

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

We Need Them!

In 1978, all was well in the world of music retail. The local music store was *the* source for purchases, services and information, whether the store had a good vibe or bad vibe. If someone bought a guitar or horn at a competitor, the hometown store might not help that customer anymore. “Let them deal with the store they bought it from!” the dealer could say.

Thirty-plus years later, things have changed. But at many stores, attitudes haven’t. What’s the vibe you give a person that needs his or her Costco sax fixed? How about that entry-level electric guitar from GC?

MAKING THE MOST OF THE SITUATION

Why does my store fix other people’s stuff (aka junk, to many MI dealers)? I fix it because I want students!

If they come to my store, and I treat them with respect and help them the best I can, I have a chance of getting a new student for my lesson program. If I have a chance to develop a new musician, then I have a new customer to sell to.

It may not be a strategy from the halls of the Harvard Business School, but it works.

For many people, the music store isn’t where you buy your first horn or guitar anymore. Families buy recreational products where they buy all of their other products — Costco, Wal-Mart, the Internet, etc. It isn’t a personal attack on your business. It’s how things are. If these outlets become the bona fide new source for entry-level musical instruments, what are you going to do?

The music store is pretty much the only place where these people can service their newly acquired musical products. If they come into your store, are you going to tell them, “Take this junk and shove it!” or “Your parents were stupid!” or “You’re stupid!” Would you deal with someone that just insulted you?

If this is your vibe, I hope you’re my competitor.

I WANT STUDENTS

When we do a repair, the following happens: 1. We get money for doing the repair. (Money is always a good thing.)

2. I get the opportunity to talk to the customer regarding the quality of the instrument. (In a respectful, informative way.)
3. They are now in my database.
4. I get them to take lessons at my store. (Yes, even my repair technicians help promote music lessons.)

Parents buy at non-music stores because they don’t know if their children will stick with it and, for the same reason, the price is right. It has nothing to do with your business.

Let’s face it, most consumers view music stores as places for people that already play. Does your store stock any beginning-student instruments? I’m talking a \$49 guitar and \$199 trumpet. If you don’t, than you can’t complain. How do you think the public got the vibe on us? We only carry “real” instruments.

Here’s the bottom line: I think parents will spend money on their children’s music. They will spend \$80 a month for a whole year (\$960) on lessons for that \$49 guitar. That \$960 is an important part of my budget. That’s why I don’t chase these customers out of my store. In fact, if they’re students, I’ll take their instruments as trade-ins once they want better instruments.

Come up with a plan to get these new customers in for lessons. Tell them your going to help them as a musician.

If you are still approaching this subject from a 1978 state of mind, say your prayers — you’ll need all the help you can get. **MI**

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‘Why does my store fix the music products from mass merchants? Because I want students.’