



THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Want Fries With That?

Pull into any fast-food joint, and the person on the other side of the counter will automatically say, “Would you like to try one of our combos today?” What they’re really asking is if you want fries with your meal, and it’s the oldest upsell in the book. The cost of a burger may be close to \$4, but adding fries and drink for a “combo” is \$5.50 plus tax. Profit margins on a drink and fries are big.



Now apply that same thinking to your music store. Start by making a mental list of small items you know are not only good profit generators but great tools for customers. What items do you have that are less than, say, \$5 that will make a customer’s life easier and can be combined with another item to generate a bigger sales ticket? These are your healthy versions of fries and a drink, the easy add-ons — or what I think of as add-ons for beginners. And by nature and cost, some of them are easier to upsell than others.

THE ADD-ON PROCESS

I departmentalize these items in my head. For example, when a customer buys a pack of reeds for a saxophone, I automatically ask if he or she needs cork grease, a cleaning cloth, a reed saver or a strap. I sell cork grease almost 80 percent of the time because it’s less than \$1. I also sell a lot of cleaning cloths and reed savers. They’re less than \$5 each.

However, straps are more than \$5, and a new case and mouthpiece are more than \$25. I know we’ll only be able to upsell these items to specific customers, namely those who’ve been playing for more than a year or are moving up to a better instrument. Also, notice that I asked if they needed a specific item. I didn’t ask, “Is there anything else you need?” Recommend what your customer may forget he or she needs, and you will make the sale.

EASY ADD-ONS

Now, let’s take a look at how you can better departmentalize your inventory and train your staff to sell these add-on items.

Easy add-ons are items that most beginner students and first-time buyers aren’t sure they need. These items make excellent SKUs

for new salespeople and teachers to use to practice upselling. The items should be demonstrated to show why they’re a good value combined with another item. Here are a few popular examples.

String winders and cleaning cloths. If a customer buys a pack of strings, he probably needs a string winder. Many new students don’t even know string winders exist. Offer to change a string for them, and demonstrate the winder. It’s only \$1.50, but sell 200 a year and you have \$300. Same with cleaning cloths. Unless your customer has a roadie, a cleaning cloth is a must.

Tuners and metronomes. Guitarists need a tuner, and drummers need a metronome, period. I know the argument: People already have free tuner and metronome apps on their smartphones. Remember, many kids under age 12 don’t have smartphones. They need a tuner and metronome, and they need a real one with bells and whistles.

Demonstrate why they need it, and demonstrate all the bells and whistles. For instance, explain that you can’t clip your smartphone to the end of your acoustic guitar headstock as a tuner. These items should be requirements for your lesson program.

The other argument I hear is that beginner guitar packs already include a tuner. Remember, many acoustic packs don’t. Have tuners next to your sales

Train your staff to sell add-ons the same way fast-food restaurants sell combo meals

counter, and keep batteries in stock, too — many people will see them and remember they need an extra pair. I recommend to customers that they carry extra batteries in their guitar bag or case. Keep 9-volt batteries in stock for effects pedals, too.

Picks, sticks and strings.

These items are self-explanatory, as you can't make music without them. I pitch these to customers as the disposable razor blades of the music products industry. You may only buy a drum set or guitar once, but you'll always need picks, sticks and strings. Your teachers should explain the benefits of having fresh strings, picks and sticks, too.

Capos and slides for guitarists and tuning keys and stick bags for drummers. I think of these as the intermediate items of

They cost more than \$5. Every drummer needs a place to store sticks, mallets and brushes. Plus, there are lots of drum keys on the market, but serious drummers need an all-in-one model — one that includes a wrench and screwdriver. Same with capos and slides. Serious guitar players will have a nice capo and slide, and students who've been taking lessons in your program will eventually graduate up to these items, too.

Earplugs. Don't let customers, especially drum students, into practice rooms without them.

ADVANCED ADD-ONS

Advanced add-ons are SKUs that may not move as often due to their higher prices. Still, there are a few things you can do to improve your chances of

selling these items.

Hardshell cases. Most prepacks come with a gig bag, but what about the customer who's ready to move up from a beginner prepack? I explain to customers that I wouldn't protect a \$600 guitar with a \$35 gig bag. The guitar needs a sturdy case.

It's said that a picture's worth a thousand words, and so is a good sales prop. One of our teachers had a nice high-end guitar in a soft gig bag when his dog knocked it over. The neck broke in half, and the repair would have cost the same as a new model. I bought it from him for pennies on the dollar and leave it hanging behind our sales counter. It looks terrible, and that's the point. People ask what happened to it. When we explain the guitar was in a soft gig bag, they start

thinking about their own gear. We've sold lots of hard cases because of that guitar.

Amps. Every electric guitar player and many acoustic players need a good amplifier. Many of today's prepacks come with an amp, so make sure you can explain the value of the product you're upselling.

I generally start a demonstration the moment a customer hears the amplifier in the prepack they're thinking about purchasing. Obviously, they aren't going to spend a few hundred on a prepack and splurge on another amp. But it plants the seed, and they know what to expect when they need to move up to a better model. **MI**

Billy Cuthrell owns and operates Progressive Music Center. Contact him at billy@raleighmusiclessons.com.

The advertisement features a dark background with a repeating pattern of brand logos including Yamaha, Legere, Jones, Evans, Remo, and Hohner. At the top center is the St. Louis Music logo. Below it, a banner reads: "Supplying 10,000 products from 150 of the world's leading brands to music stores across the Nation." The main visual consists of four vertical panels: 1) An Alvarez acoustic guitar with the brand name "Alvarez" at the bottom. 2) A P. Mauriat saxophone with the brand name "P. Mauriat PARIS Go for the Sound" at the top. 3) A Knilling violin with the brand name "Knilling" at the bottom. 4) An Austin acoustic guitar with the brand name "Austin" at the bottom.

info@usbandsupplies.com

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