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It's still early days, but at least we can point out that our first three issues have appeared as promised and on time. We've have lots of feedback from readers, most (but not all) very positive in nature, and we're publishing the best (and worst) of this on our HIFICRITIC.com website. Feel free to write in and add your twopennyworth. Roger Staton (28/12/06) can rest assured I won't be writing too many reviews myself, as the tasks of planning and editing keep me quite busy enough.

John Luke's letter (9/1/07) raises several interesting questions about the relationship between magazines and the trade. First I should make it quite clear that I'm not naïve enough to believe that eliminating advertising will automatically render us independent of all trade pressures. Editors are sometimes threatened with advertising withdrawal, but in my experience are unlikely to take much notice. Rather the relationship between journalists – staff or freelance – and all sectors of the trade tends to be far more subtle and personal.

Since CD peaked around 1990, hi-fi has lost its mass market status, and been steadily retrenching as a smaller, more enthusiast-oriented scene. Most of the generalist electronics multi-nationals have packed their bags and moved on, leaving a smaller, more specialist industry in which personal relationships play an increasingly important part.

John Luke wonders how the reviewing process works. It's simple enough in outline. Manufacturing and distribution companies want editorial coverage, especially when launching new products, and at the same time magazines want newsworthy products to review (sometimes exclusively). These interests neatly coincide, so a magazine editor arranges to borrow the relevant kit from the relevant manufacturer/distributor/PR person. The equipment might go to the magazine or its photographer, or direct to the reviewer.

The game-playing really starts over which reviewer gets to review which product. Companies might want their products reviewed, but are naturally apprehensive about what might be written. Ideally they'd like to write the reviews themselves, but since that's well outside the rules, they're obviously going to seek other strategies to try and ensure a review will be as favourable as possible.

Although the companies can't control what's written, they often dictate which reviewer gets to do the writing – at least with 'one-off' reviews. This ability to pick the reviewer can be highly significant, but it doesn't apply with group tests. Which is one reason why companies much prefer one-offs to group tests, and may well offer an 'exclusive first review' to persuade an editor to run a one-off feature review.

Perceptive observers will be aware that many companies have favourite reviewers, which they feel are sympathetic to their products, and others that they prefer to avoid. I know I'm on one or other list for a number of brands, even though I fondly believe the perception of my prejudices is largely mistaken. That said, we all do have preferences, in both music and equipment, but surely the mark of a good reviewer is not to let personal tastes dominate one's judgements. In the final analysis, the reviewer is only as good as his last review.

Doubtless some companies will decide to avoid our detailed and critical reviews. All we can do is build our credibility, earn the respect of the industry, and hope that they change their minds. In the meantime I'm sure there's plenty of other equipment that will welcome our attention.

Paul Messenger
Editor