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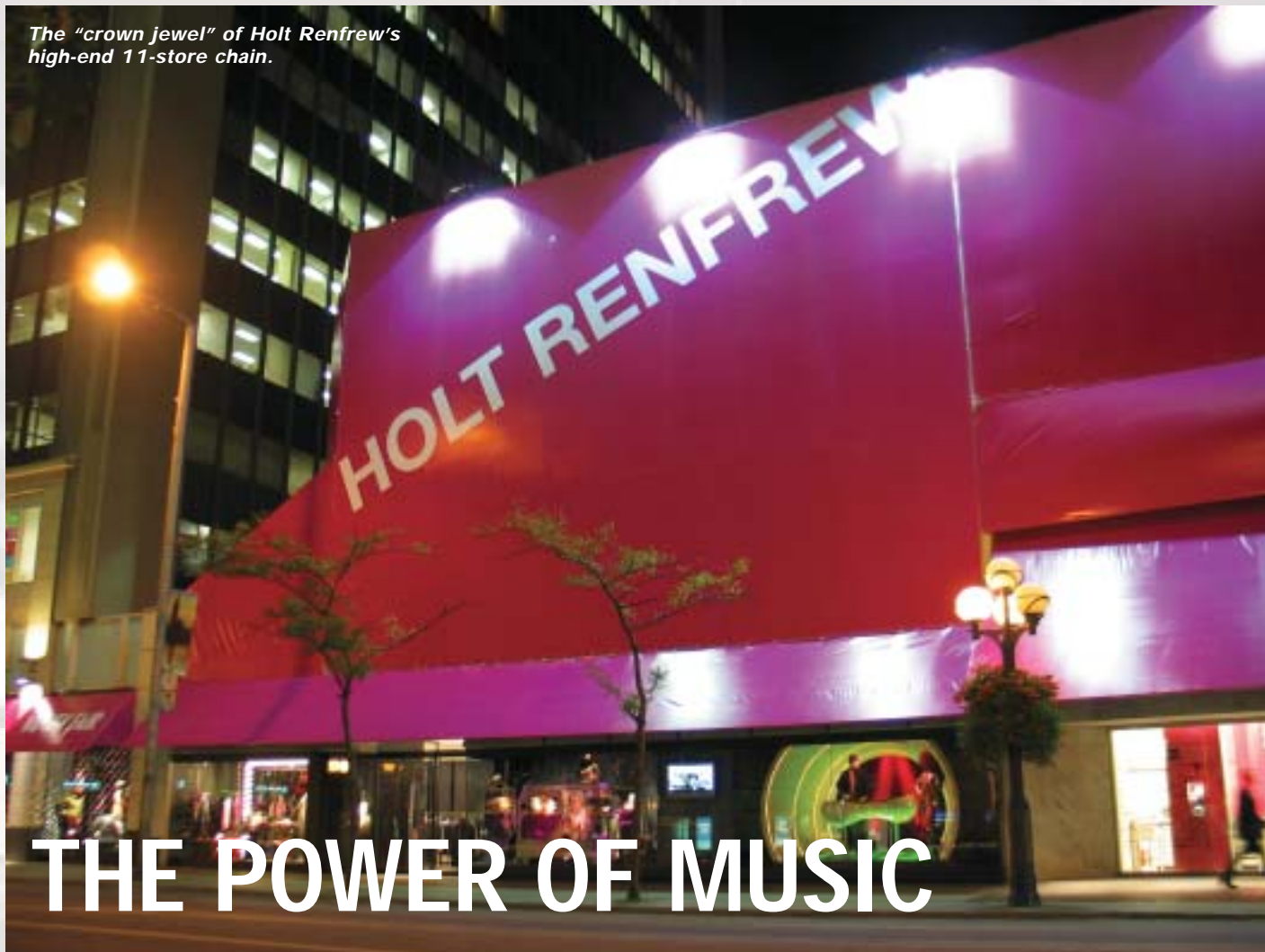
LIGHTING IS VITAL IN THE MARKETING ENVIRONMENT.



POWER OF MUSIC

CANADA'S HOLT RENFREW UPGRADES ITS AUDIO.

The "crown jewel" of Holt Renfrew's high-end 11-store chain.



THE POWER OF MUSIC

Canada's specialty retailer, Holt Renfrew, installs upgraded audio system.

BY DAVID WEISS

You can now count Holt Renfrew, Canada's leading specialty retailer, among the believers in the power of music. Although an updated audio system may have been just one of many planned improvements before its recently completed Toronto flagship store renovation went underway, the company now understands how integral the new sound has been to perfecting its new look.

