

Harman's sound equipment has made a booming impact on the sports world, as it's used in some of the largest stadiums around the globe. In fact, Indianapolis Colts fans are privy to sweet sounds through Harman components in Lucas Oil Stadium (*Indianapolis Colts photo*).



# Harman-izing MAKING BIG NOISE IN ELKHART

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By Matt Ottinger

Andrew Luck sprints across the goal line during one of the bearded quarterback's trademark scrambles. The crowd goes wild and a roar can be heard throughout downtown Indianapolis. More than just Colts' fans are making noise, however, in Lucas Oil Stadium.

Much of the stadium's sound system is outfitted by audio company Harman International, a \$7 billion global manufacturer and designer of a variety of products for cars, consumers and professionals. Its professional division, which boasts an operation of approximately 300 workers, is based in Elkhart.

"Lucas Oil Stadium is a perfect example of a system that employs many Harman technologies to provide a game-day experience that people expect," explains Marc Kellom, Elkhart site leader.

He adds that in addition to all major athletic venues at the University of Notre Dame, nine of the 12 Brazilian stadiums that saw action during the 2014 FIFA World Cup used Harman's sound equipment.

"It's well north of 70% of all major league sports in the United States that use our equipment – football, basketball, baseball, hockey," he adds.

The evolution of the sports experience has benefited the company in a booming way.

"There's a higher standard of audio and video that's present than what you would've seen 10 to 15 years ago," he asserts. "If you go to the beginning of your favorite university's basketball game, there's a giant sound and light show happening while the players are being announced, and they run video clips. All these things are going on."

## Surround sound

Harman's clientele includes far more than just sports venues.

"We provide audio and video and lighting and control technologies for a huge variety of commercial spaces – movie theaters, cruise ships, rock concerts, sporting facilities, convention centers, retail establishments, restaurants and churches," Kellom lists.

While customers vary, they're all grateful they can rely on Harman's quality.

"For our customers, reliability is the most important thing," Kellom notes. "They also want a global support structure and someone who can support them at scale. If you're doing business with a restaurant chain with 3,000 locations, it's hard to do that if you're a tiny company."

Expectations are always increasing.

“Being energy efficient and physically smaller so you’re consuming less space is important. Somebody building a cinema doesn’t want to use space for an equipment room, which doesn’t generate revenue. They want more performance and less space taken.”

Harman’s professional division produces amplifiers, lighting solutions, microphones, headphones, mixing consoles, speakers, video control equipment and more. Constantly improving its products by enhancing quality, sustainability and size are ongoing efforts.

“If you look at the electronics that would have gone with a typical concert five to 10 years ago, we had a product that weighed 77 pounds,” Kellom offers. “Its replacement weighs about 30 pounds. The amount of energy it consumes is significantly less and the amount of capability of the product has increased at the same time.”

### Elkhart ingenuity

Harman’s Elkhart operation includes a research and development center focused on audio amplifiers; a U.S. and North American regional sales office and service facility; members of executive leadership; production and warehouse facilities; and its marketing team.

“(At the Elkhart facility), we have a decades-long history of innovation and patented technologies that improve the audio aspect of our customers’ lives,” Kellom relays.

Many talented engineers are on staff. Gerald Stanley, for example, has been with the company for 50 years and holds over 45 patents.

“His technology has found its way into a wide spectrum of products,” Kellom says, pointing out that for over 40 years the facility was part of an Elkhart-based audio amplifier company called Crown Audio. (Harman purchased Crown in 2000.)

Crown still boasts a stellar reputation under the Crown by Harman name and its offerings are used in live and fixed installation applications by legendary performers like Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen and Eric Clapton.

### Room with a boom

The highlight of Harman tours is often the company’s sound room, which features about 400 square feet of the latest in audio technology.

“It’s a really high performance, acoustically-treated room that we can use for measurements and listening tests on the different audio products we’re manufacturing or designing,” Kellom explains. “We can take our product in there with a competitor’s and do comparisons. We can also do our critical listening in there to make sure our sound quality is the best it can be.”

### Lack of distortion

Operating globally in an extremely competitive industry keeps the Harman staff and sales team functioning at its highest level.

“Because of the scale of our business, we’re exporting to over 110 countries and we’re always dealing with the regulatory landscape of importing and the mechanics of

being a global company,” Kellom reports. “But that means we have a fairly high number of competitors because we’re in so many markets in so many parts of the world. Our top competitor in the United States may not be the same as our top competitor in China or Europe or Australia.

“Twenty years ago, it was a very U.S. and Europe-focused business, but now we’re expanding into India, China and Brazil. Those markets have different requirements than other parts of the world. Our products, distribution, engineering and service have to adapt.”

He adds that counterfeiters and imposters have been a problem for some in the industry, although it’s less of a concern for Harman.

“We’ve avoided that by focusing on the high-end products,” he clarifies. “Those customers are savvy enough to understand what they’re buying.”

### Life in a northern town

So what are the benefits of being located in Elkhart?

“Not the weather,” Kellom jokes.

“The biggest advantage is work ethic. The employees at this facility are incredibly hardworking and devoted to the company. We also have some advantages in terms of cost of living and lifestyle. Some of the people in this facility have worked in other parts of the country and really appreciate the lifestyle benefits and access to education you get here, and you’re still working for a world-class company that’s doing big things.”



Harman/Crown Audio’s VRack amplifier system has become a prized possession for many performers. Workers in Elkhart, described as “incredibly hardworking and devoted to the company,” strive each day to make Harman’s products the best they can be.

**RESOURCE:** Marc Kellom, Harman International, at [www.harman.com](http://www.harman.com)