

IP Connects Communities

How Publishing Connects Musicians to the Music

Could you imagine a world without music? No band, choir, performance ensembles, or music theater. No soundtracks. No concerts. No Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Gershwin, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Irving Berlin, Sinatra, Elvis, Prince, Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Eagles, Whitney Houston, Dolly Parton, or Luke Combs. Kathy Fernandes, chief sales and marketing officer for J.W. Pepper, posed this question during a recent interview.

As is the case with so many who work in the creative industries, Kathy's journey began early on. When she joined her high school's band program, she fell in love with the unity, joy, and comradery she found in musical ensembles. Inspired by her teachers, she went on to become a middle school band director before joining J.W. Pepper, and she remains highly active in the music community.

"I can still help people be involved with music, but I'm doing it differently. Rather than students in a classroom, I'm seeing the impact we can make for somebody who is getting started in their career as a composer or the impact we can make on small businesses that are passionate about the type of music they publish, the composers they represent, etc."

J.W. Pepper is the world's largest sheet music retailer, specializing in ensemble needs, including accessories, non-instrument products, and, most of all, publications. The company works with thousands of large publishing companies, small businesses, and even directly with self-published composers across the globe. It adds approximately 60,000 new works to its catalog each year and employs approximately 200–300 people in the greater Philadelphia region.

"We've tried to create a platform or a network where we connect musicians with the music they want to perform and vice versa, connecting the publishers and composers with the people who would be interested in their music. If it's in publication and we can set up business terms with the person who is publishing or composing that work, we want to make that music available to our customer base."



"IP is absolutely critical to our business, as it is for the publishers. We want composers, living composers, to be compensated for their music. Sometimes customers ask, 'What can we do to help there be more composers from any given community or background?' and I'll say, 'Start buying their music.' Buy the music of living composers."

—Kathy Fernandes

Kathy says that the company sells a balanced array of popular music, new compositions, and traditional and classical music, including older pieces arranged or written as a new edition or with a creative twist. “Popular music will always have its place, but reworkings of older pieces also seem to sustain for a variety of reasons.” The works are categorized and searchable based on the type of ensemble, difficulty level, style, range, theme, and more.

Although J.W. Pepper sells worldwide, its dominant market is here at home in the U.S. School organizations make up the bulk of the company’s clientele, but it also serves churches, military organizations, town bands, and hobbyists. Each year, representatives from the company attend more than 60 music educator events across the country. After all, “Music connects everywhere. You have it in every town in the suburbs and out into the less populated areas. You’re seeing some of the finest bands, orchestras, and choirs all throughout the state. It’s not something that’s just local to the big urban centers.”

The same rings true for composers and arrangers. Thanks to organizations like J.W. Pepper, these modern creators can grow their brand and earn royalties from their published works, in addition to direct commissions from various performance ensembles. Kathy and her colleagues act as both a conduit and an educational resource for composers and performers alike.

“In this creative industry, even as a retailer—which sometimes people wouldn’t think is highly creative—being able to translate between the creative and the business side is important work. Teachers are not always taught about business. And composers aren’t always taught, for instance, how to promote themselves as a composer. Sometimes they’re not comfortable with it. And that’s where a publisher may be an excellent service for them because the publisher would be OK promoting their work. So my job is taking the community of musicians and people who are creating music and creating this dialogue between them to build an understanding. It’s helping people make sense of this creative space and enable them to provide for

themselves and their families. And it brings things into a community that really should be heard.”

At the core of this endeavor lies intellectual property (IP) rights. For composers and publishers, that usually means copyright. For J.W. Pepper, that means copyright, patents, and trademarks. The company employs patented and patent-pending technologies designed to deliver better services to its customers, including a sheet music distribution patent and a music insight technology system. Further, the company maintains trademarks on its name, its self-publishing platform My Score, and other core services.

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One of the greatest challenges the music industry faces is piracy. Indeed, Kathy says that piracy is the publishing industry’s No. 1 competitor. And much of the piracy that J.W. Pepper faces stems from a lack of education and understanding.

“Could you imagine a world without music? If we want to help people express important things, we need to provide a conduit for people to create important things. That means they need a livelihood from it. If you see value in creators of music and other areas, we all have a role to play in helping bring that forward. We all benefit from the creative output of these individuals, so a degree of mindfulness when choosing music programs and making purchasing decisions can make a difference in the life of a future composer.”

The vital socioeconomic role of arts, such as music, in schools and communities is well documented. Companies like J.W. Pepper play a crucial role in continuing the cycle of creativity, a cycle that cannot thrive without IP protections.