"Music has become a really important tool for us, particularly in the planning of the store," explained Peter Moore, manager of Store Design and Construction, Holt Renfrew (www.holtrenfrew.com). "Before, we

didn't take into account the location of speakers or the design of the music system. Now we do. Today we're thinking about how different zones go with different types of music, and those aspects play a big part in the interior design."

Sonic Revelations' Seeds

The seeds of Holt Renfrew's sonic revelations were sown when they began laying out the plans for a two-year, \$33 million overhaul of the crown jewel in its high-end 11-store chain, which stretches from Montreal to

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Vancouver. With more than 100,000 square feet, five floors and approximately 40 distinct areas, AV designer and integrator Essential Communications saw it had a messy audio situation to address. “At the first site meeting, I discovered that they had at least 25 CD players spread throughout the store,” said David Schwartz, president of Essential Communications. “This was a problem because they had 25 different types of music playing simultaneously. Every department was allowed to bring in its own music, so you could have anything from classical to hip hop playing at the same time throughout the store, and in a lot of cases the music wasn’t appropriate for the department or its customers. The minute you walked out of one area and into another, you got a dramatic swing that just sounded bad.”

As Essential Communications set out to tackle this challenge, another one became apparent: “The first goal was to unify the music in those departments to create a more consistent experience throughout the store,” Schwartz stated. “That quickly led to a bigger problem: Along with the individual CD players you had individual sound systems, so you literally had 25 sets of CD players, amplifiers and speakers. So their problem was three-fold: inconsistent content, inconsistent volume and inconsistent quality.”

“In this sense, the music is no different from the lighting: Would you like dim lights in one area of the store and big glaring lights in another? Lighting and sound have many parallels in the way they’re perceived and have such an effect on people’s moods. Although some of it is subtle, it definitely affects the way people shop. Retailers are always trying to create the optimal atmosphere for the customer in their environment. It’s important to target those two things for customers coming into the store, not only what’s playing but how: the sound and the volume.”

“If the music is right, people tend to enjoy their experience more,” Moore added. “They like to linger a little longer, feel more comfortable and they tend to get more involved with



Holt Renfrew’s World Design Lab provides an environment for the execution of experimental ideas, encompassing the best in design from around the world.



Speakers play an important role in each department, yet are subtly placed so the shopping experience takes precedence over the piped-in sound.



The fine jewelry department.



Holt Renfrew offers Vintage Couture, must-have items for style-conscious consumers determined to claim something that is truly, uniquely theirs while making the ultimate fashion statement and smart investment.

the environment they’re in. You’ll hear from many retailers that music is important, and we agree with that. Music helps shape that theater.”

More Subtle Issues

Outside of getting control over their music needs, Holt Renfrew’s management had other, more subtle but important, audio issues it wanted to improve as well. Announcements of store closings had previously been handled

live by an employee who would get on the store paging system and notify customers—a practice much too random for Schwartz. “The timing of the announcement was never consistent,” he said. “What we had suggested was automating it and having it play back on a regular schedule. Another new function had to be a general emergency paging system to get people out of the store if necessary, so security was given its own paging override to

Essential Communications

Essential Communications (www.makeasoundinvestment.com) is a designer and installer of AV solutions to multiple industries, including hospitality, restaurants, retail, residential, academic, corporate and more. Based in New York City, the company has been creating award-winning work for an international clientele since 1987.

accomplish that.

“Another aspect of the system was that the various departments—men’s, women’s, cosmetics—occasionally would do training for the employees by bringing out a PA system and set-

ting it up in the store, classroom-style, to address as many as 100 people. They also do large, departmental or store-wide events where a DJ might come in and play club-style music. In both cases, I told them we could in-

corporate mic jacks or audio inputs throughout the store so all you had to do is plug a source in locally and send the audio only to the zone or zones that need it.

“They love that now, instead of dragging out an entire sound system. All they have to do is take a wireless mic and plug it in. A lot of these improvements are how management was able to justify a larger budget for the new system: Instead of renting all that equipment many times each year, they can apply that to the new system and spend the money they end up saving on advertising.”

Faced with all these challenges, Essential Communications set out to spec a single system head end that would distribute the myriad audio needs to the store’s multiple zones effectively. “Initially,” Schwartz said, “when we talked about simply distributing music throughout the store, we needed to figure out how we were going to matrix the store and only deliver each of the five different musical programs we settled on—styles ranging from classical to hip hop—to only the right places.”

Schwartz’ team specified the BSS Soundweb programmable DSP system for its flexibility, control and deep network capabilities, putting out signal to QSC amps and a combination of more than 300 JBL and Tannoy speakers and subs. “This was a sizable matrix we were creating,” noted Schwartz. “We ended up with 32 inputs and 32 outputs and, with all the DSP that goes in between—EQs, limiters, duckers, compressors—switching it all had to be done seamlessly, because we’re talking about managers of a clothing store, not audio engineers.

