

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Welcome to the Jungle II

It's easy for independent music stores to talk about what Guitar Center and other chain stores do wrong. I want to talk about what they do right — and how all of us indies can do better. Let's take a deeper look at GC Studios' approach to music lessons.

The GC Studios system is based on what it calls “a progressive advancement model.” It's basically a karate studio approach: Complete a packet of materials, and you advance to a new “artist pass” level (i.e. belt color). As you complete more packs, your binder gets bigger. (Note that GC aims to sell a new pack each month.)



GC Studios has a system for showing students how they're progressing. So should you

At first, I thought it sounded dorky, but how do you show progress to students and parents? GC is making it beyond obvious that the student's improving, which will also boost retention rates. Indies, on the other hand, often assume that students and parents know there's been progress. They don't.

You might think money is the No. 1 reason students quit, but most of the time, it's because they think they're not learning anything new and they're bored. And what do we use to market a student's improvement? Usually nothing.

Understand, I'm not saying this will work across the board, but GC Studios has come up with a system that can work in multiple markets. It's cookie-cutter. Most indie music stores, on the other hand, have no systems.

THE PROGRESSIVE ADVANCEMENT MODEL

So here's the challenge. Like GC, indies need to set up their own progressive advancement music lessons systems.

Let's look at an existing music industry model: piano methods. Piano students always know when they've advanced, and so do their parents. The student finishes level one and buys the books for level two. Everyone's excited.

The problem is piano methods aren't designed as short-term, goal-driven methods. And for teens, they don't teach enough “fun” stuff.

Can you take a guitar method sold at your store and create a hip, fun system, so students can experience advancement? Can you create names for these levels and packets of exciting songs the students will enjoy learning?

GET STUDENTS PLAYING FAST

GC Studios touts that it teaches students songs from popular bands, so the students can ultimately perform solo or in a band. Good idea. Indies can start by asking guitar teachers for the top 10 rock songs they teach and when, skill-wise, they introduce the song to the student. You'll find that 80 percent of teachers are teaching the same songs. Develop a supplemental song packet from this list.

Level one could include four lessons in 30 days. It should include a skill set from the method book, a song from the book and a preview of the next song the student will learn, giving something to look forward to. For example, lesson one for guitar could be: Get through page 10 in *Essential Elements For Guitar*, learn to play “Sweet Home Chicago” and get ready for the next song, “Knockin' On Heaven's Door.” Now do the same for level two and so on. If you have these 30-day goals, students will learn lots of songs, and their progress will be visible.

You need a direction, but allow for flexibility with each student. This is where the “soul” of your dealership will help you blow any cookie-cutter lessons program out of the water. **MI**

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