

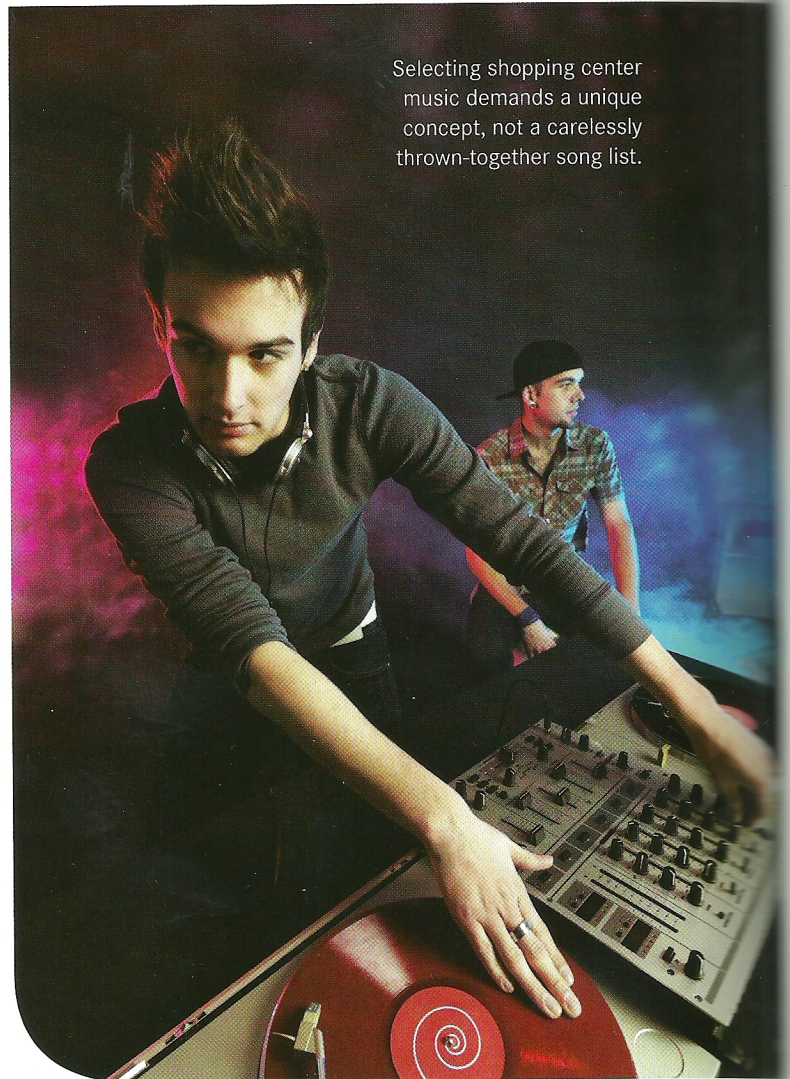
TOP TUNES FOR THE MALL

An individual audio profile as one component of a coherent image makes a brand more unique and recognizable. This also applies to shopping centers.

Successful brands differ from less successful brands in that the former occupies a secure spot in the customer's motivation and emotions. A wide variety of motives are involved when people become buyers. Research on the brain has established that experiences, negative or positive, are fixed in the subconscious mind. They lead to an evaluation that is key to the decision to buy at the POS. This process is controlled by the limbic system. For this reason, every company's goal must be to provide the customer with an environment that sparks positive feelings, because decisions to buy are not rational. They are controlled by subconscious biological functions anchored in the brain's limbic system. These subconscious biological functions can be influenced by music, among other things. Studies show that people can be strongly influenced by music at the POS. One study established that sales of French wine rose by 30% through the use of French music.

Many commercial enterprises already use background music in their shops. This is meant to improve the atmosphere and motivate customers to stay longer and buy more.

In addition to that, music can also help define the brand. An individual audio profile as one component of a coherent image makes brands more unique and recognizable. Sound experts are convinced that acoustic



Selecting shopping center music demands a unique concept, not a carelessly thrown-together song list.

recognition of a brand is at least as important as the logo and slogan. But is "acoustic brand management" also possible with shopping centers? "Absolutely," says Herwig Kusatz, Managing Director of Sound Strategy. Music can fulfill functions like recognition, orientation, and communication of values. Music can also influence emotions, moods, and thus buying behavior, says the sound expert. According to Eva Maria Kubin, Managing Director of RCA Radio Content Austria, a radio program or music makes sense in all shopping centers "where the spatial conditions and technical equipment are such that a radio/music program can be transported to – and heard by – all customers." (See interview p. 64)

IMPORTANCE OF CLEAR STRATEGIC POSITIONING

In order to position a shopping center with the appropriate tones, Kusatz finds it very helpful if the center has a clear strategic positioning and CI. The support and involvement of the decision maker is also necessary in development and implementation. "The most important thing is the strategic approach before the sound design is created. At this point the brand attributes, the services, and the current appearance have to be considered," says Kusatz and adds, "A credible acoustic identity harmonizes with the brand's entire sensory identity."

THE "IDEAL" BACKGROUND MUSIC

The "ideal" background music steers clear of song lyrics or current hit songs. The volume level moves constantly between 2 and 3 decibels above the regular, ever-present soundscape. The louder, the better is an absolute no-no, says Kusatz from Sound Strategy. According to Kubin from RCA, the volume also depends on the size and architecture of the mall as well as other sound sources. High volume or fluctuations in the volume and pitch should also be avoided. The music should not be dominant; it should only be noticeable if you consciously listen for it. The customer should not be distracted by the music, but stimulated. It is for this reason that simple musical compilations and catchy melodies are used that can also be frequently repeated. These measures should ensure that the music is perceived by the customer's subconscious, but never moves into the foreground. Kusatz even recommends factoring in music psychology.

Why? "This is about targeted communication and not a random uniform mush. Applying music psychology is important, because different sensory impressions – and sounds – are combined and processed in the mind. These impressions cause shopping center customers to behave the way they do," says the sound pro.

An Internet connection to transfer data and sound equipment with amplifiers and speakers are the only technical equipment necessary in shopping centers. If this is not present, it can be retrofitted. With new projects it is wise to involve sound experts during the planning phase.

ONLY TRUST THE JOB TO PROFESSIONALS

Anyone considering setting up a radio or music program in his or her shopping center should leave the job to professionals. A random music program, such as a computer compilation of titles, and in-house spots done by the receptionist should be avoided at all costs, says Kubin. "That is completely out of date!" RCA's work, such as announcements of events or special offers, is done by professional moderators and produced like radio spots.

"We adhere to all the radio programming rules. The program is constantly updated, and we can respond very quickly through our technical system. For instance, this allows us to add special offers to the program at the last minute," says Kubin and adds, "Compared to the production and distribution of flyers, radio is a cost-effective and enormously flexible information tool for a shopping center." ♦



>> HERWIG KUSATZ

"The best ideas are the simple ones, and the same rule applies to brands. In order to anchor a simple but strong sound identity in the minds of all target groups, a clear and attentive perception of everything one hears is necessary," says Herwig Kusatz, Sound Strategy Managing Director. Sound Strategy is an internationally oriented agency for sound branding that helps companies and organizations develop a consistent sound identity. One example of their work was coordinating the telephone system for the Austrian soft drink, Almdudler, with its brand values. The Almdudler soundscape is also used in the corporate headquarters to make the company values audible for visitors and employees. At trade fairs the agency helped generate more interest in the booth and created the right mood with music.