



The New Old SCHOOL

Vintage Machinery and Capacitors
are Key for CE Distribution

By Victoria Wasylak

Inside some of CE Distribution's 20,000 sq. feet of warehouse and office space

In 2019, let's face it: new technology is one of the easiest, sure-fire ways to reel in attention no matter what market you're in. Take almost any item made in a factory, add on a handful of new touches, and consumers will line up (or, at the very least, tune into livestreams) to see the new version that's faster, bigger, more durable, and most likely, more expensive.

But for companies like CE Distribution, there's serious worth in keep things the old-fashioned way, specifically regarding the Mallory equipment they still use to make capacitors. Bought 20 years ago, the vintage machinery keeps CE Distribution surprisingly ahead of the curve.

"The music industry is full of vintage equipment with unique tone and characteristics," explains the team at CE. "We feel it is important to use as many original parts as possible to properly maintain the character and tone of the equipment, so we refurbished the machinery to produce capacitors the exact way they were produced during the heyday of vacuum tube electronics. We updated the equipment used in the aging and testing process to provide the best quality control possible, but left the entire manufacturing process alone."

Founded in July, 1999 as a wholesale parts distributor for the MI market, CE Distribution now boasts almost 10,000 SKUs across the company's immense catalogue of pedals, potentiometers, and plugs, to name just a few of their product categories. Located in Tempe, Arizona, the company houses all their goods in their ample 20,000 square-foot warehouse, production areas, and offices. Close to 40 employees keep the operation running smoothly, especially since many of them have worked with CE Distribution since its start 20 years ago. All together, the staff has more than 200 years of musical experience combined ("Our employees are the heart and soul of our

business. Without great employees, it is impossible to succeed," the CE team affirms).

To the Arizona company, the core of their business remains centered around their capacitors, Jensen speakers, and a few other vital items, although their catalog seemingly knows no bounds.

"Our primary product lines include our Jensen speakers (we are the exclusive importer), CE Manufacturing canned capacitors (almost 50 unique values), Yellow Jackets, MOD kits, and JJ vacuum tubes. We have an expansive offering of amplifier and guitar parts, accessories and supplies," they explain. "We are constantly sourcing new products to add to our offering and better serve our customers. We proudly add many new items each year."

The CE Manufacturing capacitors, however, are where those fine vintage pieces of machinery come into play. Made in batch sizes of 300 to 500 pieces, they're stamped and wound individually by one employee at a time. In between steps, CE Distribution's prized Mallory equipment comes in handy.

"We don't know the complete history of the equipment, but we know it originated with Mallory in the U.S. This is based on equipment tags that still exist on some of the machinery," the CE team adds. "Later, Aerovox produced capacitors on this equipment in the United States before moving the operation to Mexico. We purchased the equipment from the Mexican factory and brought it back to the States! The equipment had suffered from years of improper maintenance and repair, and we spent months bringing it back to proper operating form. For the most part, this equipment is still early to mid-twentieth century technology; mechanical counters, delay relays. No computers, logic control, et cetera."

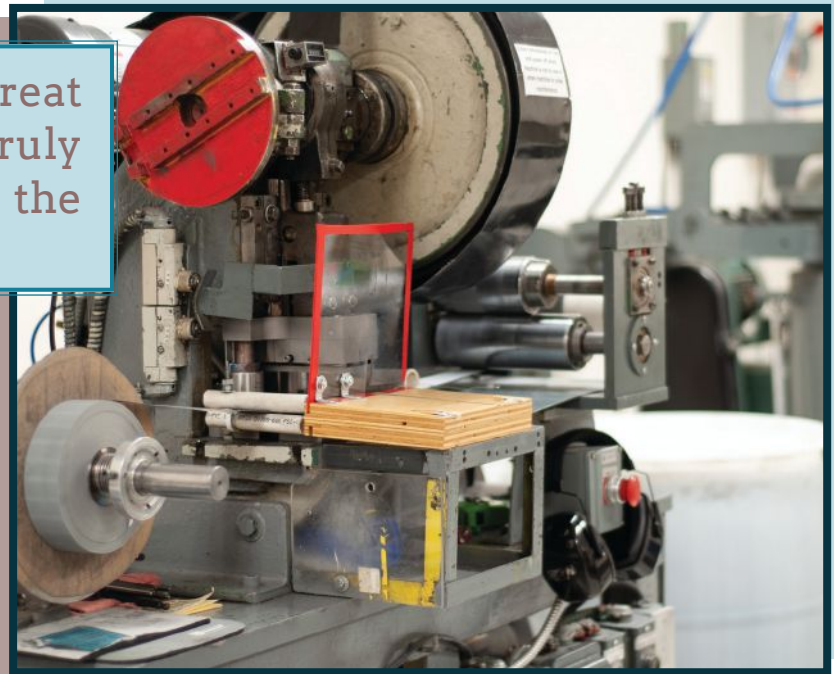
“Our customers are great technicians and we truly enjoy helping them find the parts they need!”

After fixing up the machinery, CE installed it as a fundamental step in working on their capacitors. The machinery stamps out sections of anode and cathode. From there, they are wound, swaged, and “impregnated” with electrolyte. At the end of the day, each capacitor gets tested by hand before it gets shipped out the door. A special mechanic keeps all the machinery running properly in its old age.

“However, when we reach the hand assembly step, which is very time consuming, we bring in extra people to help,” the CE team notes. “Once the capacitors are made, they still must be aged and tested. We age and test 100 capacitors at a time. The aging process is also time consuming because we bring the voltage up very slowly. Once the capacitors reach their aging voltage, we hold it there for an additional four hours! All totaled, a typical batch takes about two weeks to complete.”

CE Distribution recently made a series of videos explaining the all-important process (which can be viewed on YouTube). The company broke down the artful process in detail. Likewise, the SoZo capacitors ranked as some of CE Distribution’s most popular items of the year.

The team explains: “Vacuum tubes, speakers, SoZo capacitors and our MOD Kits are our most popular items. Players love to try new brands of tubes and change out their speakers and pickups to experiment and find a new sound. In addition, our



customers are great technicians and we truly enjoy helping them find the parts they need!”

Looking into the coming months, CE Distribution wants to expand their motto of “Service, Availability and Honesty” by adhering to the requests of customers, who they insist “know best” (and actually mean it). New MOD kits are also on the horizon, a particularly popular item across the MI spectrum of late.

“We will continue to listen closely to our customers; they know best and are our greatest resource for new ideas,” the team at CE emphasizes. “Of course, we have new, innovative MOD kits coming too. Many dealers and resellers carry MOD kits for resale, allowing the non-tech musician to make their own effects pedals and learn how to be a part of their signature tone.”

From their steadfast attention to customers and overall eagerness comes a refreshing outlook on the future of the MI market. Especially for a supplier, at the end of the day, music-makers need tools, and CE will be there to equip them, no matter how the trends shift.

“We love serving the MI market! We share our customer’s passion for music and appreciate the feedback and growth we have achieved while working with them,” they add. “The market is ever changing in the same way popular music changes. Regardless of how it changes, musicians will need tools to make their music and we will supply them with whatever they need to make this happen. We anticipate a strong 2019 for our company and the MI industry as a whole.” **MMA**

CE Distribution is a wholesale-only company, serving music stores, repair shops, retailers and OEMs. Proper documentation is necessary, but users can start the registration process by going to cedist.com and clicking on “Request an Account” or calling them at (800) 840-0330 to speak to one of their sales representatives.

