantity and size of the loudspeakers, calculate amplifier channels, rack requirements, cable loss, etc., then generate the final quote package. It's in a manufacturer's best interest to make this person's job easier. It's easy to focus on *product* features, such as UL listings and IP ratings, but they are most interested in "the whole product"—a term that refers to product *and* supporting assets. Those assets (or design tools) include a complete library of supporting files, such as 2D-DXF, 3D-DXF, EASE, CLF2, REVIT and A&E specs. These tools make the designer's life much easier and, therefore, make them more likely to specify the product in future projects.

Customer #3 – System Installer

The installer (or technician) might work directly for the AV integrator or might be sub-contracted, especially if the venue is in an isolated area. Installers are also highly specialized in their role and, like designers, they can be highly influential, depending on how quickly and easily the product is installed.

(Remember, time is money when onsite.) There are many obvious product features that can make this person's life easier while onsite; those include IN/THRU Euroblock connectors on a loudspeaker, bolt-hole locations on a wall bracket that actually line up with the wall framing, or dip switches on the rear of an amplifier for faster configuration, just to name a few. When you can help them to minimize labor costs and reduce installation and programming time, you've won them over.

Customer #4 – Venue Manager And Staff

This group includes everyone who will be operating the system. Their acceptance at the final sign-off is critical to the overall success of the project. To this customer, the product not only should sound good (that's just table stakes), but also should be simple to use and, most importantly, should provide the same experience every day. This customer does not care what AV equipment is in the rack, or what loudspeakers are used. To them, the "system" is the control mechanism (the wall controller, in most cases), which is how they select sources and adjust volumes within each zone. If they are happy with the control and the results are repeatable, then they are generally happy with the product(s).

In Summary

Treating *all* of the stakeholders mentioned above as "the customer" means spending extra time to understand the unique requirements of each, and then considering those requirements when defining product features. Remember, the customer is not just the person who makes the final transaction—the customer is anyone who influences the selection (or future selection) of the product because they've had a positive experience with it.