

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

A Supplier's Burden

A supplier is a person or business that provides a good or service. So guess what? If you teach music lessons, you are a supplier. As music retailers, we expect our suppliers — both manufacturers and distributors — to create new products and improve existing products. We expect them to create a buzz in the marketplace. We expect them to keep us informed. We expect them to have someone help with this, usually a rep.

By those standards, how are we as retailers performing as a supplier of music lessons to the community? Do we meet the expectations we set for our suppliers? Are you creating new music lesson “products” and marketing them? New approaches to teaching, new student activities, new teachers — all keep your “catalog” strong. But that’s not enough.



As suppliers of music lessons, do we meet our own standards of excellence?

It all comes back to: What are you doing outside of your store to drive lessons into your store? Don't be the supplier rep that visits one time at NAMM. Set up a “Five-Minute Music Lesson” booth at the local mall so people of all ages can touch and play an instrument (and learn about your store). Do a mini concert at the local teen center to show off your teachers.

MUSIC LESSON REPS

Great suppliers have great sales reps, but everyone at that company is usually knowledgeable and can assist you in anything you need. Suppliers you hesitate dealing with are the ones where you “Have to talk to Joe” to get help. Get the point? If it's “Talk to the teacher” for info on lessons, you're blowing it. Everyone on your staff should rep your lesson program.

KEEPING CUSTOMERS UPDATED

Isn't it great when suppliers and reps let you know what's new and cool? Well, it isn't any different with your lesson program. If a new teacher who knows oboe or jazz sax just came on-board, if a student showcase is coming up, don't wait for students, band directors or parents to ask about it. You need to be proactive and keep everyone posted.

WHAT SUPPLIERS CAN DO

Whatever help you can get from *your* suppliers for your lesson program is a bonus. But it will vary based on the company and rep, so don't rely heavily on them.

That said, I'm not letting our suppliers off the hook. Here's a big way that they can help me, you and the music industry grow more musicians.

Demand that all of your suppliers have a “Where to Learn How to Play” button on their Web sites. It should cost them next to nothing, and it can drive students into independent stores. It will help with all those big-box/Internet purchasers who just bought their first axe. If anything, suppliers could link to a Web site like themusicedge.com, which already has a search engine of NAMM members. **MI**

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