Had to Be Simple

“This had to be really easy for them to use and implement, so we ended up putting in localized BSS ‘Jellyfish’ 9010 LCD remote devices that allowed them to select not only the source but adjust the volume and tone from within specific zoned areas. These remotes are also password protected so only an authorized manager can make those changes.”



The sound system also reaches the Holts Cafe.

The result was one streamlined, centralized but locally controlled audio system to replace the 25-system monster that had existed before. Taking up three 40-space racks in a specially built equipment closet located in the store's administrative area, the system was ready to go. Now all it needed was an equally efficient source to handle the store's voluminous music and automated paging needs.

Equipment

- 4 AKG WMS 80/880 wireless mic systems
- 13 ART 341 dual-channel 15-band graphic equalizers
- 2 Biamp Advantage MCA 8050 8-channel amps
- 1 Biamp Advantage MCA 8150 8-channel amp
- 8 Biamp Advantage TDT 150 70V transformers
- 8 Biamp Advantage TDT 50 70V transformers
- 2 BSS 9000 Soundweb network hubs
- 10 BSS 9010 Soundweb remote controls
- 5 BSS 9088ii Soundweb networked audio DSPs
- 3 BSS PSU24 standalone universal AC supplies
- 4 Denon DCM 270p 5-disc CD changers
- 3 Furman Pro Series 20A power PM Pro conditioner/monitors
- 19 JBL Control 19CST ceiling subwoofers
- 194 JBL control 26CT ceiling speakers
- 3 Lowell L262-70 40RU x 27" equipment cabinets w/accessories
- 1 QSC 1202V 2-channel power amp
- 3 QSC 602V 2-channel power amps
- 1 QSC ISA 300T power amp
- 4 QSC ISA 500T power amps
- 22 RCI custom mic/line input panels
- 1 RDL PS 24A 24V power supply
- 1 RDL PS 24U2 24V power supply
- 4 RDL STA1M universal mono line amps
- 17 RDL STM-1 universal mic preamps
- 4 RDL ST-PD5U switching supply distributors
- 1 RDL STR-19B racking system for modules
- 1 Shure SM58 paging mic
- 110 Tannoy CMS60ICT30 flushmount ceiling speakers
- 3 Trusonic digital 2-channel music players

List is edited from information supplied by Essential Communications.

Essential Communications chose a Trusonic music management solution to address this phase of the project. Consisting of a hardware box installed onsite at Holt Renfrew, Trusonic connects both to the store's sound system and to Trusonic's central server in California via high-speed internet, that delivers the music. Store management or Essential Communications personnel can interact easily with it via its Music Manager intuitive web interface, which allows for convenient programmed play, daily modifications to schedules and more.

"Holt Renfrew's requirement was that the music management/announcement system be hands-free with no human intervention," Schwartz stated. "No updating, no CDs, no touching—so it had to play music/announcements on a schedule and update itself automatically. Trusonic met all those criteria. It has playlists that we chose to play on specific channels as selected for various departments, based on assessments we made from meeting with management, and our own planning. There's a pretty diverse customer base with departments ranging from food to

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THE POWER OF MUSIC: HOLT RENFREW

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clothes to cosmetics, but we were able to narrow it down to five styles of music. We could have had more, but if you get too specific, you start to inch back to having all those different music genres, which was part of the original problem. Taken together, these approaches and systems allowed us to effectively address the three components we discussed earlier: consistency, volume and quality.”

Keeping Things Interesting

Keeping things interesting for both the store and their systems contractor along the way was the fact that the store had to stay open throughout this extensive sonic remodeling. “These renovations were moving from section to section, so we had to follow a very detailed plan,” Schwartz said. “We would bring sections of the store

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online as they were finished, but we could never test the whole system until it was 100% complete.”

According to Schwartz, the continuing evolution of retail audio reflects consumers’ increasingly heavy emphasis on what goes into their ears. “Music is more available than ever and people expect a better experience,” he said. “When you see the number of people wearing headsets on the street

or on public transportation, and see how many people are sharing music over the internet, it shows how important it is to them. When people go shopping or to restaurants, they’re expecting the same great experience they get at home. Otherwise, they’re not going to shop there. A project of this size can’t be left to chance, and retailers such as Holt Renfrew are recognizing that.”

From Moore’s perspective, the sound-quality upgrade has proved a serious enhancement to his Toronto flagship. “We have really noticed the difference,” he offered. “There’s a certain buzz in the store. The music elevates the mood when you walk in the door, and we’re paying attention to it. We have an incredible system now and, as we continue to evolve with the control it gives us over content, we feel like we’ve just scratched the surface,” Moore concluded. ■