

Sound of music moves a serial entrepreneur

By **Urvaksh Karkaria**

STAFF WRITER

Richard J. Lenz has a love of the written word and the sound of it. And he's made a business out of both.

A year ago, the serial entrepreneur launched a boutique music label to promote new musicians.

The label — **Red Eye Gravy Records** — does “360 deals,” which involve artist management; music distribution and merchandising; concert tour scheduling; and social media marketing.

Red Eye Gravy is an “incubator label,” Lenz noted.

“We’re not EMI,” he said, “but we will take an artist who we believe in and get them to a certain level of attention where a better-known label will pick them up.”

While social networks and iTunes allow musicians to self-promote and distribute their music, once their following increases they need the marketing and distribution muscle of conventional music labels.

Red Eye Gravy “is kind of a mini step between those two approaches,” Lenz said.

The label represents Nashville singer/songwriter Nathan Beaver and Atlanta-based Mike Killeen.

Despite the multitude of music distribution outlets, getting on radio is still the way artists get known.

For an upstart like Red Eye, getting radio airplay for its artists is not easy.

“It’s hard to get attention from the very big radio stations,” Lenz said. “But in every market there is generally a radio station that is more open to new music and new artists.”

One such station in Atlanta is Dave FM, which has a show that plays artists who have been featured at **Eddie’s Attic**, a Decatur music venue.

Lenz is a “non-stop idea machine — if his energy was electricity, he’d be 240 volts,” said W.H. “Dink” NeSmith Jr., president of Athens-based **Community Newspapers Inc.**

“Lenz is always imagining what-if,” NeSmith said. “And ... he is willing to put in the energy and time to make [those ideas] come true.”

NeSmith has known Lenz since 1980,

when Lenz joined his newspaper chain as a rookie reporter straight out of college.

“We tossed him into some very swift waters early in his career and he always wound up swimming like an Olympian,” NeSmith said

Making connections

Red Eye Gravy dovetails into Lenz’s two passions — music and marketing.

Lenz is lead guitarist for the cover band

Johnny Clash, which recently played at an event at Eddie’s Attic to raise money for the **Georgia Cancer Foundation** and the **Magic of Life Foundation**, two cancer support nonprofits.

“It seems like everybody my age has a band, or is working on their guitar skills,” Lenz said.

For Lenz, playing in a band is an effort to get back the “creative force.”

Lenz’s love of music dates back to his days as a student at The University of Georgia in the early 1980s. He and his company have sponsored several musical events, including a live performance by Patterson Hood of the Drive By Truckers at the 2008 **Decatur Book Festival**.

While Lenz plays in a cover band by night, by day he runs his eponymous marketing firm located next to the always-packed **Brick Store Pub** on the Decatur Square.

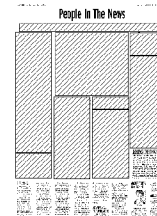
Lenz Inc. handles Web design, creative services, public relations, media buying and marketing strategy, with a specialization in health-care and nonprofit organizations.

“We have a company full of creatives,” Lenz said. “We all have a great interest in music, so we launched a label and got behind it with our marketing skills.”

The digital revolution that has hit every industry has also hit marketing. It’s brought new tools and ways to reach new audiences.

Social media and digital marketing have not replaced traditional marketing — TV, radio, print, billboards — in effectiveness, Lenz said, but it is “a great adjunct.”

“There is not a single mass media



approach to marketing anymore,” Lenz said. “There’s a million ways to get your message out.”

Beyond music

Lenz has leveraged his firm’s specialty in marketing for physician practices, hospitals and pharmaceutical companies into landing a weekly radio show.

Lenz, who moonlighted as a radio jockey in college, has developed a weekly health-care news and information program that airs on **AM 750** and **NOW 95.5 FM News/Talk WSB** called “The Weekly Check-Up.”

The radio show, no doubt, is also a great marketing platform for Lenz’s paying clients.

Lenz has found a way to monetize his love for reading, the outdoors, music and the arts, said Dr. Bruce Feinberg, who hosts Lenz’s weekly health-care radio show and has known Lenz for about a dozen years.

“What makes Richard quite unique is that he manages to turn all of his passions into successful business ventures,” said Feinberg, who is vice president and chief medical officer at **Cardinal Health’s** oncology services division.

Another of Lenz’s ventures is the **Decatur Book Festival**, billed as the largest independent book festival in the nation.

The entrepreneur is a founding board member of the annual event.

The book festival, at the Decatur Square, attracted about 30,000 to its inaugural event six years ago. This year, the festival drew 75,000 and 300 authors.

Lenz and his marketing skills have been instrumental to the success of the Decatur Book Festival, event co-founder Daren Wang said.

The festival “has Richard’s DNA all over it,” Wang said. “Richard always brings a unique [and valuable] perspective to any problem.”

Lenz’s involvement in the Decatur Book Festival is driven by his passion for writing.

His firm donated 100 percent of the marketing in the first year, and has donated a large portion of its services every year since. Lenz has written for *Southern Living*, *Cooking Light*, and *National Geographic Traveler* magazines, and ghost-written an editorial for a U.S. president, declining to disclose details.

“One of my first dreams was to become a poet,” Lenz said. “Then I decided also that I wanted to eat.”

Lenz is the author of two books, “The Civil War in Georgia: An Illustrated Traveler’s Guide” and “The Longstreet Highroad Guide to the Georgia Coast and Okfenokee.”

He is the editor, creator and designer of the Longstreet Highroad guides, which is a national series of 19 natural history guides, published by **Longstreet Press** in Atlanta.

There’s also a business motivation behind his book writing. **Lenz Marketing** is a contract publisher of books for mainstream publishers, most recently for **Sweetwater Press**.

In the end, the record label, the radio show and the Decatur Book Festival meld Lenz’s passions and allow him to flex his creative muscles.

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If you know an executive whose hobby — or day job — is unusual enough to be in print, contact Jessica Saunders at jessicasaunders@bizjournals.com.



JOANN VITELLI

EXECUTIVE PROFILE RICHARD J. LENZ

Age: 50

Current job: CEO and founder, Lenz Inc.

Born: Iron Mountain, Mich.

Education: Bachelor's degree in journalism, The University of Georgia

Family: Wife, Wendy; four children