

**Franck Bichon**  
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

# BG Products



BRAND NAMES: BG, BGFrance, BG Franck Bichon, DIVA

YEAR FOUNDED: 1985

TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 19

PERCENT OF BUSINESS RELATED TO BAND AND ORCHESTRA: 100%

KEY PRODUCTS: Ligatures, straps, cleaning swabs, accessories

KEY APPEAL: High-quality reputation and largest choice. We are not cheap, but we offer a fair price regarding quality and durability.

LOCATION: Lyon, France

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## School Music Dealer: What are the origins of BG Products?

Franck Bichon: I created BG Products 24 years ago. Our products are distributed in 80 countries, and we sell more than 400,000 items a year. As owner of BG Products, I spend more than four months each year traveling worldwide for exhibitions and to visit customers.

My dad—a saxophone teacher at Lyon Conservatory, France—came to me asking if I wanted to take care of producing a ligature he designed to improve the sound quality of saxophones and clarinets. I had my marketing agency at that time and told him, “OK, but I will start this business only to become No. 1 worldwide in the quality woodwind accessory business.”

I started BG with one ligature and then extended our range to other ligature designs to offer different sound benefits, and then created straps, cleaning swabs and other accessories.

My dad is chief engineer for the acoustic department and was a freelance inspector for Vandoren reeds before he retired from there. Serge Bichon, now retired from Lyon Conservatory as a teacher, was a student of Marcel Mule, the worldwide reference/master in classical saxophone. He also taught Claude Delangle, the saxophone teacher at Paris Superior Conservatory.

I personally design all non-acoustic products and packaging.

## SMD: What is the philosophy behind your company and your products?

Bichon: First, we offer, worldwide, the largest range of high-quality accessories for woodwind instruments. Since we design and manufacture, dealers do not need to look for a different supply source. If dealers are pleased with a brand, they naturally tend to stick to it for its range and it is better/easier for them to choose from one catalog, receive only one bill and get better terms.

Second, we would never sell a product we wouldn't like to buy for ourselves or someone we love. Any BG employee who has a doubt automatically knows that product will be rejected, as they decide on their own when a product is not ready for delivery. My raw material suppliers are used to my high-level requests and know that if they sell me other than the best, it will come back to them. I look for long-term satisfaction from customers.

Third, all this adds up to BG's final goal, which is to become the quality reference worldwide, no matter how long it takes.

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### BG Products Management Directory

NAME	TITLE	YEARS
Franck Bichon	president & founder	24

# WHEN DETAILS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE



AMERICAN WAY MARKETING [www.americanwaymktg.com](http://www.americanwaymktg.com)  
YAMAHA CANADA [www.yamaha.ca](http://www.yamaha.ca)

[www.bgfranckbichon.com](http://www.bgfranckbichon.com)

## BG Products

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### SMD: What makes your products stand out among the competition?

Bichon: First, let me say that I have a great respect for my competitors. We all try our best to please customers, but with different priorities.

Ours are, simply: Quality + durability + design + comfort/elegance/fashion.

We care only for quality. Every strap and swab is hand checked. We cut the felt and heat treat them to prevent fraying. That means extra cost, but I call that, "Respect due to customer."

All of our dealers are welcome to visit our factory.

We care only for products that

last, long-term. After 24 years it is still hard to find, worldwide, any musicians who complain about BG products. Dealers comment that musicians do not need to replace our products often enough, but I prefer them to feel comfortable recommending other BG products. I look more at Rolls-Royce as a reference to follow than to low-cost items from China, which are far too expensive and often are unsafe. We always test with our repairmen. These key guys care only about quality, not sales. That's why they are the best advisers.

We don't like to design "me too" products. Indeed, the opposite is true. We put no limits on offering each musician the solution he's been looking for. We keep an open mind,

which goes along with creativity. We never say no to a request for a prototype or an improvement test, and we always look for new direction to answer a need.

### **SMD: What new products do you have that would interest school music dealers?**

Bichon: My exclusive U.S. Importer, AWM, has the following new products: a Pad Drier with an exclusive design for woodwinds. Made of fabric, it replaces cigarette paper for sticking pads. It lasts longer than 18 months and is washable.

