

IDEAS

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IN THE TRENCHES | BY MYRNA SISLEN

LEAVE YOUR STORE!

When I bought Middle C Music 10 years ago, I didn't know anything about the music business, music products or even print music. I had a lot to learn, and I had to learn it quickly. I decided to listen to Tony Robbins, who says that you don't have to reinvent the wheel: If you want to know something, go to someone who is doing it well and copy what they do.

As I've noted before, attending our industry's events made all the difference for me.

My first year in business I went to Summer NAMM, Retail Print Music Dealers Association's (RPMDDA) annual convention, Winter NAMM and National Association School Music Dealers (NASMD) convention, with a visit to the annual New York International Gift Fair thrown in for good measure.

And for all these years I have wondered how store owners manage without attending these shows and classes. I have always speculated, but never been able to put my finger on the answer, until I was speaking with Gayle



Attending conventions can have a positive effect on your business smarts as well as your bottom line

Beacock of Beacock Music at the fall RPMDDA board meeting. We were discussing musically themed jewelry accessories in her store, and I asked her how she got new products without going to the gift shows.

She told me, "I don't."

Well, that sure answered my question. Without leaving our stores and attending our industry shows, there is no way we can know what is new and innovative in our industry. How can we find that one item that will sell like crazy and excite every customer? And don't even get me started on attending the classes offered at these conventions. I credit a large portion of my success to what I have learned at our conventions and classes.

THE PAY OFF

I can hear your objections already: "I've already been in business for so long. I used to go to the conventions, but there is nothing more that I can learn."

I admit that I think that way, too. But then I go anyway and invariably, within the first day, I will find the answer to a question that has been bothering me, or solve a problem that I thought couldn't be solved.

A good example of this was a few years ago at the RPMDDA convention in Milwaukee. The first activity was a trip to the Hal Leonard headquarters. We all got on the bus, and I said to Beacock, who happened to be sit-

ting in front of me, "I am having real trouble sending out e-mail newsletters because they are all bouncing back as spam." She said, "Use Constant Contact." That was the answer I needed, and my problem was solved. And quite frankly, that paid for the trip. All in the first day.

If I had not left my store and gone to that meeting, I don't know when or how I would have solved that problem. I can't tell you how many times that has happened. Even when I don't have a specific problem to solve, I always, and I mean always, come away with important information that makes my store better and makes me more money.

You have to leave your store to improve it. It was legendary Hollywood costume designer Edith Head who said, "If you want to make a million, you have to look like a million." Spend the money, take the time, and take advantage of the many conventions and shows that our industry offers.

In fact, Gayle Beacock and I will be attending the New York International Gift Fair next summer. **MI**

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