

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Your Best Brand

During 2005, all of us in the music products retail industry asked “What’s next?” questions with regards to the products we carry and the companies we associate with. I can almost assure you that 2006 will not bring any news of mass merchandisers, big box music retailers or Internet sellers calling it quits with music products.

I also don’t think you’ll hear our industry’s manufacturers and distributors deciding that the independent retailer is the only venue where they want to sell their product.

In fact, you probably had to “re-up” with certain brands just to remain a dealer in 2006, or get the discounts necessary to stay in business.

All this with no guarantee you won’t see the same product at your competitor. And what if the company you buy this product from is bought? You may no longer be able to (or want to) buy the product from the new company.

Bottom line, you have no control over the brands or product you carry. You really have no say over how long you will be a dealer or who else will carry a product. If your claim to music retail fame is “We’re the only Brand X dealer in the county,” you may be in trouble.

THE ONE EXCEPTION

The one brand you do have control over is your music lesson program. It is your product — you design it, you make it and you distribute it. No dealer agreements. No “re-upping” for 2006.

No “we’re cutting you off as a dealer.” No “now it’s in Wal-Mart!” Even if you lost every product line you carry now, you’d still have your music lesson program.

Your lesson program is your most valuable product line, so treat it accordingly. Make a dealer agreement with yourself: “I promise to promote

our lesson program to our customers,” “I promise to train our staff about our lesson program” — c’mon, you know the drill. Instead of signing something for a company, develop an agreement about what your music lesson program will become in 2006.

A CHRISTMAS STORY

I recently visited with the Ghost of Christmas Future (and I’d suggest you do the same). Based on what he showed me, you’re not going to have Brand X as your big draw during the holidays in 2006. Not to mention a big box will set up across the street. And Best Buy will have a music products retail depart-

ment. (That one came true already.) And the grocery store will have clarinets and guitars.

But towards the end of all this madness, I saw a music lesson program, with students and parents coming into the store, and indies were still in business. Lessons saved the holidays. (OK, this article was being written the week before Christmas, but let’s think ahead — this scenario is possible.)

PRODUCT PROMOTION

We all get excited about new product at the NAMM Show, and we can’t wait for it to arrive. But you should treat your lesson program better than that new product line you just signed up for.

When you approach your lesson program, promote it in all the same ways you would with that new product or product line. Be excited! Tell everyone about it — “We’ve got the greatest music lesson program in the area!” Make plans to sell more of it through advertising and merchandising. Train your staff on it.

Dream about what’s possible, and share this dream with your staff and teachers. It will come true if you make it your passion! Lessons are *your* product, and they won’t let you down. **MI**

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