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Cover photo by Jukka Montonen

SOLUTION-BASED SERVICE

WESTLAKE PRO'S SERVICE HAS HELPED IT ACHIEVE A REPUTATION AS THE GO-TO PRO-AUDIO DEALER AND STUDIO INSTALLER ACROSS THE NATION

WRITTEN BY **KATIE KAILUS**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JUKKA MONTONEN**

In business, location means everything. However, very few MI or pro-audio dealers feel quite the impact from their location as Los Angeles-based Westlake Pro. Within a five-mile radius of the store's Universal City, California, showroom sits Universal Studios, Warner Brothers Studios and the Walt Disney Studios. Head a few miles south, and you'll find ABC, NBC, Technicolor, 20th Century Fox and The Village Studios. All are Westlake Pro clients. While its location in the center of the entertainment capital of the world definitely helps pull in some big names, it's Westlake Pro's top-of-the-line service that makes it a go-to source for all things audio and sound.

"Our sales staff is truly incredible," said George Adjieff, CEO of Westlake Pro. "We have the most incredible audio sales staff in the country. I don't want to speak out of turn — there are a bunch of good guys out there — but as a group of people together under one roof, we have the best team anywhere."



WestlakePro
Pro Audio & Video



George Adjieff and Joe Taupier



Westlake Pro's headquarters in Universal City, California, is home to its pro-audio showroom, its outside sales force, a video and clinic space, and several studio installation setups.

And it's that team that for the past few decades has positioned Westlake Pro at the forefront of the pro-audio industry. Since 1971, Westlake has been a part of the audio scene in many different iterations. Formerly a part of West LA Music, Adjieff and company president Joe Taupier, who have both been involved with Westlake since 2005, purchased the company through a management buyout from West LA Music in 2012. Today, Westlake Pro boasts about 11,000 square feet of space across all of its properties which includes a warehouse in Burbank, California, and its showroom, demo studios and offices in Universal City where its outbound sales team continues to offer five-star service to its clients.

"We are not your typical store where there might a lot of clerking going on where people come in, ask for something and leave with something," Taupier said. "Our guys are involved a lot technically with the sale. We are professional sales. And that definition in my mind is solution-based sales, which is, when we have a client, they have a certain expectation of knowledge that we need to have to be able to have conversations with them and meet their needs."

"Relationships are what's important to us as a company ... that's why we are where we are. Our sales culture is really relationship based."

- Joe Taupier

Westlake is always looking to hire talented people with a passion for audio who want to learn this segment of the business.

"We've always had long lasting relationships, so we don't have a high turnover," Adjieff said. "But, when we are looking for new talent, we look to the area schools which are constantly looking to place people. There are a lot of avenues for that. Los Angeles is a big town. It is an entertainment community, so there are a lot of talented people."

BOOMING INSTALLATION BUSINESS

While Westlake sells a wide range of microphones, headphones, cables, inter-

faces and other recording gear, its studio installation business is one to be emulated. With several demo studios available for viewing at the company's showroom, Adjieff estimates Westlake does anywhere from 60-75 studio installations a year — for some of the top names in the music and entertainment business.

"We are in the process of doing [Guns N' Roses' guitarist] Slash's room and [guitarist] Ray Parker Jr.'s room," Adjieff said, adding that they've also done studio rooms for Tool bassist Justin Chancellor and hip-hop artist Snoop Dogg. Aside from the musical heavyweights, the company has also sold and integrated all of the equipment for the

YouTube pro-audio talk show Pensado's Place — garnering much attention from its audiophile following and helping put the company on the map.

"A lot of our installations are here in Los Angeles," Adjieff said. "But we also do a lot of work across the country, including Salt Lake City, Boston and we recently did a six-month installation in Mumbai, India."

Recently, Westlake Pro got a call from the government, but, for once, this was a good call. The Department of Homeland Security in Chicago reached out asking Westlake to install a Cedar Cambridge forensic audio system.

Additionally, Westlake Pro is on a first-name basis with the various film lots across Los Angeles, regularly installing consoles and studios.

"Over the past few months, we've installed probably eight consoles at NBC and Universal Studios," Adjieff said. "We deal with the big film lots on practically a daily basis — Universal Studios, Walt Disney, Technicolor and Warner Brothers. We feel confident about doing that work for them, and they feel confident working with us as opposed to maybe just a freelancer."

A large majority of that confidence comes from Westlake's sales staff and studio technicians putting an emphasis on nurturing those relationships.

"Relationships are what's important to us as a company," Taupier said. "Nurturing that culture. That is why we are where we are. We have the best clients in the world. They are extremely loyal. Our sales culture is really relationship-based. Cultivating new clients is based off of the clients we already have and getting referrals off of that. It's been that way for us for years."

SMALLER SALES MATTER

While studio and sound installations are a large part of the business, the Westlake Pro still grabs new clients through the sale of microphones, headphones and cables at both its showroom and on its website.

"We think of [our sales structure] as a pyramid," Adjieff said. "The base, which is the biggest part, is typically a beginning DJ or first-time guitar player or electric keyboardist. Those [clients] are serviced well



In its showroom, Westlake Pro features several different fully functioning studio setups that display both product and installation work.

by the big box houses. A certain amount of those people get into a different mode and get more serious about it, and that's the middle of the pyramid. When you get to the top of the pyramid you get into the professional people. While some of the larger stores deal with that bottom part of the pyramid really well, at some point, people don't want to keep going to 'Target' to buy their gear. They want to get a more specialized experience, and they end up graduating to us. And so we deal mostly with the serious hobbyists to the really high-end professional. But, we still get shoppers coming in looking for a new microphone."

