

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Welcome to the Jungle

Guitar Center and Sam Ash are entering the music lessons business. GC's setting up its lessons program, GC Studios, in every new location. Sam Ash plans to incorporate music lessons into its corporate remodeling vision.

Once a holy grail for independent music stores, lessons are now under siege. Welcome to the jungle — are you really surprised?

GC and Sam Ash aren't doing this to put indies out of business. They want to grab more market share and get new bodies into their stores every week. But like non-gang members getting shot in gang crossfire, some independents will get killed.

Many independents have survived because a local GC or Sam Ash sent them lesson referrals. That will change.

Many independent retailers also think, "It's OK if we don't sell as much gear because we teach music lessons and GC and Sam Ash don't." Reality check: They do.

You need to remember what GC and Sam Ash did to your sales when they opened in your area. Could the same happen to your lessons program, and if you lose your music lesson foot traffic, can you survive? Guitar Center and Sam Ash programs will have all the typical hype and glitter, so your music lessons program needs heart and soul to thrive.

WHAT'S YOUR MARKETING MANTRA?

The GC Studios website claims that the lessons operation offers "a proven world-class curriculum," which it created alongside print music publisher Hal Leonard. The curriculum is based on a progressive advancement model that can be taught through one-on-one lessons, workshops and clinics.

Finally, music education done right.

It's a pretty egotistical claim for a company that has never offered music lessons. You can bet GC's thinking behind this is we're bigger, we're better. It makes for great marketing, but it also raises the question: What's your music lessons marketing mantra? Selling your program on its longevity is important — for example,

"30 years of making musicians." Also, be sure to include photos of students that have gone on to music careers. Rock stars, junior high band directors — include them all.

WHAT'S YOUR CURRICULUM?

GC vows to offer a world-class curriculum. You're not going to find downloaded Internet tab or a "what do you wanna learn this week, dude" approach at GC Studios. Instead, it has a beginning material packet in a binder for students. GC will boost its print music sales with this format.

You should be doing the same at your store. Survey students at all levels to learn what's going on in your private lessons and music classes. Ask teachers questions to find out what method books they use and what songs they teach.

Get on-board with a digital print music service. Put together a binder that includes songs that students are learning in their lessons, and sell it to them. This way, you can also make money on print music.

Make sure teachers sign a no-copyright-abuse-policy agreement. Get rid of photocopies. Make your lesson program legit and professional. **MI**

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With large chain stores getting into the music lessons business, your lessons program needs to have heart and soul to thrive