

Getting "The Deal"

The Music Industry's Endorsement Game

by Rich Mangicaro

More than ever before, today's musicians—professional and amateur alike—view getting an endorsement deal somewhat like getting a record deal. It's a mark of success—a statement regarding one's career. Many believe that when a company signs them, it verifies that they are talented and influential enough to deal directly with the manufacturer. These points are true.

Many musicians also believe that an endorsement means free products, money, feature spots in advertising, and basically a way to increase their fame. This is not quite the true picture.

A Sporting Approach

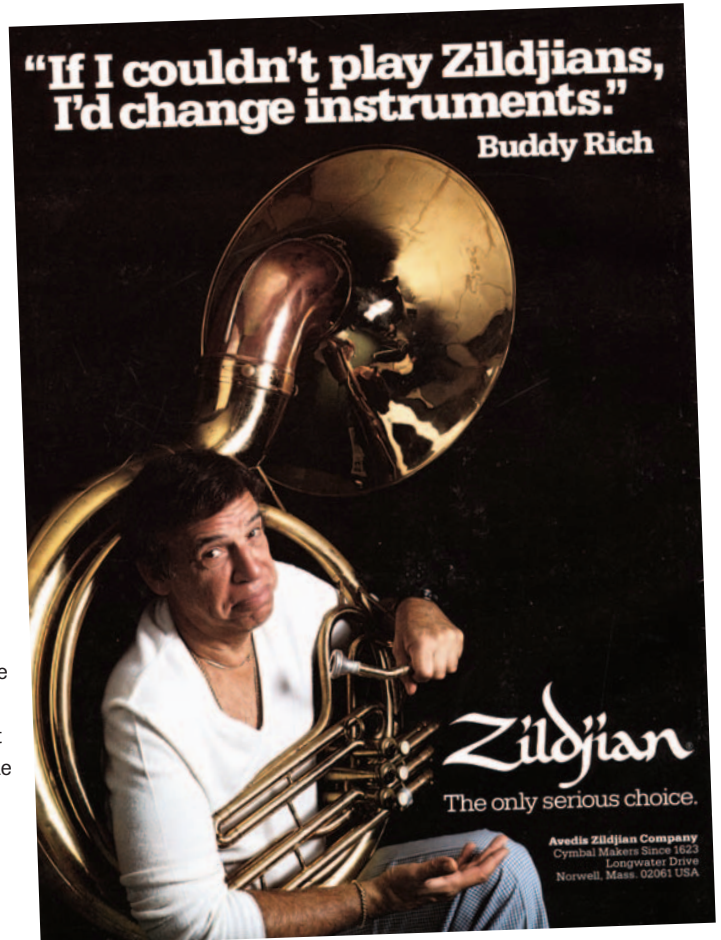
A good example of how endorsements work comes from the sports industry. Nike did not sign Michael Jordan to a multi-million-dollar contract in order to help him become famous. It was because he was *already* famous that Nike sought an endorsement relationship with him. They knew that his name would ultimately increase sales for them. So they invested in that relationship, offering Michael royalties in return for the use of his name and likeness.

The main difference between a music-industry endorsement with an artist and a sports-industry endorsement with someone like Michael Jordan is that the music industry is *much* smaller than the sports industry. There are simply more people buying sports equipment than musical instruments. As a result, sales revenues generated for Nike by someone like Jordan are substantially higher than those generated for a drum or cymbal company by a high-profile drummer. Because of this difference, the sports world can support much larger marketing campaigns than those that are generally seen in our industry.

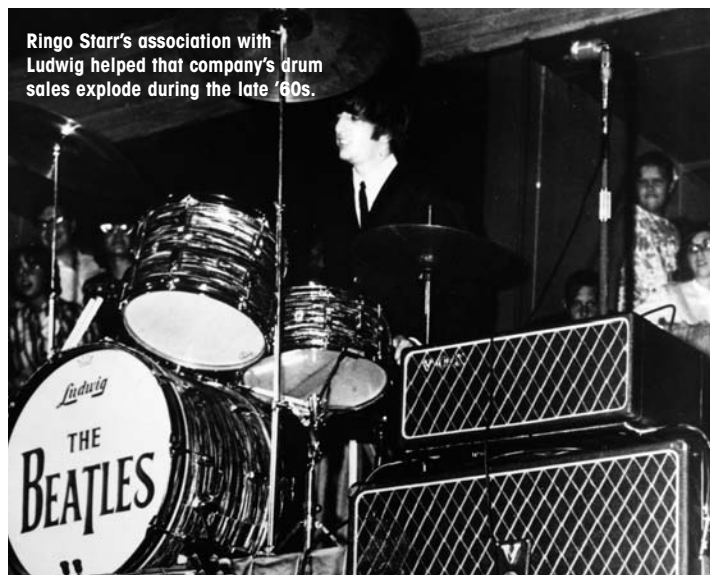
What Is An Endorsement?

An endorsement is an official relationship between a manufacturer and an influential artist. This relationship is based on the manufacturer's hopes of increasing overall sales by utilizing the artist's name and likeness through association, advertising, and promotions.

