

Como Audio launches crowdfunding effort for a Braintree manufacturing plant

The Boston company's founder says his goal is to stop making its high-end equipment in China.

By [Hiawatha Bray](#) Globe Staff, Updated June 26, 2020,



Tom DeVesto is the founder of Boston-based Como Audio.
COMO AUDIO

[Como Audio](#) of Boston has been manufacturing its high-end music systems in China for years. But founder Tom DeVesto is ready to change that. He has leased industrial space in Braintree and has launched a crowdfunding campaign with the goal of making his company's products in the US.

“Why should we depend on China to listen to Neil Young?” said DeVesto, an industry veteran who began his career in the 1970s, when Massachusetts was home to major manufacturers of high-end audio gear. He cofounded Cambridge SoundWorks in 1988, [Tivoli Audio](#) in 2000, and Como Audio in 2016. But over the years, China came to dominate the supply chain for key electronic components, and DeVesto's various companies shut down their US production lines.

DeVesto has talked about opening a US factory for years. “I'd love to put three or four hundred people to work in downtown Boston,” [he said in a 2017 interview](#).

Now he's taking concrete steps to make it happen. On Thursday, the company began a fund-raising campaign on the crowdsourcing site [StartEngine](#), declaring itself “hellbent on building high-quality music systems on Main Street USA.”

Meanwhile, Como has taken 8,000 square feet in a 30,000-square-foot building in Braintree. DeVesto plans to use the space to prepare custom versions of his company's products. For instance, Como offers Valentine's Day and Halloween-themed audio systems with specially decorated speaker grilles. These systems are now shipped in from China and customized at Como's Seaport offices. Moving the work to Braintree should enable the company to expand its custom offerings, DeVesto said.

DeVesto plans to lease the rest of the building and start assembling his audio products there. He admitted that many parts will still be imported from China and other countries. But he said some key components can be produced locally, like speaker drivers, circuit boards, and wooden speaker cases. “The biggest single carbon footprint, with what we make, is shipping a speaker box from China to the United States,” said DeVesto. “That I can make.”

Harvard Business School professor Willy Shih said that Como Audio might succeed in manufacturing its products here, especially since it makes premium products priced at \$300 and up. That means its target customers can afford to pay a little more to buy a US-made product. Still, Shih predicted that the company will remain dependent on parts imported from China, because of its

well-developed supply chain. For example, Como Audio can easily get domestically made speaker enclosures, but not LED display screens. “Nobody outside of two time zones in East Asia makes them,” Shih said.

DeVesto said he’ll do whatever it takes, including investing more of his personal assets if crowdfunding falls short. “I think within a year we’ll be making something,” he said. “If there was ever a time to do it, it seems like it’s now.”

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