

Best Buy Rising

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / August 10, 2008

It's no secret that Best Buy carries Apple iPods and iPhones. However, it is a secret for songwriters and composers that a major test has been going on between Apple and Best Buy. There's now Mac hardware and selected software in 300 of its 930 stores that began as a pilot program in 2006. And, thanks to a press release that never seemed to find its way to the music industry, an announcement was made at the January Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas that Best Buy store distribution of Macs was expanding. Products offered include notebooks and desktops and accessories.

According to [AppleInsider.com](#), after the January Consumer Electronic Show some financial analysts were confident that Best Buy would have Macs in 500-600 stores by the end of February 2008.

However, in speaking to Best Buy's Jeff Dudas, who handles media relationships for this segment, by end of year 2008, a little over 600 Best Buy stores, two-thirds of the chain, will be Apple Mac dealers.

This expanded distribution will be supported by Apple keeping an Apple Consultant (ACS) onsite with Best Buy's where there are Apple Stores. Where there's no ACS from Apple, there will be trained Best Buy personnel.

Fortunately for Film Music Weekly, after attending a training meeting, one of the Best Buy employees was given a DVD presentation of Best Buy's Mac plans and posted it on YouTube (video no longer available).

But that's not all.

According to Justin Barber, who handles the media relations for this next segment, Best Buy is also testing carrying those musical instruments that make up a rock band: electric guitars and basses, keyboards, drums, and DJ equipment. In three test stores, including the Best Buy in Riverside, California, there are high-end Martin Guitars.

To see the starting inventory, go to the Best Buy site and under search, type in guitars, basses, drums and keyboard.

For guitars and pedals, you'll find Fender, Gibson and Yamaha.

For keyboards, there's Casio, M-Audio and Yamaha.

For drums, there's only an electric drum pad and starter electronic drum set. With this, one test store is giving guitar lessons.

Given that the average age of those purchasing this gear is 45 – 47 and that most purchasers live in suburban and ex-urban areas, the match-up for Best Buy is ideal. And with Best Buy's strategy of having the top five computer brands in the U.S., it means that one store equals one buying center that competes with audioMIDI.com, Guitar Center, Sweetwater and independent specialized Mac stores which carry Macs, but aren't always savvy with Logic and Digital Performer.

Best Buy's computer choices include Dell, (also being carried by Guitar Center Pro), Gateway, Hewlett-Packard, and Toshiba.

Although limited in selection to start, you can buy online and in some stores, Mac Pro, MacBook, MacBook Pro and MacMini. For RAM, there's 2GB RAM modules.

If you have a Mac G5 and you want to expand, you can. Right now, Best Buy has a two-port eSATA card for Mac, eSATA cables and eSATA drives. If they're not in your local Best Buy, you can order online.

For software, there's only Final Cut Pro Express. No Apple Logic was listed.

So what does this mean for songwriters and composers?

It can mean a little or it can mean a lot. That's really up to Best Buy. What Best Buy has that no other chain has is the Geek Squad, if it's properly trained. Like advice from Home Depot or Lowe's, how good the advice and support is depends on how good the Mac specialists are in any one geographic area. That's the first level. The second level is whether anyone will be trained for our industry.

This is critical because there are things specific to MIDI and audio that salespeople and Geek Squad members will need to know. This includes knowledge about audio cards and MIDI interfaces. If nothing else, this could be a great opportunity for MOTU who has both, as does M-Audio, who already has a small presence there.

A hole in the Apple/Best Buy test is that you can't buy any audio cards outside of one card from Creative Labs that's PC only. For studios with multiple computers, Best Buy carries Linksys, but not the Linksys router for LAN connections.

However, these are minor points. Getting the Mac hardware from one source and audio/MIDI from another is really no big deal except for the inconvenience of not having everything MIDI in one store.

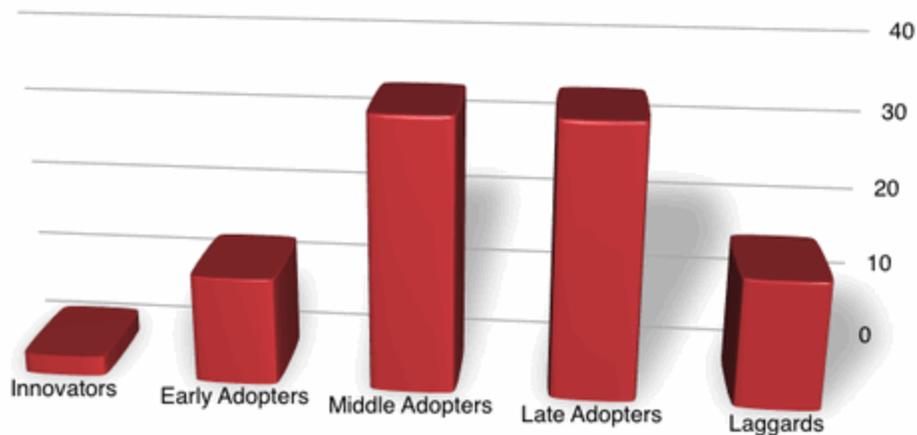
With Best Buy, you do have a great shopping experience with everything in one place. Can we say that about many local music stores carrying Macs or PCs especially where the sales staff is on location and has a 90% turnover a year?

So on that aspect, I see a real plus with Best Buy.

I also see that if Best Buy and Apple make this work, it could explode sales in music technology by leaps and bounds by exposing what's happening to millions of new customers with little to no knowledge as to what's happening with music production and computers today.

For example, the news media flecks to CES. But who in the news media flecks to NAMM?

Rogers Curve of Technology Adoption



Look at the chart I created for this article. This is called the Rogers Curve of Technology Adoption. There are five groups. Innovators represent just 2.5% of the market. They're the first to buy, are usually self-taught, and if you get one that's a salesperson, they're the first to say it's easy, you don't need a manual. (These salespeople also turn off lots of customers who discover after getting home and setting up, that they need a lot more than a manual!). The Innovators are also the ones to whom all the manuals, ads, and press releases are written, not to mention most product reviews.

Everyone else needs training.

Early Adopters represent 13.5% of the market. Middle and Late Adopters represent 34% each, and Laggards, which are usually institutions like schools and churches, represent 16%.

Early, Late and Middle adopters are the Best Buy market. And those segments alone represent millions of potential new sales.

The reason I bring up the Rogers Curve of Technology Adoption is that many years ago, Apple's PR guru, Regis McKenna, wrote a book called *The Regis Touch* in which he explained how Apple was using this information for its marketing and building word-of-mouth.

This now needs to be passed on to Best Buy for music technology, if it hasn't already.

Sadly, most software instrument developers have never heard of the Rogers Curve of Technology Adoption. The result is geek-to-geek PR and ads written in such a way that the content sails over the heads of the early to late adopters leaving them with the distinct impression that MIDI and recording is too hard, that they can't do it.

Yet, with the proper training, they can.

What will be interesting is whether or not the major players in music software come down from Mt. Olympus and get their act together with better quality control and the kind of realistic instruction that will entice Best Buy to bring them into Best Buy's distribution channel.

The flip side of all this is whether or not the Best Buy staff has what it takes to get out of Minneapolis to see what's really happening in music technology. And then, sitting down with the heads of the music

software development companies, lay out the cold facts of how they need to change and what they need to do so that Apple, Best Buy and the industry gets a big win.

And not a moment too soon.

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