

IDEAS

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THE TECH BEAT | BY JAMES HARDING

FACE-TO-FACE MARKETING

After a recent recital, I found myself discussing player piano technologies with a confused parent.

Specifically, I was explaining how today's players no longer use floppy disks. Everything is wireless. And, just as I was about to walk away feeling superior in my knowledge of cutting-edge technology, one of the performing pre-teens walked up and pointed at the man's floppy disk. "Look, mom!" she said with some excitement. "Someone 3D printed the 'save' icon!" And just like that, I realized how close I was to turning 40.

In retrospect, I should have thanked that girl for giving me the idea for this article. In fact, her declaration (and the humorous chat that followed) helped remind me just how quickly things change. Many kids today have no idea what it's like to only have three channels on the TV (four if you count PBS). Many have never dialed a rotary phone. Some kids even look at me strangely when I try to explain how a grand piano action uses gravity — like a "see-saw." Modern culture is so deeply connected to communications technologies that, in many ways, it's actually become more



Get out in front of your prospective customers, and meet them face-to-face

difficult for small businesses to reach their customers.

Every potential advertising venue now comes with hundreds — if not thousands — of options. How many websites are there? How many hundreds of channels can we enjoy on TV or satellite radio? Who has the time or the budget to cover all of these and still find resources for social media? It's impossible to do it all, so, as we adjust to our

ever-changing marketing climate, we "guess and check." We try new things, evaluate the results and move on — until we find something that works. But, what if that something isn't new at all? What if it's been right in front of our faces this whole time?

HIT THE ROAD

I am fortunate enough to speak with piano dealers from all over the nation and those who are spending time engaging people face-to-face (both inside and out of their stores) are seeing a significant increase in sales. Dealers who rely on traditional, "mass-media" advertising are seeing flat or even declining sales. Our prospective customers appear to be overwhelmed with advertisements. They crave real experiences.

With that in mind, my store, Gist Piano Center, has renewed its focus on "face-to-face" marketing events. We've done "new product testing" with local teachers. We've done theme recitals in local malls or public places. We've put together performances for charity organizations. We've even partnered with a local hospital chain to provide equipment and performers for their music therapy libraries. Coming up, we're joining forces with "big-

box" stores to experiment with "store within a store" spaces, helping us reach thousands of people who might never have thought to visit us. And we've managed to collect a myriad of prospect data and automatically upload it to our database thanks to our Constant Contact app.

In short, we're going back to "The Old School" and focusing on the one thing technology hasn't changed: our need for human interaction.

So far, our early results have been extremely encouraging, especially in traditionally slow months, and I anticipate that we'll see more success as we head into the holiday season.

How about you? Why not try getting out of your store and seeing your public face-to-face? Wow them with the musical fun that only you can offer and watch as they delight in a hobby they might never have otherwise considered.

New technologies are great, and we should definitely embrace them when they make our lives easier. But, when technology gets in our way, it's time to build our prospect pool the "old-school" way: face-to-face. **MI**

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