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Industry Insiders: Josh Katz, Vibe Creator

By
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Josh Katz is the co-owner and founder of EL Media Group, a premier custom music provider and audio/video installation company. Along with his partner Ernie Lake, Katz works with hospitality and nightlife venues worldwide customizing music programming to create a client-specific atmosphere and soundscape. The transition was close to seamless for Katz, a music business veteran, and EL Media Group is expanding rapidly—almost solely by word of mouth. More on the concept after the jump.

Background:

I've worked with literally thousands of bands. I did sales and marketing for BMG; I worked at Jive Records and helped launch Britney Spears and Backstreet Boys. I always had a passion for music from my childhood growing up in Roslyn, New York. I was seeing music non-stop. Then I went to college in Ithaca and I promoted shows there all the time.

First concert:

It was Asia when I was 10 years old.

On the foundation of EL Media Group:

I met my partner Ernie Lake about 13 years ago. When I was working at Jive Records, I was marketing Backstreet Boys and all that teen pop. Ernie was doing remixes at the label. About six or seven years later, we hooked up and started doing new compilation record CDs. At this point, we've done over 300 of them. We sell CDs in close to 50,000 hotel rooms: the Hard Rock Las Vegas, The St. Regis, Tao, Hotel Gansevoort and Thompson Hotels.

On the scope of their operations:

The CDs are how we started, but that matriculated and came back into everything we did. The people we made CDs for came back to us and said, "How do we get this music to play in our lobby or our restaurant or our rooftop?" A light bulb went on and we started doing programming. I went out and started finding the best DJs everywhere and getting them to work on programming for us. Through word of mouth, it just took off. We defined the company at the same time that the whole meatpacking district was coming about and we started doing music for everyone there. We reached a point in '06, '07 when we were turning away business. We were just so busy. One of the biggest things is that I've spent a significant amount of time on is scouring the city and Miami and Vegas finding the best DJs—recruiting them to work for us and setting up music for various hotels and restaurants. That led to the next progression, which was putting in sound systems. The people we were doing music for would call us and say, "Oh listen. My speakers aren't working or this or that." Before we knew it, we were outsourcing all of that. It became so much outsourcing that we went and bought an AV company. That's where we are today. We do a background music service. Some of the biggest clothing chains have called and said, "You know what you're doing for them? We want it." They realize the importance of it.

On replacing DJs:

[This concept] replaces a DJ. In the past, it's been Muzak or just shitty music in the background. We've been the pioneers of putting great music into retail stores, restaurants, and hotel lobbies and making music a part of the overall experience where it's not just background anymore. We call it music styling because it's part of the overall venue. We try to stay involved in the whole design aspect.

On the process of creating the vibe:

Right now, I'm working with a casino in Vegas and it's all about the overall concept of the venue. When you walk in the door, what are you going to feel? What's the feeling you want? It comes down to your senses. What's it going to look like? What's it going to smell like? What's it going to sound like? That's a big part of it. We try to get in on the early stages of the people putting the design together and we try to understand the overall brand and what they're trying to achieve. Then, we create music playlists to create a mood.

We do the music on a streaming system, and it's different for breakfast, lunch, and dinner time, depending on the needs of that venue. Then, the CDs we create incorporate the music from the lobby and extend it into the room so guests can take it home.

Recent projects:

We're working with Five Napkin Burger, doing a place in Long Island City for them. And Food Park at the new Eventi Hotel. We just did Prime Co. on the Upper West Side, the new Gansevoort on Park Avenue and STK Midtown.

Go-to places:

I've been really into Provocateur. I always love Nobu 57. I just love the whole vibe and the food in there. I enjoy Avenue. I definitely like Bagatelle. I really like Philippe and The Palm in the Hamptons.