As Roland and Yamaha dealers, Westlake Pro offers an assorted range of MI gear on

its website, including keyboards, electronic drums and guitar amps.

"While the high-end audio gear does well on the Web, the way to get a lot of those people as clients at first is through the smaller things," Adjieff said. "Nobody plugs a microphone into nothing. So, one way for us to get some of the larger business often times is to start smaller and get the smaller sales first."

Additionally, Westlake Pro has a strong used and vintage business, mainly from its eBay site, that has grabbed the attention of a large number of clients across the nation.

"There are some people out there that all they care about is used or vintage," Taupier said. "It gives us a whole other avenue to offer them products and service them."



Westlake Pro's showroom features a wide array of microphones, headphones, interfaces, cables and recording equipment for all levels of recording professionals.

CREATING AN INFORMATIONAL OUTLET

Another way Westlake Pro has established itself as a leading source for sound and audio is through educational posts on its blog. Adjieff said the posts are not sales-driven, but instead focus on teaching and informing its readers about the products it offers.

“One of our biggest initiatives right now is that we’re constantly shooting new content for the blog,” Adjieff said. “We want to show our clients how the gear works and how new workflows available through different technology works. It’s really informative, and it drives awareness of our company. We are not just trying to sell something — sales are going to happen as they are going to happen.”

From studio engineers like Alan Sides explaining his new Ocean Way Audio speaker line to Grammy-winning artists and producers explaining how they mixed their records, Westlake Pro’s blog highlights all things audio, including up-and-coming artists, giving them a platform to promote their work while also sharing their methods

with Westlake’s audience.

“You don’t have to be Slash or Snoopy Dogg to be featured on the blog,” Adjieff said. “We like to showcase people who are up-and-coming and doing really cool stuff. It could be indie producers that you’ve never heard of or artists that are doing neat demo projects that are really inventive. We showcase a lot of the people that in that middle section of the pyramid. We’ll focus on a great client of ours that has done something with us and promote that because maybe they have a great workflow that could speak to a lot of other people.”

Once a video is uploaded to the blog, Westlake’s marketing team will blast it across its social media pages.

“Right now we are doing a post-production studio for Levels Audio, which does the post for shows such as NBC’s *The Voice* as well as the Grammys and the Oscars,” Taupier said. “As we are working on the studio, our social media person will go there and get daily updates.”

Adjieff and Taupier said collaborating with their clients is a mutually beneficial

relationship.

“It’s like free publicity for them,” Adjieff said. “We’ll get it out there and thousands of people will see it. We look at the relationship with our clients as partnerships. Especially with how content-driven everything is now with social media. It’s more content for them. In fact, we’ve never had anyone say, ‘No, I don’t want to be promoted.’ Most of the clients are passionate about what they’ve done. They want to get it out there, and they want to show it off. It helps us, and it helps them.”

In addition to its blogging efforts, Westlake Pro hosts regular clinics with manufacturers and artists about every six weeks, bringing in around 125 attendees each time.

“Frequently manufacturers will come to us because they want someone to partner with and sometimes they’ll bring an artist in,” Adjieff said. “Oftentimes, we will call them up and tell them we have a client who uses their stuff and ask if they want to do a clinic. Again, it’s not really a sales tactic, but more to show people how to use it.”

Westlake Pro records all of its clinics for

use on its blog and social media as well as live streams them on the Internet and throughout the showroom for overflow attendees.

“Our clinics are always well-attended,” Adjieff said. “The community is into it, and we do a lot to promote them through email blasts as well as making sure the sales team promotes them during their calls.

Additionally, Westlake’s marketing team sets attendance goals for its clinics and works meticulously to meet them.

“We know how many people are signing up, and we know if we are flat or sharp to that goal,” Adjieff said. “If we need to do more, we will promote more. We are focused on hitting goals and making sure that if we bring a vendor in here there will be plenty of people for them to get their product in front of.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Adjieff and Taupier have big plans for Westlake Pro’s future, which includes increasing its Web-based sales, as well as its house of worship and restaurant installations.

“We have the cream of the crop when it comes to our clients,” Taupier said. “We work with some extremely talented people that we are fortunate enough to call our customers and friends. We are very fortunate that they have brought us to where we are today. And our employees, not just the sales staff, but our whole team — operations, marketing and warehousing — are phenomenal. We have a great team, and they are all a big part of what has made us successful.” **MI**

5 KEYS TO TAKING CARE OF BIG-TICKET CUSTOMERS

WESTLAKE PRO’S GEORGE ADJIEFF DEALS WITH BIG-TICKET CUSTOMERS ON A DAILY BASIS. WHEN HANDLING CUSTOMERS THAT ARE MAKING LARGE PURCHASES, ADJIEFF ADVISES TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

1. MAKE SURE THE CLIENT IS DEALING WITH AN ENTERPRISE-LEVEL SALESPERSON WHO CAN HANDLE COMPLEX SALES. ALL RESPONSES SHOULD BE PROMPT, CLEAR AND CONCISE.
2. BE SURE THE DIRECTIONS ON THE PURCHASE ORDER AND INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE CLIENT ARE FOLLOWED TO THE LETTER.
3. PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS!
4. EXHIBIT THE SAME SENSE OF URGENCY AS THE CLIENT.
5. FOLLOW UP AFTER THE TRANSACTION TO MAKE SURE ALL PARTS OF THE SALE WENT WELL.