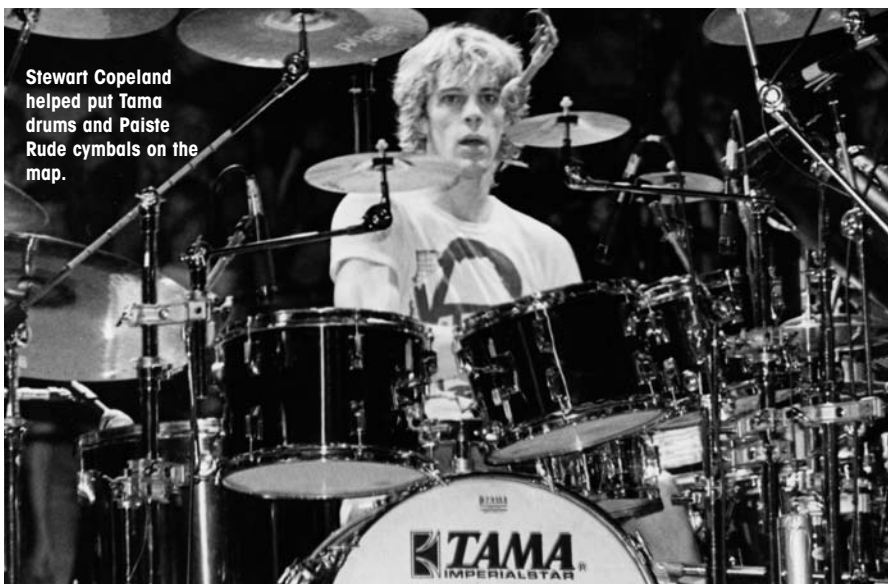
Perhaps the most famous example in the drum world is Ludwig's long-standing association with Ringo Starr. This relationship catapulted Ludwig into industry leadership when The Beatles hit big in the '60s, and has been part of what has kept Ludwig's notoriety and drum sales consistent over the ensuing forty years. In exchange for the use of his name and likeness, an artist such as Ringo receives unlimited free products, involvement in advertising and promotions, and a personal relationship with a company.



Major artist endorsers often appear in advertisements—such as this humorous mid-'80s Zildjian ad featuring Buddy Rich.



Stewart Copeland helped put Tama drums and Paiste Rude cymbals on the map.



Generally speaking, in the music instrument industry no money is exchanged between the artist and manufacturer for the artist's endorsement. The exception is when the manufacturer pays the artist for participating in an event such as an educational seminar or clinic, an autograph session, or a personal appearance representing the company.

The issue of payment is probably the main misconception among young players when they think of endorsements. If you're looking to obtain a salary from an endorsement deal, you'll probably be better off practicing your foul shot than your drumming.

Ya Gotta Believe

Most of the artists I've had the honor to work with made their decision to pursue an endorsement primarily because they truly believed in an instrument and wanted a rela-



An enthusiasm for drumming, great playing technique, and skill as an educator make Gregg Bissonette an outstanding clinician/endorser.

tionship with its manufacturer. Many of those influential artists have become indelibly associated with that manufacturer's products, and have ultimately helped to shape the company's image and sound.

One of the first drummers I met when I began my career in artist relations was Stewart Copeland. Stewart was a huge inspiration to me in my younger days. He was also the reason I was originally drawn to Paiste cymbals. I grew up in Upstate New York, and we didn't have as much exposure to the Swiss-made cymbals as we did to those of other brands. Along with his incredible skills and ingenious blending of styles, Stewart's cymbal choices were always unique and complementary to what he was playing. He was the first drummer I heard playing Paiste Rude cymbals, which were so different and aggressive, matching his awesome, energetic live output. I'll never forget the first time I saw Stewart play—to say nothing of the honor of subsequently working with him for so many years.

Other amazing artists have influenced our choice of instruments, because when we think of them, we're reminded of what they play. Just a few examples of successful endorsements and their obvious influences on us all: Buddy Rich (Zildjian), John Bonham (Paiste and Ludwig), Tony Williams (Zildjian), and Jeff Porcaro (Paiste and Pearl).

Why Seek An Endorsement?

The main reason to seek an endorsement *should* be to establish a personal relationship with the company that makes the instrument you like best, and that you truly believe makes you sound better. If you sound better, you're more likely to gain the attention you desire, thereby increasing your visibility and that of the instrument you're playing. This is good for the endorsing manufacturer. In

exchange, you can reap the benefits of equipment support, discounted or possibly even free products, and involvement in advertising.

Just keep in mind that it only makes sense for a manufacturer to include you in their advertising campaigns when your name and likeness helps them increase their sales. More often than not, this is the primary consideration for *their* decision to take you on as an endorser.

The Main Factor In Your Decision

As drummers and percussionists, we have many choices when it comes to which tools we use to pursue our craft. Our tools ultimately reflect how we play, how we sound, and how we are viewed professionally. You should always choose the instruments you like best and that resonate with you.

