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How to run a record shop

**Company:** Title

**Locations:** Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide

**Flagship store:** Surry Hills, Sydney

**Founded:** 2006

**Number of staff:** 29

**Number of outlets:** 7

**Weekly sales of Patti Smith's 'Just Kids':** Between 10 and 20

Australian media-retailer Title piles its stock low and sells it for what it's worth. The brand's success has rewritten how to revive the business of dealing in the hardware of the ailing music, book and film trade. "Everyone said I was a goosel!" says owner Steve Kulak. "But you have to disregard other people's opinions and follow your own passions."

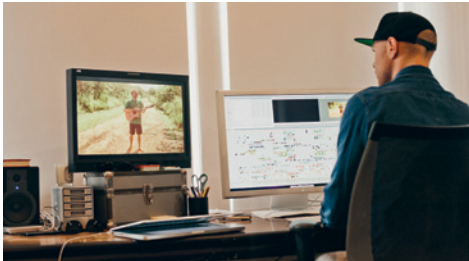
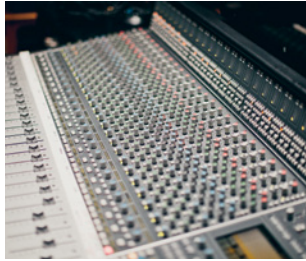
Having spent the years between 1980 and 1991 hitchhiking across the globe as an aspiring writer – an experience that saw him get shot in Africa, deported from Moscow and narrowly escape the Golden Temple massacre in Amritsar – Kulak is accustomed to risk. On returning to his native Sydney he chose to enter one of the retail industry's most precarious sectors: the mixed sale of books, films and music. He started the first Sydney Title store in 2006

with a simple formula: combing a curated inventory of newly pressed vinyl, hard-to-find literature and cult films with a smart retail space in an up-and-coming suburb.

It proved an overwhelming success. Kulak now has various Title outlets across Australia's east coast. He also oversees a distribution company and a publishing label.

Kulak sees his shops as social destinations. He says that each store manager knows 60 per cent of their customers by name. "These big pleasure palaces have got a place," he says. "But when you come to a Title store it is a little more profound – you come out with something deeper."

The company's policy of stocking only items that "define the cultural space" has been equally important. It's a model built on the belief that certain titles, however unlikely to find their way to the cash register, are crucial for establishing the brand's tone. "Do you know how many copies of James Joyce's *Ulysses* we've sold in any of our shops? Probably one," he says. "Is it in every shop? Yes." This strategy is typical of the fearless approach that Kulak cultivated from his years on the road. "It's like travelling up the Congo: you might get a spear in the arse or you might not," he says. "You can't step back for fear of failing." — (M)



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How to run a record label

**Company:** Brushfire Records

**Location:** Los Angeles

**Founded:** 2002

**Number of employees:** 4

**Artists:** 7

**Jack Johnson's worldwide album sales:** about 20 million

"Brushfire was created to put out records for our friends and we've tried to never veer too far from that simple credence," says Emmett Malloy (*pictured, top left*), co-founder of the LA-based record label. "Some days I do wish I had a few more helping hands and creative minds but I guess I don't want to outgrow our comfortable office."

It's easy to see what Malloy means: the former residence is more of a home than a workspace to the label's small team. "It's an early 20th-century craftsman house and they always possess so much character," he says. "I just tried to keep that old style intact." It's also a sentimentally short walk from Malloy's childhood home.

Malloy started the business with his longtime friend and internationally successful recording artist Jack Johnson in 2002. They didn't set out

to launch a record label, though. Brushfire's beginnings lie in the surf-film soundtracks the pair produced as part of their previous venture, the Moonshine Conspiracy in Hawaii. During this period in the late 1990s, the pair were already inadvertently laying the foundations for their distinctly relaxed take on starting a record label from scratch and managing a growing list of artists.

Brushfire Records has played an important role in managing and developing bands such as the Bahamas and indie rockers Rogue Wave, alongside singer-songwriter Zach Gill, skateboarder-turned-songwriter Matt Costa and jazz-folk aficionado Zee Avi.

With about 20 million records sold, however, it's the mellow musical mood of the company's co-founder Jack Johnson that's given Brushfire the freedom to grow in a flagging industry and even to share their success with the musical community as a whole. This isn't a privilege Malloy takes lightly.

"I never feel that we didn't make a mark on this scene," says Malloy. "I know the scene is changing and that's OK, people will always want good records and good films so I just have to keep trying to make those with my friends and family." — (M)