

Louder than ever before

Loud Technologies CEO Mark Graham is revitalising some of pro audio's best loved brands. *Pro Audio Asia* finds out how as he touches down in Singapore to meet his team for the Palme Asia show

HAVING MOST RECENTLY SERVED as president of Crown International, Mark Graham was earmarked as the new CEO of Loud Technologies in October 2010. Once he had been convinced to assume this coveted position, he relocated by driving his wife, four biological and two adopted children, dog, cat and five kittens some 2,400 miles from Indiana near Chicago to Woodinville near Seattle. He is also driving the EAW, Mackie and Martin Audio brands with a clear vision for the future.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Asian Pacific market is also on the radar of Mr Graham, and he is currently enjoying seeing his master-plan unfold.

Upon tendering his resignation from Harman and being appointed by Loud Technologies, Mr Graham was given a two week window, which he put to good use. 'At the time, most employees at Loud didn't know I was coming onboard and I used it as a period of evaluation of the company,' he remembers. 'I researched their strengths, their weaknesses, the different brands, products and finances and such, so when I started in November, I had a head-start at least and a general sense of direction. This gave me confidence to interact with the team at Loud and I soon began to appreciate both the quality and the calibre of the employees here. From the outset, I realised that the business would improve quickly with this top-flight team around me.'

Mr Graham had obviously been concerned by some of the supply problems and delays that had dogged the EAW and Mackie brands several years ago in addition to a catalogue of faux pas that seem to plague larger organisations within what many still believe is a cottage industry.

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Mark Graham CEO of Loud Technologies

'I have definitely joined Loud at a time when it is enjoying an upward curve, but there was a lack of confidence there when I came onboard as the organisation had undergone a number of years of difficulty,' he reflects. 'It wasn't as though I was bringing great skills or a certain style of leadership with me – I simply wanted them to feel confident in their abilities again.'

Mr Graham recently completed the

decentralisation of the company's management structure. While previously a matrixed structure with key functions, like sales and marketing, shared across all brands, Mr Graham organised resources into three distinct, autonomous business units aligned around a brand, or

joy back and I'm doing everything I can to help them flourish. You could see the guys breathe a sigh of relief when I first met them – it was as though they realised that this guy understands them and gets it.'

The confidence he has instilled within his teams and the excitement

at the highest levels. I want him to see what opportunities exist in the market and for him to be given the tools to achieve them. We just added Clifford Nathan as general manager, China, who now oversees our business interests there. He previously worked for Avid for many

I felt they had to invest huge capital into the business and allow me to invest appropriately in R&D, because it's all about new products. And they were absolutely on board. Now I have all the tools to do things the way I feel good about and I'm having a blast. Look at Martin Audio's MLA. That kind of innovation is what drives these brands forward and it's exciting. I wouldn't have been interested in Loud if it was just commodities.'

Martin Audio recently split its mainland China distribution into three verticals, electing Pacific Budee to handle its installed and touring products, Beijing In Star for the cinema products and Dah Chong Hong for its entertainment systems. Mr Graham is a keen supporter of the strategy.

'It was an intelligent move,' he observes. 'From my experience, distributors are usually strong in one or perhaps two vertical sectors and weaker in others. You have to engage with the local market and deliver a product that is in demand. If you force the agenda, you will lose. Look at the cars in China – the successful models are spin offs of Buick, Audi and Volkswagen, but they're not models you'd see on Western roads.'

Reassuringly, Mr Graham is keen to downplay the public limited company image. 'Loud is a big business, but we're not a super-power and so the focus has to be on what I like to think of as boutique brands,' he implies, pointing out that his business card carries a listing of the individual Loud brands rather than the overall Loud Technologies one.

'I really want to inject a less corporate image and make ourselves more personable, in which each brand comes across as a Special Forces team – athletic and muscular – rather than a collective PLC. It's better to be an entrepreneur in business in order to connect with customers and engage with them rather than introducing yourself as a CEO of a PLC. We can play to strengths however and be big enough to be formidable but small enough to be responsive.'

