

Dealer Spotlight

JML Audio: A Toast to Ten Years

He's very young to be celebrating a milestone anniversary. At just 27, Josh Landau is wrapping up his first decade as president of JML Audio, a company he started ten years ago as a teenager with his friend and partner, Adam Stein.

As early as 1997, Landau and Stein developed reputations for being the go-to guys for quality layout, custom design and fabrication. "We now have a reputation on a national level," Landau said. Located in St. Louis, Mo., JML Audio attracts customers from as far away as California, and even Canada. "It means a great deal to us that clients would drive that far for us," Landau added.

Now the sole owner, Landau attributes his dedication to quality and customer satisfaction to his company's longevity. His methodical "under-promise and over-deliver" approach to customer service leaves clients feeling they've received a great value. "This is a quality-driven operation. At the end of the day, it's not how many cars we've whipped out the door, or how much money we've made," he said.

Looking back on the last ten years, Landau has no regrets. There are, however, a few things he might have done differently. "I would have liked to do more training and gone to shows sooner. As soon as we could finance trips to CES and KnowledgeFest, we went."

Landau credits the trade shows and workshops for reducing the industry's learning curves, as well as creating invaluable networking opportunities. "Instead of learning the hard way, by trial and error, [retailers] can work together to learn off each other," Landau said, noting that one of the benefits of using other retailers as resources is strengthening the industry as a whole.

As for changes he'd like to make for the future: "We definitely want a larger facility," Landau said of his plans over the next ten years. JML has created a name for itself in fabrication, and Landau is looking forward to designating a large space for the sole purpose of designing and building things like fiberglass enclosures. Landau hopes to relocate his shop within the next year.

He's going to need the extra space. Landau predicts that, over the next few years, the aftermarket installation world will continue to rely on the car audio enthusiast. "Our clients are going to be true audiophiles," Landau said of his future (and current) customer base. "I think this shift is going to help us in the long-term, but it's going to change the industry for everyone," he finished.



Josh Landau of JML Audio can't stress enough how important it is to invest in good tools. He sees it as an investment, not a cost. JML Audio turns ten years old this year. Landau started the company when he was 17.

JML Audio's Top Ten Tips to Ten Years on Top

1. **Invest in tooling.** Shell out for good gear. It's an investment, not only in the tools, but in your employees as well.
2. **Attend trainings.** Education is a lifelong thing. Embrace it.
3. **Stay passionate.** If you don't care about what you're doing, it doesn't matter how much you know.
4. **Network.** Creating a network of shop owners, technicians, and fabricators strengthens your position in the industry.
5. **Find solutions.** Think innovatively. Don't be afraid to take on projects you've never done before. Do your homework. Challenge yourself.
6. **Market, advertise and promote.** Even excellent work won't sell itself. Get the word out.
7. **Listen to your client.** Don't just hear them, but truly listen to what they are asking for.
8. **Be honest.** Honesty is truly the best policy. Be upfront, and don't hide anything. Clients don't come back to a shady operation.
9. **Provide a rental car.** It's an inexpensive way to avoid inconveniencing your client.
10. **Think big.** Whether you have one bay or ten, you are larger than life. The possibilities are endless. If you believe in yourself, others will too.

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Woofers on the Waterways

Not everyone is geographically poised to sell marine audio. But that's not the case in Stockton, Calif., for Neptunes Marine Audio, a specialty retail and installation business catering to high-end marine customers. Located on the California Delta and situated on more than 1,800 miles of waterways, Neptunes makes marine specialization look easy.

Owner Jim Rockwood, a 12-volt veteran with 23 years of experience, opened Neptunes with his wife and son almost four years ago. The marine industry was more attractive to Rockwood because "the market hasn't been destroyed... yet." Unlike car audio, big-box stores and pricing wars have evaded marine audio.

And according to Rockwood, it won't be any time soon that conglomerate retail or cheap independents threaten his industry.

"Our clients don't want to go to a fly-by-night shop," he said, noting that the average starting price of the boats that come into Neptunes starts at \$48,000. "And it's not about who's got the best deal. They want someone they can trust."

Neptunes is doing what it can to turn marine sound into more than a hobby. In the spirit of 12-volt competition, Neptunes hosted the first ever marine audio sound-off last year, with the help of Mike Jaffe from USACi, according to Rockwood.

"We promoted it just like we would a car audio event," he said. Competitors were judged on subwoofer level, and had their SPL measured from 50 feet away. The event, held at the delta's Lost Isle, was a huge success by Rockwood's standards with 23 contestants.

Last month, the second sound-off hosted by Neptunes was held at Lake Tulloch, a camping and marine resort about 75 miles west of Yosemite National Park. This year's event, held on Cinco de Mayo weekend, was sponsored by a few boat manufacturers and was considered a massive success; the entire resort and campground sold out almost four months in advance. The sound-off, paired with a wakeboarding triple-up competition sponsored by the Delta Riders Association, will continue to be annual event.

With little competition in marine specialization, Rockwood says he



Neptunes Marine Audio held the first-ever marine sound-off. Competitors were judged on SPL measurement from 50 feet.

can count on a busy season through October, picking back up in April. When he's not outfitting sport boats with towers and speakers, he's installing navigation and video units in yachts and houseboats.

His customers will drive 200 miles for his expertise, though Rockwood doesn't insist that they always come to him. If there's a problem with a system, it's not unlike him to jump into his own MB Sport, taking customer service to the open seas. "If a customer is having a problem, we'll go find them on the delta and help them out. Even on a Saturday. I don't mind," he laughed.

