Radiating Globally

PETER JANIS, President, Radial Engineering

BY FRED GOODMAN

Peter Janis, president of Radial Engineering, began his road to success in Montreal, Canada, where he grew up. Back in high school, he and his friend, Jacques Tessier, ran the audio system for the student lounge. Then, in 1976 at the age of 18, he started to work for Steve’s Music Store in its high-tech department, including recording, live sound and early synthesizers. In addition, he and Tessier began building speaker cabinets in Tessier’s front yard.

In 1980, Janis moved to Ottawa to work for Lauzon Sound. The company designed and supplied sound systems for clubs, schools, churches and arenas. In 1982, he was hired by CBS-Fender as product director for the Canadian market. Back then, CBS had invested in some high-tech brands such as Rhodes and ARP, and it wanted to get into the PA business. So he was hired to handle that side of the business and launch the Matsushita (Panasonic)-made Fender PA range.

When CBS sold Fender to private investors, Janis’ focus was shifted to distributing new products for the Canadian market. The company acquired distribution for Alesis, Akai, Casio and Audix. He stayed with Fender for 10 years before starting Radial in 1992. “And for nearly 20 years,” he notes, “I’ve been acting as president and chief floor sweeper.”

Janis also understands the performing side of the audio landscape. He started playing piano at the age of seven and guitar at the age of 14. During the ’70s, he spent a few years playing clubs. He discovered that he was constantly trying to figure out how to get his instruments to work better. “I think this is the foundation that has allowed me to develop new products and still today sets the tone for the stuff we build,” he notes.

The company is divided into three brands: Radial is concerned with instrument interfaces; Tonebone includes distortion pedals, preamps and switchers; and Primacoustic is the acoustic division, which has two sections—recording and installation.

Radial employs nearly 50 full-time staffers. The entire product range is produced in Canada except for the Primacoustic Broadway panels. According to Janis, more than 50,000 Radial electronic products were shipped in 2010.

The sales department has multiple “legs”—for the U.S. and Canada, there is a fulltime team of 10 individuals that handle the ML, recording and live touring markets. This includes a mix of inside sales support, along with four people traveling throughout North America.

To address the Primacoustic contractor world, there is a separate team that uses 14 independent rep firms scattered throughout the U.S. Export sales are managed through exclusive distribution partners around the globe. In addition, the company has five full-time people that work in marketing, handling web development, advertising, public relations and print media.

Janis emphasizes, “My job is really centered on the product. I work with a team of engineers to develop it, then with the marketing and sales team to bring it to market. We have been producing Radial direct boxes since 1996, and 25 years later, we have yet to discontinue a single product. Our Radial JDI and J48 are testaments to this commitment. This, I believe runs throughout the organization. Do it right. Build it right. Ship it on time.”

Janis discloses that there are two major initiatives under way right now—with the Radial Workhorse and its range of 500 Series modules, and one with Primacoustic. The Workhorse began shipping in February; the modules, a month later. “To understand the importance of the 500 Series,” Janis says, “you must consider the recording world and how it has changed. The days of the mid-sized studio are gone. Only major studios will survive. But underneath is a growing mass of small studios that are digitally savvy, yet looking to fulfill their musical expectations by incorporating analog fun into their computers. The Workhorse addresses this need by allowing the engineer to select a Radial, API or Neve module based on the character of the track or the mic being used.”

The other big push is with Primacoustic. “We started supplying acoustic panels to the market 20 years ago,” Janis remarks, “yet only today are folks beginning to understand their importance. I guess folks have finally figured out that changing the church PA will not make any difference if the room itself is not treated. This is also coming to light in areas such as recording, broadcast and videoconferencing. Broadcasters have known all along that unless they treat the room, the listener will have difficulty understanding the message. Sending sound over the internet follows the same rules. We have recently partnered with Cisco to supply its customers with solutions on a global level.”

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