The new Flute Body Swab, made of a microfiber, cleans both the body and edges of the headjoint.

There is a new warmer for flute/oboe/clarinet that protects an instrument when left on its stand. It's also useful for protecting the instrument from the cold as it helps eliminate cracks in the wood and keeps the instrument from getting out of tune while the musician plays in the cold or in air-conditioning.

### **SMD: What new promotions do you have?**

Bichon: Our PROPACK concept extends now to versions without ligatures included. PROPACKs contain all accessories needed by a player. They come with gift packaging, to seduce buyers, and are good for selling everything a musician needs in one shot. The savings is 15 percent. PROPACKs are perfect as gifts as well as to accompany a new instrument or rental programs. We

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have launched new versions to please every customer, and we are designing new displays for demos of our swab material and straps.

We always have ligature displays to save time to dealers showing all models at once and to give players easier access to various benefits (free blowing and sound improvement). No “blah blah blah”—just try! It’s the best way to sell.

I encourage all dealers to contact American Way Marketing to find out about promotions and support material, such as the complete BG color catalog, which is filled with important reference information about the products and the mini-catalogs that are specific to the instrument.

### SMD: What support do you provide for dealers?

Bichon: The first support is our quality. At the recent NAMM show, an experienced salesman who once carried BG products told me that even though his company stopped carrying our products five years ago, it still receives requests for it. In 17 years, he said he had never had a complaint about our products, only compliments. So he said he wanted to have us in his catalog again.

We need to help both dealers and their salesmen to know at a glance which products are available from BG and what their benefits are. With that in mind, all of our single-product packaging includes a mini-cata-

log with references of all products available for the instrument concerned. If a customer buys a saxophone strap, that customer also knows all about the ligatures, care cloths, mouthpieces, cushions and harnesses that are available from BG.

Our deluxe 36-page, color reference chart is clear and easy to follow. In one glance, it introduces BG products for saxophone, clarinet, flute, oboe, bassoon, brass-wind, and for classic guitar, violin and piano.

Both mini-catalogs and reference charts are available from AWM. Dealers may start by ordering only one product to establish their relationship with AWM.

### SMD: How do BG products correspond to both professional and student use?

Bichon: Not only the pros deserve quality. Our first target was professional musicians, because they care about quality. But everyone likes quality that is accompanied by long-lasting durability. We offer the largest range to please everyone, no matter if they are a professional or an amateur.

Beginners as well as professionals need comfort and look for fashion and elegance. Every beginner should consider having better ligature to get free blowing, easier staccato, and to enjoy playing with less effort.

### SMD: Your tagline reads, “When Details Make the Difference.” Can you explain?

Bichon: I owe that tagline to my

friend Patrick Selmer who was my first OEM customer. After we talked together many times, he suggested that this tagline was a perfect fit for my business philosophy. Why, indeed, should dealers and importers buy products from France instead of locally? They need quality, design and good name recognition. That is why I travel so much—to test market reactions and continuously work on improvement.

### SMD: Is there other news from BG products?

Bichon: In 2008, we maintained our product turnover from 2007. We are confident for 2009.

Selling accessories is the way to maintain and develop business for dealers when instrument sales are going down. This is true because accessories are daily sales. Musicians want to get the best from their instruments, and ligatures definitely help them do that.

In the second half of this year, BG will launch DIVA reeds, the first-ever hybrid reed for saxophone and clarinet. This reed was created by my dad.

### SMD: What does the future hold for BG Products?

Bichon: In 2010, we will celebrate our 25th anniversary. This will include the launch of an alto saxophone classic mouthpiece designed by my dad. •

School Music Dealer (ISSN 1097-4512) April 2009 [Spring 2009], issue no. 82, is published six times a year (Jan, Feb, April, June, July, Oct) by Windplayer Publications, 10959 Venice Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90034-7014. Subscriptions are \$25.00 per year, add \$10.00 for foreign delivery. Periodicals Postage Paid at Los Angeles, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: School Music Dealer, PO Box 2666, Malibu, CA 90265-7666.