

# Billboard



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## Making The Brand

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### Quango's Quest

Label Develops Custom Music For Stylish Partners

Quango Music Group and its founder, Bruno Guez, are at it again. After amicably parting ways last year with Palm Pictures, the über-cool, 10-year-old label has a renewed energy and focus. And brand marketing—as well as quality music (we are talking Quango here)—is playing a major role.

Guez has secured partnerships with savvy brands like American Rag Cie, Oliver Peoples Eyewear and Da-Nang Surplus for multi-artist compilations.

"The past nine months have been like a complete relaunching of the label," Guez says. After Quango's joint venture with Chris Blackwell's Palm label ended, Guez contemplated entering another joint venture. (Guez remains the music director/consultant for Blackwell's Island Post Hotels.)

He chose instead to function as a full-fledged indie, linked with Bayside for distribution and began working with retailers that wanted to create branded music. Guez says he concentrated on consumer brands that matched—musically and aesthetically—Quango's lifestyle sensibility.

"Music speaks to consumers on an emotional level—and thus, plays an important role in establishing the lifestyle of a brand," Guez says. By creating "a soundtrack for the brand," Guez in effect taps into consumers' emotional response to certain songs or artists, which can aid in brand trust and loyalty.

Like its namesake, the two-disc "American Rag Cie" collection focuses on sounds that, while retro, push today's boundaries. Tracks by electronic acts Sia, Chicks on Speed, Mo' Horizons and Moloko, among others, capture this spirit.

Conversely, "Oliver Peoples 4" is geared toward more organic, more soulful electronic music, with contributions from Martina Topley Bird, 4 Hero, Beanfield, Bliss and others.

According to American Rag Cie founder and owner Mark Werts, who executive-produced the set with Guez, CDs account for highest sales per square foot in his boutique department stores. "Our customers are interested in the entire lifestyle of the brand," Werts says. "Music is an integral part of

the mix."

The same is true for the Oliver Peoples brand, which has been selling Quango CDs in its stores since the late '90s. The eyewear company began creating its own branded compilations six years ago—with the help of DJs Jason Bentley and Allen Vaskanian, founders of the still-thriving weekly Bossa Nova party in Los Angeles. This fourth volume in the Oliver Peoples series is the first one to be commercially released.

"The music we play in our stores has always been an extension of our brand—and Bruno and Quango understand this," says Rudy Manheim, manager of the flagship Oliver Peoples store on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles.

In addition to executive-producing "Oliver Peoples 4" with Guez, Manheim compiled it with Vaskanian, who happens to be American Rag Cie's music buyer. Six degrees of separation, anyone?

For many, it comes down to one-stop shopping at a brand you trust. "People spending \$300 on a pair of jeans at Fred Segal [in Los Angeles] want to get all their cool merchandise at a store they trust," Guez says. "And this includes music."

Which helps to explain why more fashion retailers are devoting floor space to music. The added exposure and revenue are a boon for the bands and the brands.

In addition to the three branded compilations, Quango has released two new, beautifully chilled artist albums from Bliss ("Quiet Letters") and Cantoma (self-titled). And Guez is in the process of lining up more brands for Quango.

Throughout, Guez never loses sight of the power of music. In fact, he credits music with helping to save his own life. In 2000, while vacationing in Brazil, an innocent dive into the ocean proved nearly fatal for Guez, who hit a hidden sand bar. He has been paralyzed from the chest down, with limited use of his arms, ever since.

"Music is food for the soul," he says. "Its restorative powers are immense." Consider Guez living proof. \*\*\*

Quango Music Group founder BRUNO GUEZ sees music as essential in establishing the 'lifestyle' of a brand.

