

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Marketing to Returns

How many kids participate in your local elementary school band programs? How many play in the junior high and high school band programs? How many of these students are taking music lessons at your store? Do you have 10 percent? What about 20 percent? Or, do you have 1 percent? This is a huge, untapped market for potential new students.

In a previous column, "Marketing to Rentals" (November 2007), I discussed how the school music rental season is a great time to get beginning-student music lesson sign-ups. But the end of the school year is also a great time.

Objections customers had in the fall, like, "My kid's just starting," aren't valid anymore. By now, parents have seen their children perform in the end-of-year concert and may want them to continue with their instruments. So give that rental list another call. You'll get more lesson sign-ups.

COURT RENTAL-RETURN CUSTOMERS

Now is also the season of rental returns. Don't overlook this potential lesson-sign-up opportunity. Most store clerks accept the returned rental and hand the customer a receipt. Instead, ask every return, "Why is your kid not playing next year?" It's important to know why parents return rentals. If you don't ask, you won't know their rationale.

Usually, there are three main reasons, and you can always talk up your lesson program when you hear these responses:

- 1. "My child didn't like being in band."** This student still might want to play, even though he didn't like band. Convert him to another instrument, like guitar, piano or drums through your music lesson program.
- 2. "Band is over."** Summer lessons can be fun. Plus, students will improve their skills and retain an interest in the band program.
- 3. "I thought they had to return their instruments when school ends."** The library books have to go back, not the trumpet.

GET REPS INVOLVED

Have your road reps talk with school music teachers about how lessons can help them retain students and teach students new skills. Your lessons could keep those chops from deteriorating, while raising a school band's overall level of musicianship. The rep needs to hang your lesson program fliers in the school band room and get them into the hands of student musicians. All students should know your rep, and your rep should know them.

Think about it. Ninety percent of the guitar players and 90 percent of band musicians are in the local schools. Marching bands, jazz bands, concert bands and drum lines can all use your teachers' expertise.

SELL YOUR TEACHERS

Take your instructors into the school and host a sectional. Students will want to play if your sax teacher develops a positive vibe with them, especially if their band director isn't personable. When you host the sectional, let students and the teacher know your instructor teaches this kind of lesson at your store. The lesson program will now be viewed as product instead of vaporware.

Offer to hand out awards and fliers at school music events. Present "Student of the Month" and "Student of the Year" awards at school concerts. This is a great targeted audience, and it shows the community your support for local school music programs. Tell the audience about music's importance in the schools and about your lesson program. Have your promotional fliers on display as people enter the auditorium or gym. By making an extra effort, you'll see an influx of summer music lesson business. **MI**

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Customers returning rental instruments are prime candidates for summer music lessons