I had the pleasure to work for many years with Ndugu Chancler, who is one of our industry's best examples of a true endorser. Ndugu has been with the same companies for over thirty years, and in that time he's been a key figure in those companies' overall image, development, and sales. Ndugu states, "By the time you've arrived at an endorsement level, you should be able to determine what your needs and requirements are. If you have a strong enough name, you can play whatever equipment you want. I don't think most of us would play equipment that's below our sound and quality standards. Equipment is a direct reflection of an artist's integrity, sound, and image."

Any manufacturer will view you as a more desirable endorser if your decision comes from a musical place. They know you're on board for the right reason.

Stay Put

Once you sign on the dotted line, you should look at it as a long-term commitment. Build a relationship with your company, and



With more than thirty years of association with the same companies, Ndugu Chancler embodies the qualities that manufacturers look for in an endorser.

it will ultimately serve you well. You may not receive instruments for free at the outset. But if you work hard and stay true to your craft, as your visibility increases you will eventually enjoy the same rewards that your favorite artists enjoy.

Remember, too, that your company is not there to make you famous. Still, if you are hard-working, honest, and a team player, you will thrive. Be patient, and communicate continually with your company. Artist relations representatives have many artists to support, so the better you communicate, the more willing and able they will be to assist you.

Business And Social Chops

Your business and social chops may be just as important as your playing chops—if not more so. Music is a social business, and how we relate to and respect each other, both on and off stage, is crucial. Keeping your ego healthy—but in check—requires daily practice. Likewise, keeping perspective amidst our insecurities (and we all have them) is something we can learn from the masters.

Being confident and prepared while also being empathetic and considerate to others requires balance and a sense of community. As musicians, our work only prospers when we support each other. When this topic comes up, I always use Gregg Bissonette as a shining example. Gregg possesses this balance. Along with being one of the world's greatest drummers, Gregg is truly one of the nicest guys I've ever met.

Professionalism is an important element of an endorsement relationship, too. For example, even though this point seems obvious, *always* be on time. Again, from Ndugu: "To be *early* is to be on time. To just be on time is to be late." These words are the mantra of the successful studio musician, and I was fortunate to see it first-hand over my long association with Ndugu.

Another terrific example is the late, great Jeff Porcaro. Even though Jeff had his drum tech and cartage company at his sessions, he was always the first one there—and, most times, the last one to leave. Jeff was an inspiration to me in this way, demonstrating how much he cared about each project by his attention to detail, his professionalism, and his amazing musicality. Jeff truly cared about what a song called for, and about how to make it really groove and feel good. And if he honestly didn't feel he was the right drummer for that job, he would immediately suggest another drummer he thought was a better choice. He cared that much about

making sure that the artist got the best possible end result. Now, *that's* an example of a healthy ego.

Wrapping Up

We drummers are lucky. Our job is to make people dance. How cool is that! If you keep that—as well as everything else we've discussed here—in mind, you'll make the right decision about an endorsement. Base your decisions on musicality rather than on "getting the best deal," and you'll ultimately enjoy a long-standing relationship that will benefit everyone involved. Remember, we're all in

9 Tips For Success As An Endorsing Artist

by John Wittman

1. Develop a clear vision of yourself. Know who you are, determine your own sound, and devote yourself to music: the songs, the group, the sound, your students, and your career. Once you're making a living playing music and have something to offer others, then move on to tip number two.
2. Ask yourself why you're seeking an endorsement. What do you bring to the table that would matter? What attributes do you have as a person and an artist that would make you valuable to a company?
3. Do you have an established career in music? (Be realistic.) How long have you been in your current band? How many thousands of recordings were sold last year with your name listed? Are you currently on a major tour? If you're still in school, stay focused on your music and forget about endorsements.
4. A great *player* is not necessarily a great clinician. It's important to manufacturers that those who call themselves clinicians are indeed artful and effective at this pursuit. Before you ask for clinic support, have 100 clinics under your belt—and make sure that belt is a black belt in the art of teaching.
5. If you want to be an endorsing representative of a company, you must know and respect who you'd be representing before you even approach them. Become an expert on the company whose instrument you play. Know its history, philosophy, current artist roster, and position in the marketplace. Study the roster of artists on the company's Web site. Do you fit in with that roster?
6. Establish a rapport. Introduce yourself to the company's staff at trade shows—*without* presenting a package or even *mentioning* the word "endorsement." We assume, if you're talking to us, that you can play. In an endorsement context, you need to establish yourself as a businessperson. We want to know what it would be like to work with you.
7. Prepare a well-crafted promo package. It should include a short cover letter, a bio, a recording, a photo, and the URL to your Web site. Take time crafting this package; it creates your first impression. Do some background work to be sure you're sending the package to the correct person, and that you have that person's correct title and the correct spelling of his or her name.
8. Don't expect free instruments or to be paid money in return for playing a company's instrument. Artist discounts will be discussed after your package has generated interest. And remember that companies expect endorsing artists to play their instruments exclusively, to mention their companies at educational events, to thank the company for their support, and (when possible) to include the company's name on recordings.
9. Keep focused on the music while paying attention to your sound and to your business skills. Music manufacturers are, above all, interested in being represented by good, professional musicians who truly love the tools of their trade.

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