

# IDEAS

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THE TECH BEAT | BY JAMES HARDING

## SCARING UP PROFITS

October — for music retailers it can be one of the most foreboding months of the year. Forever locked in the “dead zone” between rental season and the holidays, October is a profit-draining, life-sucking abyss for many of us. In fact, my own haunting history with this precarious month began many years ago. I was a young piano retailer, eager to impress my superiors with new ideas and desperate to meet my monthly sales goals. I was ahead for the year, but only by a little, and as my eyes fell upon an empty plan for the month of October, I knew I’d have to do something dramatic or risk losing my precious bonus.

A piano sales event would bring in cash, but it would also risk our sacred holiday selling season. A direct mail campaign would strain October’s already tight budget and prevent our marketing team from completing their holiday work on time. I needed something cheap and simple that would bring a ton of people into my store.

### GOBLIN’ UP SALES

At the height of my despair, I overheard a tiny lizard telling people that they could save



### Throwing a Halloween-themed event stimulated a slow October

themselves a ton of money by switching their car insurance, and a bomb went off in my head. “Save yourselves a ton of money at ‘XYZ’ Music’s Halloween weekend!” It seemed like the perfect slogan for an impromptu weekend event. I knew at once what I had to do.

I organized a special “not-quite-live” performance of “Ludwig van BOO-thoven” at my store to kick off the weekend just before

Halloween. Everyone who came would get some free candy and a coupon for special “this-weekend-only” discounts. On Saturday, we began the day with a reading of “The Celery Stalks at Midnight” by a local NPR radio host (who agreed to mention her appearance on air free of charge). During the day, we had harvest games for the kids as their parents took advantage of piano prices that we “slashed to the bone.” And before the entire weekend “passed away,” we invited students to perform some spooky tunes on the “FrankenSteinway” dressed in their Halloween costumes. We advertised using all of the free or inexpensive methods at our disposal, including classified ads, in-store signage, flyers on local message boards, our studio newsletter and letters to our teachers. We’d use them all in a campaign to bring October to life.

I was a mad scientist at work. I bought some fake spiderweb and stretched it to within an inch of my life. I brought in my own fog machine from home and encouraged our staff to bring in some Halloween decorations to help us spruce up the place for the weekend. This event would either boost our sales for the year or brutally murder my annual

bonus. With my heart in my throat, I opened the door that Friday and a host of people came in.

In short, I sold six pianos that weekend and, perhaps even more importantly, I finally saw some true potential for the miscreation of a month that is October.

Now, Halloweekend, as we call it, has become the cornerstone of Gist Piano Center’s teacher outreach program. Events like this help us build meaningful relationships with hundreds of prospects in our area — many of whom we would never have met if it hadn’t been for Halloweekend. The recital draws well over 300 students per year, and it has been featured in local media (including TV) on a regular basis. Every department in our company has seen a boost — from print music to piano service to, yes, even piano sales. And Ludwig van BOO-thoven still unleashes his talent upon the innocent from time to time courtesy of our QRS player piano systems.

This month, remember that a little creativity, a sense of humor and some killer Halloween party tunes can transform your “dead” month into something far more profitable. **MI**

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