

Shop till you bop

That funky boutique soundtrack isn't just harmless background noise – it's a ruthlessly hi-tech weapon made to empty your pockets, says Zoe Griffin

The clock's just struck 1pm on Monday and you're on your way to get a sandwich, but it's raining so you nip into a nearby clothes shop. As you browse the rails, you find yourself humming along to the background music.

The Arctic Monkeys' number-one hit *I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor* thumps through the store as you dither in front of a rack of shirts. You pick one up, hopeful that it will, in fact, do something to improve your dancing. The music changes to Pete Rodriguez's uptempo dance classic *I Like It Like That* and you feel compelled to walk towards the till. It's only when you close the door to the shop, step out on to the pavement and start walking back to the office that you remember you only popped out for a sandwich...

Spending on male fashion is soaring, and as the battle heats up retailers have realised that one of the most powerful ways of reaching your subconscious is through music. And you won't believe how far the technology has advanced. Gone are the days when the music was down to a shop assistant rummaging through a stack of CDs. Today a growing number of shops, including Dunhill, Gieves & Hawkes, Ted Baker and Theo Fennell, use a remote-controlled system that automatically tailors in-store tunes according to the time of day, the type of clothes sold... even the weather.

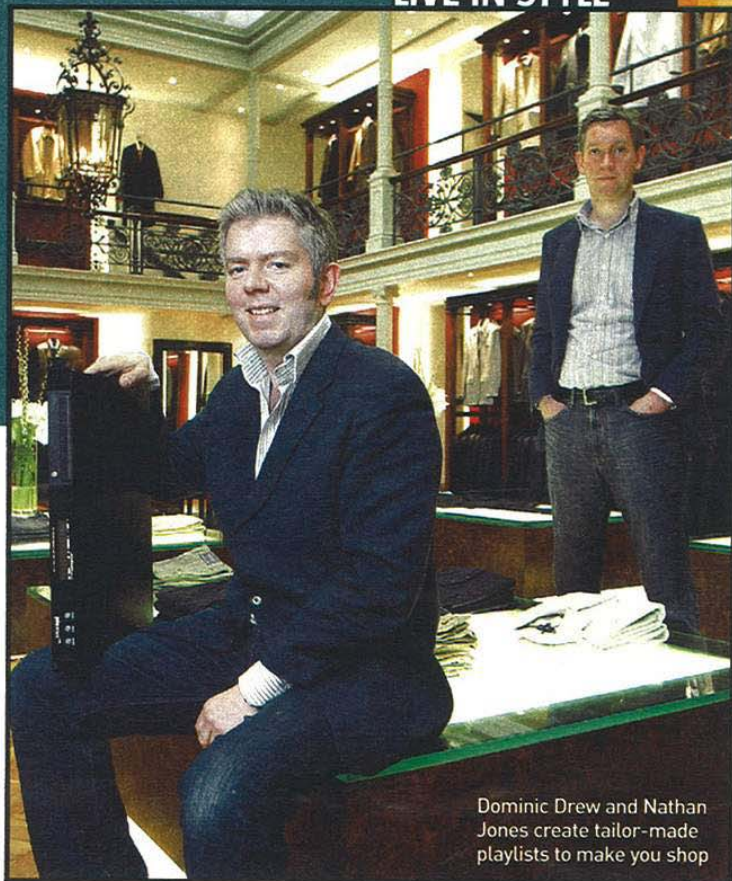
Cantaloupe's Plexus system means that stores don't even need to buy their own CDs. The music is piped in via a broadband link from the company's head office in Fulham, west London.

'In-store music is a science – a subtle mix of psychology and market research,' says Cantaloupe co-founder Dominic Drew. 'When retailers have spent a fortune finding the right décor and

lighting, the music is the finishing touch. Our experience shows that if shops invest a little in the right in-store music and technology on which to play it, they should get back at least twice as much in extra sales. If we get it right, we can make the customer feel younger, cooler and thinner – and therefore more likely to leave with a shopping bag or two.'

