

Fine-Tuning Background Ambiance

Former DJ's song lists serenade customers at bowling alleys, hotels.

It used to be called Muzak, but don't call it "modern Muzak." It's "sonic branding," and one Laurel Canyon company is using it to help retailers and restaurants create the desired atmosphere.

Michael Smith Event

Music creates tailor-made music and song lists for clients, which include retailers Fred Segal, Monique Lhuillier and Beckley, as well as all SBE properties and Standard Hotels.

While Muzak mainly offers preset music channels, Smith creates a playlist of songs based on a client's demographics, location, products or services. He also offers an interactive platform where



Jockeying: Michael Smith.

clients can go online and change the tempo or style of music. Smith will also write music for a client if requested.

Dolf Berle, president of **Lucky Strike Entertainment LLC**, which operates a chain of bowling alleys, said Smith's ability to refresh playlists and make changes is important.

"If there's a song that for some reason doesn't feel right to a local management team at

a certain time, that song can be pulled quickly, typically the same day," said Berle, who hired Smith 18 months ago to provide music for all 17 Lucky Strike locations. "I feel the level of joy inspired by the music, and people jumping up on their feet and singing along, is higher than when we left that up to the discretion of the local managers."

Smith got his start as a DJ nine years ago, mixing songs for corporate events, including some for Chanel, Vogue and House of Blues. When he got a gig at SBE-owned nightclub Hyde Lounge in 2006, the company asked him to program the music for its Katsuya restaurants. That's when he got the idea to start the subscription service and offer it through the Internet — it was easier to adjust the music that way.

"We're like interior designers of sound," said Michael Smith, chief executive of his eponymous company.

— *Maya Meinert*