

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Using Your Downtime

It's August, and it's slow. Really slow. If you're like me, you have to resist counting the number of days until school's back and biz picks up (along with your cash flow). However, this is the time to do stuff you are, hopefully, too busy to do when September hits. Here are some low-to-no-cost suggestions that will reap benefits for your lesson program.

MANNING THE PHONES

Call your existing students. How are the lessons going? Talk to the parents and find out what they think. You will help retain students and increase new lesson signups — many times, parents and/or students will ask about other instruments you teach.

Call customers that have stopped in lately. How are they doing? How is Sally doing on the flute they're renting from you? Are they familiar with your lesson program? Call customers that haven't been in for more than 90 days. What have they been up to? This is a tried-and-true part of service-oriented retail. Besides, you're paying to have a phone and employees, so put them to work.

LATE-SUMMER CLEANUP

Consider the "look" of your lesson program. Look at your lesson rooms. Could a little paint or carpet cleaning help?

Look at the rental instrument flier you've been handing out at parent meetings. Redesign it and add information about lessons. The kids that rent

horns for school band might want to learn outside of the classroom, but if your hand-out only has rental rates and terms, how does anyone know they can learn from you?

Also, look at your Web site. Many of us are guilty of not updating our sites regularly. Here's one idea: Take photos of your teachers and make a page on the site for them, along with short bios. You can also use them on lesson fliers, or frame them and hang them up in the lesson room area for customers to see. You can even hang them up next to related

product. They will work as silent salespeople.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Speaking of teachers, how is lesson availability for when fall hits and demand increases? Start early and get the word out that you are looking for teachers. Hold a teacher job fair. Once you get a couple new-hires, implement a teacher training program. You'll have a squad of energized new teachers ready to go for September.

CURRICULA CONCERN

Even before you start training new teachers, develop new technology or product topics to enhance your lessons. This is the stuff that method books don't tend to cover.

Good topics might be: how to use a tuner; how to use a capo; the ABC's of strings/reeds/drumsticks; how to use effects; brush technique for drum students; how to clean your instrument properly; how digital recorders work.

For some of these topics, create a "take-home" info sheet (with store info on it) and blow one up to hang in the lesson rooms. Talk to the teachers and have them incorporate these topics into their teaching — they normally wait for students to ask.

If you have a solid curriculum for traditional students, start thinking of untapped lesson markets out there.

Take the home school market, for instance. Most of these parents want lessons during their school day — music is a requirement for many of them — so that means 10 a.m.–2 p.m. Promote these slots in your area as "Home School Music Lessons," and word of mouth will take it from there. **MI**

Pete Gamber is the owner of Alta Loma Music in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. He welcomes questions at pete@altalomamusic.com.



Instead of waiting for September (and more business), use August to refresh your lesson program