

COOL CAREERS

Ronny Schiff

Music Marketer

Music follows you everywhere—to the supermarket, to the shopping mall, to the dentist's office, and so on. But how exactly does it get there?

To investigate, we talked to Ronny Schiff, vice president of a music/media company called Disc Marketing. Her main job involves putting music in the friendly skies—literally. Ronny was excited to tell us how she does it, and how she landed there.

Q: What were your earliest musical experiences?

A: I started playing violin in the school orchestra when I was 8. Not only did I have classical training, but around the corner from me [in Venice, CA] lived Tex Ritter, a cowboy star, so I learned a little Western swing and bluegrass fiddle, just by osmosis.

Q: Did you study music in college?

A: I got a music scholarship to Arizona State University, and I played in their orchestra while majoring in music education.

Q: What did you do after graduating?

A: I thought I wanted to teach, but a publishing company offered me a job managing their sheet-music operation. I got to work in several different stores, including one in Hollywood, where I'd meet famous people—rock 'n' roll stars, opera stars, movie legends. It was very exciting!

Q: What happened next?

A: In managing, I started thinking of ways the company's catalog could

be improved. I asked, "Why should we buy Mel Bay's beginning guitar method—which is kind of old-fashioned—when we can write our own?" I kept sending more ideas, and the next thing I knew, I became a troubleshooter for the company. I'd go to the main offices periodically and figure out what



kind of books they needed, and then I'd help put them together.

Q: Did you ever have your own publishing company?

A: Yes! After a while, I wanted to produce my own music books. I went to different music publishers and said, "You've got a big hole in your catalog that I can fill." So I gradually started working on books for companies like Warner Brothers.

Q: How did you get from there to your current career?

A: In 1997, I was helping a client put together a book, because she needed someone who knew about music and licensing. Later, this client went to United Airlines to

pitch a promotional recording. They liked her a lot and offered her a job programming the airline's in-flight audio, so she called me and said, "Let's do it!" We built a recording studio, hired people who knew how to use it, and it took off.

Q: What's the job like now?

A: It involves programming 21 two-hour channels every two months, in five different languages—only one of which I speak! Basically, I have to figure out what sort of music would be comfortable for someone who's sitting on an airplane for a few hours with earphones on. What I might enjoy listening to at home might not be appropriate for an airplane situation. In certain types of music, what happens sonically sometimes causes tension, and

you don't want that in the air.

Q: What part of your musical training has been most valuable?

A: My knowledge of music history. I really have made it my life's work to be as encyclopedic as possible, and that comes into play every single moment of my working day.

Q: What's the most rewarding aspect part of your career?

A: My job gives me a great deal of experience dealing with music from around the world, so it's like traveling without ever leaving my seat. I have to understand why certain music is popular in certain areas, and that gives me a global concept for which I'm forever grateful. 