The Plexus hard drive sits in the shop, plugged into a normal amplifier and speakers. When it's connected to the internet, Drew and business partner Nathan Jones can manage the system remotely and make adjustments from their Fulham office.

Updates usually consist of about 750 new tracks, equivalent to 80 hours of music. And Drew and Lane are careful to include a mixture of rock, chilled and upbeat tracks to match how shoppers' attitudes vary from morning to evening and as the weekend approaches. Once instructed, the computer will select an uptempo tune for a Friday evening, such as Britney Spears' *Hit Me Baby One More Time* remixed by Frank Zappa's son Dweezil, or pick a more sedate and chilled *Hôtel Costes*-style track for a Monday morning. Drew and



Dominic Drew and Nathan Jones create tailor-made playlists to make you shop

Lane currently have more than 200,000 songs in their collection. So, what is the right background music?

At Dunhill, where customers look for leather cigar cases and silver hip flasks, the soundtrack has a 'quintessentially British' musical theme, including tunes from Echo & The Bunnymen, Rod Stewart and David Bowie. 'The music reflects our heritage, but brings us bang up to date,' says Dunhill's John Abbate.

But the right background music needs to do more than just match the items sold in store. 'People's moods vary depending on the day of the week and the time of the year,' says Drew. 'Customers tend to feel happier as the weekend approaches or on sunny days, so we will match that by playing quick, upbeat songs such as *You Are Invited To A Party* by The Victorians or *Coconut Water* by Robert

Mitchum. On a cold winter's day, people tend to respond better to angry rock such as *Tied Up Too Tight* by Hard-Fi or *Munich* by The Editors.'

The majority of songs played in Theo Fennell shops come from the Twenties and Thirties. For a wet Monday morning they might play Frank Sinatra; in summer they might experiment with tracks from the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, hoping to make people smile as they hear covers of hits such as *Smells Like Teen Spirit* by Nirvana and *Dy-na-mi-tee* by Ms Dynamite. The results of the new music, says Fennell, have been terrific.

Plexus can be configured to switch itself on and off to match shop opening times, which means the staff never have to touch the system. There is, however, one thing they will be required to do: serve even more people at the tills. ■

→ SEDUCTIVE SOUNDTRACKS FOR SHARP SHOPS

GIEVES & HAWKES

- 1 *Time Is My Everything* (Ian Brown)
- 2 *Teenage Kicks* (The Undertones)
- 3 *One Time Too Many* (PJ Harvey)
- 4 *Just Can't Get Enough* (Depeche Mode)
- 5 *Pump It Up* (Elvis Costello)

KURT GEIGER

- 1 *60 Seconds* (Audio De Lux)

2 *Nikita* (Ralph Myerz)

- 3 *Brothers And Sisters* (Bondmaster Inc)
- 4 *Morenito* (Stéphane Pompuognac)
- 5 *Bucovina* (Shantel)

DUNHILL

- 1 *Fashion* (David Bowie)
- 2 *Maggie May* (Rod Stewart)
- 3 *Marwood Walks* (David Dundas, from the *Withnail and I* soundtrack)

4 *The Killing Moon*

- (Echo & The Bunnymen)
5 *Waltzing Black* (The Stranglers)

TED BAKER

- 1 *Living For The Weekend* (Hard-Fi)
- 2 *I Like It Like That* (Pete Rodriguez)
- 3 *Baby, Hit Me One More Time* (Dweezil Zappa remix)
- 4 *I Predict A Riot* (Kaiser Chiefs)

5 *Apply Some Pressure*

- (Maximo Park)

THEO FENNEL

- 1 *Hang Out The Stars In Indiana* (Al Bowlly)
- 2 *The Stately Homes of England* (Noel Coward)
- 3 *Underneath the Arches* (Flanagan and Allen)
- 4 *Coconut Water* (Robert Mitchum)
- 5 *Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* (Guy Mitchell)