

# **Trans World pumps up FYE brand name with star appearances**

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**by Robin Wood**

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When Guilderland-based music and video retailer Trans World Entertainment Corp. consolidated its mall stores last year under the FYE name, the goal was to unify the brand and create excitement. At a Jan. 29 appearance of the boy band Dream Street at the Colonie Center FYE store, the strategy definitely was working.

By 10 minutes before the band's scheduled appearance at 4 p.m., the area outside the store was filled with hundreds of fans, mostly girls and young women. Store officials estimated that at least half had bought a Dream Street CD, video or DVD before getting in line to meet the band.

Colonie teenager Heather had a Valentine teddy bear to give to Frankie, her favorite Dream Street band member. She and her sister, Michele, and friend, Mallory, said they'd bought the band's CD when it first came out last year. The girls said they buy about 20 CDs a year and shop in FYE regularly.

Dream Street's appearance, and one scheduled for Jan. 31 by exercise guru Richard Simmons, are part of FYE's marketing campaign "Never Stop Playing." The company identifies performers who are building buzz promoting tours, albums or movies, and brings them into FYE stores, said Mark Hogan, Trans World's vice president of marketing.

An increasing number of products and services are competing for consumer entertainment dollars, Hogan said, and the celebrity appearances make FYE stand out among its competition and bring consumers into the stores.

FYE's marketing is targeted at a core demographic of consumers 14 to 34, but the celebrity appearances deliberately promote performers who appeal to different groups.

"We're about youthful fun entertainment, but that can mean people of all ages," Hogan said.

Sales at brick-and-mortar stores still represent the vast majority of sales, according to industry statistics collected by the New Jersey-based National Association of Recording Merchandisers. But changing technology could make online music distribution the venue of choice in the future.

Some consumers in FYE's core demographic group, including 27-year-old Troy resident Jason Paddock, already keep most of their music collections on a computer. Paddock said he likes FYE stores for the selection and ability to sample a CD before buying it, but he only buys four or five CDs a year. He discovered MP3 downloadable digital music files a couple of years ago, and now has about 1,000 in his collection.

But Marco Scibora, president and CEO of Advanced Communication Design Inc. of Minneapolis, which develops interactive merchandising systems for music retailers, said Paddock is still the exception to the rule.

"The fact is, we are creatures of habit; we like to collect things, to own things," he said.

Trans World is on the right track with FYE, Scibora said, creating synergies between its Web and retail outlets and using technology to allow customers to preview sales. Advanced Communication Design has worked with Trans World in the past, but does not currently have a business relationship with the retailer, Scibora said.

The entertainment retailing industry should take the next step and recognize online and digital distribution of music as a opportunity, he said. Consumers will continue to pay for music and it is in a retailer's best interest to use technology to better meet customer needs.

For example, some consumers download individual songs because they don't want to buy an entire album for a single song, but retailers could use digital technology to allow people to customize their own CDs in the store, Scibora said.