

# MUSIC TO YOUR POCKETS



If there is one sector of the coin-op industry that has enjoyed a revival in recent years – it is the jukebox. Digital technology has given jukeboxes a new lease of life. Now, the way music is stored, paid for and delivered has changed beyond all recognition, not only within the industry itself but in the world at large.

Gone are the huge warehouses where CDs were distributed to jukeboxes across the country. Gone is the fiddly process where labels were printed with the track names and artists artwork. Gone are the wasted album tracks that never got played. And, thankfully, gone are the many visits necessary to load new CDs into the boxes in the first place.

Most of the big names of jukebox production remain involved in the coin-op sector. Some, such as Rock-Ola have decided to concentrate on consumer sales. Rock-Ola sold its commercial division to AMI in June of this year. Wurlitzer is also predominantly selling to collectors, trading on what is arguably the most famous name in the business.

Sound Leisure has enjoyed huge demand for its range of “Nostalgia” jukeboxes and designed a new model this year, which was a homage to the 1946 Wurlitzer 1015, which remains to this day, the biggest selling jukebox of all time.

But for the most part, the jukeboxes that one sees in pubs and clubs in Europe are now a far cry from

the bubble tubes, chrome and carved wood that marked the glory years of the 1950s.

Jukeboxes have basically become computers. The differences between them depend on the amount of tracks they can hold, the amount of tracks they have access to – via the internet – and whether they have any add-on features, such as video, music downloads and bingo.

What really differentiates the various suppliers of jukeboxes in the market today is service and cost. Whether a jukebox has ten thousand tracks or 20,000 tracks on its hard-drive is probably not going to make a huge amount of difference to cashbox. But the number and frequency of updates for new releases is crucial. “We have noted that over 80 per cent of the plays on our jukeboxes is chart music or new releases,” says James Luck from Sound Leisure’s music supply partner Soundnet.

Cost is obviously the other issue. Gamestec, the UK’s leading gaming machine and jukebox operator, has launched a new cost-effective digital jukebox. The GT Music meets demand from licensees for a cheaper digital music solution. It has been developed by Sound Leisure and is only available from Gamestec.

The GT Music offers pub goers a selection of 10,000 tracks, to suit any venue. The music is updated regularly

using ‘Intelligent Music Management Software’ (IMMS), which provides each site with a customer driven and profitable selection of music by adding tracks to the jukebox, based on previous customer selection trends.

Profiling and music management are the other major concerns for a jukebox operator. Making sure that the music that is available to the site is suitable for the site and remains so, is a priority.

“The UK is the main user of profiling and this is something Sound Leisure and Soundnet have championed since the introduction of the digital product,” says Sound Leisure Managing Director Chris Black. “There are a few important elements to profiling, it is not just ensuring that the tracks the site would like appear on the box are available for selection, it is much more important in many cases to ensure that the tracks that the site does not want don’t appear on the machine. Heavy Rock tracks that appear at lunch time in a country pub can be devastating to trade, likewise Glenn Miller playing at 9pm in a city centre site can obviously have the same effect on clientele.”

As for the add-ons, such as downloads or bingo – these are also very site specific. TAB Austria has developed “music to go” for its MAX FIRE jukeboxes. “On-the-move





entertainment has become more and more important recently," says the company's Managing Director Siegfried Dattl jr. "Everyone wants to have the latest music on the way to work, the gym or when at home in the evening. With "music to go", the direct transfer of music and video is possible. Via Bluetooth or USB interface the latest songs and videos may be loaded –

ready for the road – at the touch of a finger – on your mobile phone, MP3 player or USB stick."

NSM has also worked hard on "value added" features for its jukeboxes, which are attractive to both the operator and the user. You Tube™ was added to the new Icon 2 box earlier this year and coin drop in many venues has increased phenomenally, according to the company's Alex Kirby.

Both Sound Leisure/Soundnet and TAB Austria feature charts on their jukeboxes. Sound Leisure Milestones in Music jukeboxes feature every audio track in the Top 40, since charts began 55 years ago in 1952 and the AV version shows every available video from the Top 10 since 1980. The TAB charts function, features the US Hot 100, UK Top 75, German Top 100 and Austrian Top 40.

Video has definitely undergone something of a resurgence since jukeboxes have become digital. Back in the days of CD – adding video was a cumbersome and sometimes unreliable process and the numbers of available chart videos was not huge. This has changed, now that video files can be as easily downloaded as music files.

"In the right site, video jukes will take more money than anything else out there, the knack is identifying the site," says Chris Black. "There are a few operators in the UK that have got this just right and are making extremely good money from video. It is also fair to say that the bars that have

these units in are also benefiting immensely compared to many of their competition that don't have them. We have recently run tests with a major Brewer in the UK using the Milestones AV technology. We replaced VVS computers which was our last video Juke technology and simply replaced the PC in the existing cabinet with the latest MIM AV technology and showed a 35% increase over 21 sites over a three-month period - that is when you know that you have got the technology correct."

TAB Austria is also a great promoter of video technology. "Music videos strengthen the emotional statements made by music tracks," says Dattl. "Jukeboxes with video such as the MAX FIRE allow a more intense connection with the music. Live recordings of rock concerts or other chronicles of super shows become exciting and vivid contemporary documentaries that we want to play again and again; they also allow us to reminisce," he adds.

Other jukebox suppliers, such as Jaybox have their reasons for not including video output. "We have no plans to incorporate video as we prefer to focus on the biggest selection of music we can supply, whereas video offerings are limited by speed and bandwidth," says the company's Richard Elsy. But all Jaybox machines do go out with a Bingo game, which can automatically call numbers.

"Everyone is looking at different

ways of using jukeboxes, most of which, although there has been a lot of hype have not amounted to a great deal in the cash box," admits Chris Black. "We firmly believe that we need to offer different services from the Jukebox, however this should not be at the detriment of the music offering. The latest Milestones Unlimited technology is available with Bingo that can be used on a quiet night to pull people into the bar, hopefully then when they are there and the game has finished they will then use the machine to play music again."

It is difficult to predict where technology will lead jukeboxes in the future. Sound Leisure and Soundnet recently launched the Rock Box – a jukebox dedicated solely to rock sites. So perhaps, greater specification to individual sites will be the key.

This is certainly the feeling of TAB, "The development of online networks will ensure a future where individualization is tailor-made according to the particular venue," says Siegfried Dattl jr.

Richard Elsy from Jaybox believes: "The increased availability of broadband with – hopefully – improved service, will allow more sites to be offered online machines. Remote monitoring and online diagnostics will cut operator costs and we envisage more sites where direct debiting or invoicing will remove the need for collections. The development of 3G coverage will help this greatly."

