

Notes from ROLI Team Time, April 2018

We hit our sales plan by the skin of our teeth for the third month running. It's just as well: we can only sack Gregg once. But our suppliers still aren't getting paid on time and we don't have any money to replace departing team members. So, welcome to the monthly quiz, in which you get to look at some promising sales figures, hear how great everything is, and then have to read between the lines to understand why your nostrils are filled with the stench of death.

We'll start with the funny smell coming from this cupboard labelled 'heavily discounted Seaboard GRAND' and ... Oh, sure enough, we're selling old stock for less than it cost to make. We can now put a tick in the box marked 'Pawning the family silver'. And what's this? We sold more than we could actually ship? A tick next to 'Treating our customers as creditors' and, er, and our suppliers aren't talking to us either, so we can also tick 'Treating our supply chain as creditors'. Almost a shame not to go for the full house at some point, and just stop paying the team.

When we sort those little blips out, imagine how delighted our customers will be in a year's time, when we ship the final update to Equator and force them to rent the next release for ten dollars a month. OK. Let's spray some Febreze around, pay the Sales team's bonuses, and close this cupboard. Now to look under the sink ...

Aah, who's this hiding? The Edge? Guitarist of U2, renowned philanthropist and tech guru? Who's this with you? Onkyo! Aww, you'll be a great fit, guys, with your history of Hi-Fi innovation, engineering flair, and groundbreaking industrial design. Being in a time zone eight hours ahead of us will be perfect for co-working. Mohaupt? I've never met you guys before, but I bet you don't get invited to a lot of parties. Sorry, I didn't catch your name. Oh, *Tedder*. I've just looked you up. You could be anything from an agricultural machine to a dead aristocrat. Apparently, though, you've all given us a loan. Hope your mortgage lenders are

sympathetic! I suppose you're all expecting our next product to be a light-up keyboard, gentlem - ah. OK, you're all expecting different things. This is like that cocktail party in my recurring dream, just before everybody starts punching me. Who's that playing 'Candle In The Wind'? How did you even fit that piano under the sink, Sir Elton? Let's do a special one for 2019 that starts 'Goodbye all my cash ...'

Sorry, I'll start again. Apparently some team members are annoyed about a general lack of executive buy-in. Well, we bought in some executives! Here's Toby. Seems nice enough. We don't know why he's here. You can ask Jim [VP Product], the person who singlehandedly suggested, vetted, and accepted his appointment. Rest assured that Toby is expensive because he's played a lot of computer games. He's already asking why Grand Theft Auto is easier to master than classical piano. We can almost touch that three-comma valuation.

If there are three competencies you need to run a hardware business, they're to understand your customers, to execute your products, and to watch the cash. It's so important to get unfiltered feedback from customers that we've hired Freshminds to talk to them on our behalf. It frees the team to spend more of our time compiling slideshows, and flattering investors by pumping back the smell of their own farts. On the execution front, we cannot wait to show you the Lightpad XL. The main things we're doing differently are raising our exposure to technical risk, decreasing our projected sales, and changing nothing about our approach to manufacturing. We're shipping in June, it's now April. Our most experienced developers spent Q1 frantically bodging LEDs into piano keys and making Google Home and Alexa play C major scales.

We're about to launch a campaign called 'Start Making It'. It's reminiscent of Nike's 'Just Do It', but with the added suggestion of aborting a half-hearted attempt at DIY.

Over to Jim for the product plan. Integrated hardware and software. Consolidated roadmap. Use of external partners to share development

work. Strengthening the ROLI platform. It sounds sensible, and anywhere else it would be. But there's still no vision of 2019 that's engaging and achievable: just more disembodied CGI renders from Roland's porn stash.

Jim continues talking. The lessons we learned from NOISE and PLAY are that both were a mistake and they're confusing and not interoperable. So, which of these horses should we back? And, the award goes to ... Neither! As well as continuing to support the technical burden of two mobile apps for the next twelve months, we'll be mounting the annual frantic Christmas push for a new one. This time, it's called ROLI Studio Mobile. This will combine the best bits of NOISE and PLAY without any of the bad bits, while being so feature-packed that it's impossible to name in fewer than three words. We're bolting on a transparently exploitative freemium model to purge any customer goodwill we might have created by accident. The users this time will be mass-consumer types: that demanding and uninformed market we weren't interested in two months ago, which is what we told you when Terri [Chief Marketing Officer] walked before she'd even adjusted her office chair.

Of course, the customer will actually be Roland pretending to second-guess investors. Until about August. Then somebody will point out that we're making yet another product for Marco [Product Demonstrator], but with some consumer features shoehorned into a corner. ROLI Studio Mobile will thus be tailor-made for a professional multi-instrumentalist of rare distinction, who wants to be nannied through keyboard playing like a child while translucent popups incessantly demand several dollars a month.

One thing we've learned, though, is that most people downloading NOISE were actually expecting a port of an XBOX game.

A couple of random quotes from Team Time: 'Delight the consumer and ignite the professional'. I don't remember who said that, but let's ignore the fact that we cannot do both in a unified strategy without a lot of other things happening first. We need to talk about

'ignite'. 'Ignite' sounds ominous. Are professionals generally drawn, moth-like, to flames? Or do they seek the best tool for a given job and disown anything that looks like it will fuck them about? 'The funnest and fastest way to start making music on mobile'. The word 'funnest' raised eyebrows when Jobs-era Apple used it to describe iPod Touch. In case anybody out there still thinks we could copy Apple's poise, we're showing them how slutty we look when we wear the same make-up.

Roland finishes by grabbing the mic at 5:35pm, and proceeds to Lambsplain everything that his colleagues have already said. He uses the expression 'golden win', which is not an actual idiom but is, according to Google, a hotel in Myanmar. He mentions the customer precisely once, which is an improvement over his usual form. There may still be hope.