



## White Paper

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# JBL Professional Guide to Business Music

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The purpose of this guide is to equip users of business music with practical, non-technical information which can help in the process of purchasing commercial sound systems. It is intended to support the efforts of system designers, and their customers.

The audience for this guide includes architects, interior designers, space planners, building developers, purchasing agents, business executives, and project managers with responsibility for entertainment and communications systems in commercial spaces.

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## What is Business Music?

Business Music is pre-recorded music played in commercial establishments for business purposes. It can be used for any combination of the following goals:

- Relieve stress and create a pleasant atmosphere.
- Enhancing employee productivity.
- Reinforce brand identity and marketing messages.
- Mask ambient noise & provide speech privacy.
- Entertain customers to foster increased business, as in restaurants and retail stores.

### Business Music's Roots

Business music history goes back to the early part of the 20th century. Among the early research was the “stimulus progression” studies of the late 1940’s, which documented the benefits of playing music in office and industrial environments to enhance worker morale and productivity.

## Types of Business Music

**1. Background Music:** Business music played at low levels, also known as ambient or environmental music. Most often found in offices, medical facilities, hotels, and retail spaces.

Background music is often noticed only in its absence, like when awkward silence fills a hotel lobby, superstore aisle, or employee break room.

Background music is instrumental music--no vocals--and is generally recorded specifically for business music applications.

**2. Foreground Music:** Business music played at audio levels higher than background music, but lower than dance club or concert music. Most often found in restaurants, theme parks, health clubs, and fashion retail spaces, foreground music is designed to be noticed and enjoyed as entertainment. Both vocals and instrumentals are programmed, and the music may include popular hits by original artists as well as specially-recorded theme-oriented selections.



## What Business Music Is Not

Business music needs to be distinguished from three other forms of music and entertainment. Business music is not:

**1. Live performance:** This is generally music performed live for the expressed purpose of entertainment. Examples range from church choirs to live dance bands to concert tours.

**2. Home entertainment:** Whether hi fi audio, home theater, or computer games, this type of music and sound is for personal recreation in a private environment.

**3. Cinema soundtracks:** The audio and music in a movie theater, while similar to business music in some respects, is specially recorded, programmed, and reproduced for cinema environments.



## Sources of Programming

Where does a business get its music? There are a variety of potential sources.

**1. Professional Programming Services:** A number of professional programming services provide pre-programmed music on a subscription (fee) basis. Programming services handle licensing and royalty issues and offer advice on how to best correlate music to your specific business purposes. They may also offer additional services like video programming, system design and installation, and data transmission.

**2. Radio and television:** Some businesses tune the radio or TV (broadcast, satellite, or cable) to a station which best suits their respective environments and needs. While the music is free, commercial establishments are still liable for usage fees to performance rights organizations like ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC. Further, broadcast music tends to include commercials, network ID's, and news/talk programming which may be distracting and counter-productive.

**3. Local origination:** Some businesses set up audio/video systems to play off-the-shelf records or personally-programmed compilations on cassette, CD, VHS, DVD, or Laserdisc. Such recordings are also subject to licensing regulations in business environments.



## Worldwide Business Music Trends

Music--from classical to rock to ethnic--is a universal language. The music industry is truly global and artists from a wide range of music styles are recognized around the world. Consumers enjoy and expect to hear music in public spaces. The limited selection of previous decades has given way to a business music menu including dozens of styles.

## Key trends

### **1. Increased Demand for Quality Sound:**

The collective “ears” of consumers around the world have gotten better in the digital era. We don’t settle for “telephone-quality” (limited bandwidth) sound in our cars or homes, and thus expect comparable quality in public spaces.

### **2. Time of day programming:**

For example, the music played during breakfast and morning coffee breaks is different from “happy hour”.

**3. Wider selection:** Merchants and their customers like variety and want to be able to choose from among many options.



## Audio as a Design Element

Increasingly, businesses are using audio as an environmental design element. Like the furniture, fixtures, wall and floor coverings, and lighting in a commercial space, sound and music is an essential part of the ambiance. As a business person, it is as important to reckon with your audio and music needs as you would each of the other design factors.