When it comes to brand values, Mr Graham knows that their maximum potential lies in letting them be themselves. 'You can't squeeze them into a common model. If you force the organisation to be too centralised the brands lose their unique identities. We went to Anthony Taylor and said "Okay, you are the GM of Martin Audio and have the control". We promoted Jeff Rocha of EAW the same way, allowing him



Mark Graham, CEO of Loud Technologies

group of brands: EAW, Martin Audio and Music Gear Group (or 'MG', consisting of the Ampeg, Crate and Mackie brands).

Each has full span of control over their business and is led by a president with full P&L responsibility: Jeff Rocha, EAW president and GM; Anthony Taylor, Martin Audio president and managing director; and Alex Nelson, MG president and GM.

they effuse has spread to the Asian Pacific sales and technical team as well as the regional distributors. The company as a whole is enjoying a general 22 per cent year-on-year growth in sales, but in Asia the number is a staggering 60 per cent increase.

Mr Graham believes, however, that the APAC region's breakneck growth requires in-market leadership with executive-level engagement and support to execute the business units' vision. 'I'm really excited as we have now promoted Dawinder Sheena to APAC managing director,' he reveals. 'Dawinder and his team will manage all business interests, market-development strategy, and sales team and distributor relationships for all Loud brands in the region. To do so, Dawinder will partner with the business units and get their full support to implement these plans, as well as access corporate resources to get things done in the region.'

'I want Dawinder to think of our entire presence in APAC as his business as he is a really capable business manager who can operate

years, speaks four different Chinese dialects, understands the culture and feels part of the team here. He reports directly to Dawinder, as my goal is to encourage local business ownership and ensure that Woodinville isn't telling these guys what to do and what not to do.

'Everything from management and sales channels to market development and strategies will be handled by the team in Asia. I'm also encouraging Adrian Bell, our SVP of corporate communications and market development, to spend an extended period of time in market to put some heft behind Dawinder's efforts to ensure our team in the region gets some early, strong traction.'

Although there are parallels running between Loud and Harman, Mr Graham sees it differently. 'Harman's a great organisation, but ultimately it's a much bigger machine than Loud. In my dialogue with Sun Capital it was understood that I could be the kind of leader that I wanted to be, and I think we all want to succeed or fail on our own terms.'

'I was very candid with Sun Capital.

the autonomy. In fact, we're letting them compete, because they each approach problems in their own way and produce individual solutions. They're empowered as a result – I simply coach and mentor their activities and provide investment where needed. Jeff Rocha is extremely sharp and passionate – he would bleed EAW. With his promotion I see the excitement and the motivation there and I'm happy for him to assert the strategic direction, whilst I observe and offer help when needed.'

Having been suited and booted as a corporate executive for nine years, Mr Graham seems to be blossoming in his new role as CEO at Loud Technologies, adopting a casual but smart jeans and shirt attire. 'Education is a big focus for EAW, Mackie and Martin Audio in the Asian region and we're bringing in three sales managers for each brand to report under Dawinder,' he explains. 'They will be encouraged to assess the market needs and the business units and HQ will support their judgements. The more educated the customer, the more likely he is to favour the product. For example, Sanecore is going to be demonstrating KF740 rigs in China later this year. Musiclink will also be on the road in Australia for Mackie. Jerrold Stevens joined us recently from PMK Consultants and he is going to be visiting the Asian Pacific region a lot in the future.'



Enjoying his new role as CEO: Mark Graham

'After Singapore, he's travelling to Sri Lanka and then Indonesia to see customers, dealers and consultants. We're encouraging feedback from customers so we can offer them unique solutions to whatever problems they may have. There's a definite need for off the shelf products. We're also bringing back the EAW cinema line of speakers specifically for the Asian market as this is where the growth is – it's not in America or Europe. We're going to be localising product development across the brands though, just as Martin Audio has with some of their karaoke speakers.'