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Slashing Navigation

Floyd Seal of Empress Audio in Gautier, Miss., has found that recent price reductions in navigation units have increased sales.

Blue Skies and Green Cash

"The weather is starting to break and that always contributes to increasing audio sales, in particular with amps and subwoofers," said to Jon Clark of The Soundsource in Burlington, N.J.

Spring Into Action

Mark Scrivner of Santa Fe Auto Sound in Overland Park, Kan., encouraged customers to enjoy the warmer weather. "We ran a three-day "Spring for Sound" sale at the end of the month," said Scrivner.

Uncle Sam's Season

NVUS Motorsports in Fresno, Calif., found that a little extra advertising push during tax season goes a long way, according to Owner Lally Grewal.

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Before and After: Major Renovations to Mainstay Franchise



Out with the old (left) and in with the new: Al & Ed's will be renovating all 25 of its franchise locations in a \$250,000 effort to create an "atmosphere in which every customer who walks through the door will feel comfortable, the minute they walk in," said Project Manager John Haynes. The former gray and red interior will be replaced with black pebble finished floors, maple slat walls with black inserts, and a combination of maple and black covered glass counters.

A lot has changed since 1954. Mobile electronics has come a long way and so has interior design. In an effort to create an atmosphere that embraces a wide-range customer demographic, Al & Ed's, a mobile electronics franchise in Southern California spanning 175 miles north of the Mexican border, is remodeling all 25 of its stores.

Established in 1954 by Al Brotsky and Ed Zionts, Al & Ed's was sold to Gabi Mashal six

years ago when Brotsky retired, though the company still carries the namesakes of the original owners.

Al & Ed's was last renovated more than ten years ago, according to John Haynes, project manager for Al & Ed's. "It's now time for a change," Haynes said. The mid-90s remodel project introduced a décor that Haynes described as "non-threatening ... but not very exciting."

After experimenting with a few franchise

locations, Al & Ed's came up with a plan to redesign the interior of the stores, transforming the décor from "gray and red and some more gray" to black pebble finish floors, maple slat walls with black inserts, and a combination of maple and black covered glass counters to give it more of a high-end look. Said Haynes, "As we focus on working on more exotic cars, we really feel that the image of the company has to step up a notch so that the people who drive those vehicles feel comfortable in our store environment. At the same time, a regular guy who wants to have his audio system improved will not feel intimidated."

The renovation isn't just about keeping up appearances. Some of the changes Al & Ed's is implementing are functional as sales tools as well. "We've come up with a selling kiosk strategy. We're supplying the stores with selling vignettes, which allows a customer to see the various categories that we're involved in, and learn about those categories even if the sales staff is busy with other customers," explained Haynes. They'll also be using interchangeable graphics panels with a live product demonstration.

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The renovated edition of the sound wall is a vast improvement from Al & Ed's former setup, which was described as "non-threatening, but not very exciting."

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Al & Ed's has a renovation plan for both the sales floor and installation bays. The older bays (above) will adopt a more modern and organized appearance (below) over the next six months. All 25 stores are scheduled to be remodeled over the next six months at a cost of about \$10,000 per store.



Three stores have already undergone the makeover, and the remaining 22 stores will be receiving renovations, one at a time, over the next six months. Renovations for so many stores could be costly, but Al & Ed's has kept the price down by contracting the same vendors and suppliers for the entire project to receive a franchise rate. Haynes estimated that each store renovation will cost approximately \$10,000, a price tag that Al & Ed's will be splitting with each franchise ownership. "The store owner will pay about \$5,000, and corporate will cover the balance," said Haynes.

Al & Ed's considers it important that the store's appearance meets the needs of all the customers in the store. "We want to have an atmosphere in which every customer who walks through the door will feel comfortable,

"As we focus on working on more exotic cars, we really feel that the image of the company has to step up a notch so that the people who drive those vehicles feel more comfortable in our store environment."

the minute they walk in," Haynes said. "The stores will have the appearance of being efficient, technical, and a fun place to shop and purchase products."

hottestsellers

Who: Robert Dudley, G&D Communications, Sikeston, Mo.

What's Selling: **Apollo Video RR-SR16 In-Vehicle Digital Video Recorder**

Why: "The government is offering grants [to support these units]. We install them in police cars and emergency vehicles. They have the cameras to record in the front and rear of a vehicle. The unit records the in-car audio and records video in and out, if need be."

Who: Curt Clayton, Auto Trenz, Independence, Mo.

What's Selling: **Diamond Audio d3400.4 Four-Channel Amplifier**

Why: "The market is not flooded with this product. The knowledgeable staff and demo vehicles with Diamond Audio are great."

Who: Terry Gebert, Palm Electronics, Inc., Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

What's Selling: **Kenwood KDC-135, AM/FM/CD Receiver**

Why: "We ran a \$79.99 special on installation. It has great features for the money."

Who: Joe O'Byrne, Brentwood Car Audio & Security, Brentwood, Calif.

What's Selling: **Delphi Rody XT XM Satellite Radio Receiver**

Why: "There was a rebate from Delphi and ad promo ... we ran with it. Radio was net zero after rebates if installed and activated in-store. XM had double commission so we gained the radio money back, plus the install."

Who: Joe Dodd, 2 Guys Audio Video, Gresham, Ore.

What's Selling: **Pioneer AVIC D3 Navigation System**

Why: "We featured this item in a promotion for customers to save time, gas, and cost."