The audio system in your place of business delivers sound to the places you specify. In determining your technical system needs, the simplest way to begin is to identify what you want to have happen in your environment. The range of needs includes paging, signaling, background music, and foreground music. See the “How Do I Decide?” section below for a short list of questions to ask yourself before engaging a contractor or making a purchase decision.

## Premium vs. Commodity Audio Systems

Many business music systems in use today were designed and installed prior to the introduction of compact disks in 1984. As a result, those older systems may need to be brought up to today’s audio standards in order to be commercially viable. For example, older systems were used only for voice paging and limited-bandwidth background music. They worked fine for speech and for music which was recorded to be un-noticed.

The growth of foreground music and themed entertainment since the mid-1970’s have combined with the digital revolution to drive the need for premium quality sound systems in virtually every business environment.

**Premium systems** are capable of the following:

- Able to be played at higher volume levels without breaking up or compromising sound fidelity.
- Able to be played at lower volume levels without losing their fullness, warmth and musicality.

- Able to reproduce both speech and music through the same system with proper intelligibility and even coverage.

In other words, commodity quality (pre-digital era) systems are OK for speech and some music, but premium quality systems can handle all three: paging, background, and foreground music.

## **Enhancing Sales and Image Through Quality Sound**

Using premium quality audio systems can help increase sales.

When customers stay longer and feel better about a retail environment, they buy more. The stores and restaurants with the highest sales per square foot are the ones who are most careful about sound quality, music programming, and customer satisfaction.

Better sound also reinforces the quality image of your business.

Once you have built a beautiful looking environment, it is only natural to make the “audio environment” consistent in quality. This applies in offices and professional buildings as well as retail and themed entertainment venues.

For example, successful fashion retail stores focus on highly targeted clientele who love music and entertainment. Industry leaders are careful to program music which attracts and holds customers. They use premium quality systems to get the message across.

The restaurant business is similar. In most successful national restaurant chains, music and quality sound is part of the design of the business environment. These considerations are equally important for independent stores and fine dining establishments as for the national chains.



## How Do I Decide?

*What kind of system do I need?*

*How much will it cost?*

*Where do I get help?*

These are important questions which thankfully have simple answers. The first step is to relate your system needs to your business objectives. Ask yourself the following questions.

1. Do I want to be able to adapt my business environment easily as my needs--both technical and marketing--change over time?
2. Do I rely on themed music and/or entertainment as part of my business environment?
3. Do I need to increase sales?
4. Do I need to attract and retain customers?
5. Do I need to attract and retain employees?

6. Do I want to create an aesthetically pleasing business environment?

7. Do I want to differentiate my business from that of my competitors?

8. Do I want to send a message of quality or "high class" to customers and employees?

9. Do I want my business environment to be as pleasant and inviting to my customers as their home or car?

10. Do I want to feel as good about my music system as I do about my furniture, fixtures, lighting, and infrastructure?

If you answered YES to any of the above, you can benefit from installing a premium quality audio system in your business. The premium vs. commodity decision is relatively easy to make in this light.



## Will a Premium System Cost More?

The installed cost for business music systems in the US ranges from \$0.75 to \$10.00 per square foot (at time of this paper's publication). While this is a wide range, it is finite and controllable.

Premium systems do not necessarily cost more than commodity systems. Audio technology has improved so much in recent years that the cost difference between commodity and premium systems has narrowed substantially. Depending on your specific needs and architectural requirements, there may be little or no difference in system purchase price. Compared to commodity systems, premium systems often involve fewer individual speakers and lower installation costs to achieve excellent performance.

As such the system "pays for itself" very quickly. Depending on your situation, this may be a function of increased sales and profit margins or better control of employee costs and productivity.



## Where To Get Help

Authorized JBL Professional dealers and specifiers are in the business of designing and installing business music systems. In the U.S. contact JBL Professional at 800-852-5776. Outside the U.S. contact the JBL Distributor in your country. You can find their name and contact information on the JBL Professional web page [www.jblpro.com](http://www.jblpro.com).



JBL Professional  
8500 Balboa Boulevard, P.O. Box 2200  
Northridge, California 91329 U.S.A.  
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BusMus Guide  
4/98

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