Mr Graham speaks enthusiastically about all three business units and their brands, but almost feels guilty behaving in such a manner having been faithful to one particular brand for almost a decade prior. 'I actually feel like a polygamist,' he laughs. 'These are very unique brands and if you apply a homogenous brush to them, you would end up with a lot less than you would if you encouraged individuality and internal competition. At Mackie, I now see the fun, creativity and the uniqueness there and from that we're starting to see some pretty edgy innovations, which are, dare I say it, really exciting! I'm having so much fun witnessing all this, I feel guilty sometimes that I am actually getting paid for this!'

Mr Sheena has seen most of his Loud managers come and go over the five year period he has been their employee, but is clearly enjoying his role as never before. 'Mark has the vision and we have embraced it. We're at last empowered, and supported, to do things we have never been able to do, but with Mark's blessing as he truly understands where we are coming from. Not only that, but all the distributors are now in tune and picking up the same confidence that anything is possible. There was a huge contingent of Asian Pacific distributors who travelled to Infocomm in Orlando as they couldn't wait to see what we were launching.'

As Mr Graham departs Palme Asia for his flight back to Seattle, he leaves something of a lasting impression amongst his team, the distributors and the customers he has met. Confidence may bring success, but he is also fine-tuning the three distinct business units, and their brands, under his stewardship by empowering individuals who have at long last been handed the opportunity to demonstrate their ideas and virtues, that until his arrival were largely kept under lock and key.

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SOUNDCRAFT Vi6 AT HEART OF CUTTING EDGE INDIAN MUSIC TV SHOW

INDIA: A popular Indian live music television show is using a Soundcraft Vi6 to help deliver on-the-spot collaborations between musicians from vastly different genres. Called *Coke Studio @ MTV*, the show is based on the already successful *Coke Studio* project, which started in Brazil in 2007 and then went to Pakistan the following year.

Mumbai's Sound & Light Professionals (SNL Pro) provided the full audio set-up for the Coca-Cola-sponsored TV show, which encourages famous musicians from different genres to jam together and then record the results on camera.

Each hour long episode features six songs comprising a diverse mixture of styles from Carnatic and



The Soundcraft Vi6 in place for *Coke Studio @ MTV*

Hindustani to compositions by new musicians, recreated Bollywood tracks, and a special song created on the show. Among the stars that have appeared are Shafqat Ali, Shruti Pathak, Sunidhi Chauhan, Kailash Kher, Papon, Shankar Mahadevan, Khogen Da, Bombay Jayshree, Richa Sharma and Rashid Khan among others.

The Vi6 console was selected for

its ease of use, as SNL Pro director Manish Mavani explained: 'SNL has a vast selection of equipment to choose from and we had to ensure a very high quality mix in a project that required the best possible multitrack recording for post production. We chose the Vi6 for its convenient operation, and tried and tested performance'.

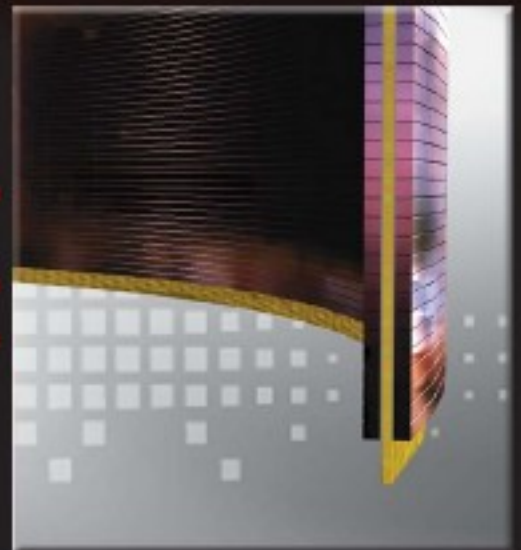
Meanwhile, Ankush Agarwal, senior marketing manager for Harman Professional India, added: 'We are extremely excited to be part of this popular and unique show where the Soundcraft Vi6 has been successfully deployed by our long term partners, SNL Professionals'.

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