

# Merchants & Marketing

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## In-Store Tours Offer Alternative Appearances Benefit Both Artists And Merchants

BY FRANK DiCOSTANZO

NEW YORK—From superstars plugging their latest CDs to developing artists hoping to “break” their first records, in-store tours continue to provide a direct link to the consumer while reinforcing the common bond between artist, label, and retail.

Indeed, the advent of “residency tours”—which are grass-roots oriented, highly intensive, regionally targeted, and short term—is in some cases presenting artists almost exclusively to one major

thing special for free while having the pleasure of meeting stars in person.” Not only can in-store events be incredibly successful at drawing crowds, but they also excite shoppers, notes Brown.

Yet beyond the benefits the chain derives from promoting the events through radio, print, and even special contests, “in-stores are also our way of giving something back to the people who frequent our stores,” Brown says.

In-store performances also expose to the public bands that might not otherwise be heard. Nearly a year ago, Chris Nadler, East Coast marketing coordinator for Sam Goody/Musicland, helped launch Sam Goody’s Home Before Midnight series, dedicated to presenting new bands at an

early hour. The shows are held on the second floor of Goody’s Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street store in New York.

“I realized that it’s getting harder for a lot of people to stay on until 1 or 2 in the morning to catch new acts, so we created this series to introduce bands that might not otherwise have been seen,” Nadler says.

and whose format hopefully matches the market you’re trying to reach,” says Cataldo. He adds that James’ recent appearance at J&R Music World in Manhattan led to a 30-minute interview on WCBS New York.

According to James, the in-stores can be even more effective than concert dates. “We can tie in closely with retailers, make personal contact with fans, and create an event that will draw the local media,” says James.

He adds, “After 30 years in the music business, I can tell you how wonderful it is to be doing an in-store and have people come up to you and tell you that your music has touched their lives in some way.”

For David Dorn, senior director of media relations at Rhino Records, in-stores have been so successful that the biggest danger has been that a store will sell out of the artist’s CDs during an appearance. For instance, when The Monkees appeared at a store in Fairfax, Va., more than 2,000 people turned out, and additional product had to be shipped in from other stores, he says. “CDs, T-shirts, videos—everything was sold out because people wanted to have them signed,” says Dorn.

“Obviously, it’s very rewarding when people show up in those kinds of numbers,” says Mickey Dolenz of



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retail chain.

“You can’t count on radio to help break in an artist, and certainly not video, so why not go straight to the consumer through retail?” asks Randy Dry, manager of field marketing for PolyGram Group Distribution (PGD), who has promoted alternative acts like Grassy Knoll and Secret Garden through in-stores.

In-store artist appearances



Antiquities Museum Shop, a gift store in New Hope, Pa., sponsored a concert with pianists Robin Spielberg and Danny Wright that drew 1,600 people. Pictured, from left, are Wright, store owner Daniel Minn, and Spielberg.

lighting, and the normal distractions that accompany playing in a busy store environment.

“It’s an unusual situation, but I’ll usually break the ice by playing one of my hits” before moving on to promoting the new album, he says.

“It’s not a performance in the official ticket-like sense,” he adds, “but rather like a book signing where you sing from the book instead of reading from it.”

Of course, for developing acts looking to gain exposure and market “presence” and build a fan base, in-store performances are just the ticket. For instance, alternative band Grassy Knoll, which just released its second album, “Posi-

many multiple impressions as possible within a dozen key markets,” says PGD’s Dry. “The in-store performances tie in with the club dates, which tie in with college radio.”

The 11-city tour, he adds, led to radio interviews and performances at key college stations, as well as bookings in 300- to 500-seat clubs, where the band opened for established local bands.

The in-store turnout, explains Dry, typically averaged 30-40 people, depending on the time and location. “Generally, we look to sell about 10 units, which is about a third of the people stopping by,” says Dry. And, “introducing the

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## IN-STORE TOURS OFFER ALTERNATIVE

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marketing manager for HMV. "If the performance is running in other stores, it loses that special something."

And while recent appearances by Julie Andrews, José Carreras, and Nas were "phenomenally" successful, says Feldman, the trade-off "is that labels are always looking to accommodate lesser-known artists and we're always soliciting them for the major names."

Apart from that, adds Feldman, in-stores are terrific morale boosters for the staff. "When we opened our Herald Square store in Manhattan, David Bowie was there signing autographs and greeting our employees," he recalls, adding, "It really energized our staff."

Not surprisingly, some artists will want to perform in a certain store because it's comfortable and the atmosphere conveys a mood that fits their image, says Charlie Peacock, president of Nashville-based Re:think Records. The small independent label, which is distributed by EMI, is promoting the self-titled debut album of Sarah Masen, a 20-year-old Detroit singer/songwriter whose music melds rock, pop, gospel, and folk elements.

Peacock describes Masen as a well-read individual who enjoys visiting bookstores, adding that the artist is performing at 21 Borders Books & Music stores throughout the country on a two-month tour.

Currently, North Star Music, an independent label based in Rhode Island, is busily promoting its top-selling artist, new age pianist Robin Spielberg, through the specialty niche market and is registering some big sales in small places.

"In the last 24 months, Robin has sold between 160,000 to 200,000 CDs, which is an incredible number for a new age concert pianist who's just breaking out," says Richard Waterman, president of North Star Music. Her four albums have sold 1,800 copies, according to SoundScan.

The label produces instrumental music and sells direct to more than 2,000 specialty store accounts. And while many of those customers range in size from small mom-and-pops to large chains like the Nature Company, Barnes & Noble, and Borders, it's the smallest accounts that have delivered some of the biggest results, often in some of the smallest towns.

At Weekends, a mostly seasonal gift shop in Lexington, Mich., near Lake Huron, the pianist received a great response, she says. The retailer promoted her upcoming performance via its own newsletter and mailing list, which included 9,000 names, she notes. In addition, the store used word-of-mouth,

posters, bag stuffers (in the form of bookmarks), and advertising.

The result, Spielberg says, was amazing. "The place was packed, the people were terrific, and we sold 115 CDs after one performance."

In a similar situation, Spielberg teamed up with pianist Danny Wright in a concert sponsored by the Antiquities Museum Shop, a gift store in New Hope, Pa. The double billing drew, she says, 1,600 people.

The store has sponsored Wright's concerts for many years, and according to Antiquities' owner,

Daniel Mill, the public has come to expect the concerts each spring and fall, with ticket sales rising each year.

That contrasts sharply with an in-store performance Spielberg made at the opening of a chain bookstore in New York, which resulted in only three CDs sold. Spielberg is quick to add that she's also had plenty of success playing the big chains.

"It's amazing how resourceful and creative small stores can be when it comes to selling CDs and promoting a show," Spielberg says.