

# IDEAS

Inside **IDEAS** > Customer Whisperer Page 28 > Indie Retail Page 30 > From the Trenches Page 32 > Retail Doctor Page 34 > Lesson Room Page 36

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

## TALK THE TALK

It's an age-old adage that selling is storytelling. In a well-executed interaction, the sales associate weaves charming yarns that tell his personal story, his company's story, and the compelling story of his product or service. The more unique each of those components is, the more likely that the shopper will reward you, rather than your competitor, with the sale.

Sales professionals, in an attempt to differentiate themselves from competitors, explain why they are the single most reliable and qualified advocate for the consumer. Then, they go on to talk about the history of their company and all the benefits it provides its customers. But when it comes time to talk product, it becomes more of a features-benefits pitch without much of a story. After all, why waste time on the story when you're selling the same stuff as everyone else? In 2012, when brand is considered king, that's the way it is — *except* for the best of the best.

### THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

The secret weapon is choosing a brand that isn't as widely available. Rather than



**Want to close sales? Tell a product's story, and use brands less traveled**

going nose to nose with your competition, selling something they don't have gives you the edge that often tips the scales in your favor. Think of it from the consumers' point of view. They go from store to store, website to website, and everyone claims to be the best. Every company

is purported to be the ultimate source. And so with all else being equal, since they're looking at the same product everywhere, they end up confused enough to either make a random choice or no choice at all. But what if you change one of the variables: the product?

### THE STORYTELLER

I learned this lesson by accident. Many years ago, my company became one of the very early importers of guitars and drums that we private-labeled under the Elger brand. But before they became well-known, we had the challenge of selling against the recognition and security of the big brands. Believe me, having a 40-foot container of instruments in the warehouse was a fine motivator to learn how to sell them. We became product evangelists, telling the story of their design, their background and a half-dozen other unique attributes that made them the clear choice for many customers. It was more work than selling the big names, for sure, but the payoffs were huge.

It happened again in the 1970s. The strongest product

category was sound reinforcement mixers, and the hottest of the hot products was the Tapco 6100 series mixer. They were a terrific product, a cleverly designed six-channel mixer, expandable to 14, with all the right gizintas and gizoutas and a respectable circuitry designed by the then-unknown Greg Mackie. The one problem was everyone carried them, so profitability was in the toilet. It got so bad that people didn't even think about percentage markups. We literally measured how many dollars we could make and watched that dwindle. To counteract the problem, we began to carry a nifty brand called Malatchi out of Boulder, Colo.

We told our customers that Jim Malatchi's boutique sound company was the hottest ticket in the Colorado live sound design market. We showed how much easier it was to visualize your settings with slide pots instead of rotary. We educated our customers on the benefits of extra effects and monitor busses. For our little 5-minute spiel, we were rewarded by making a lot of money while our competitors duked it out making just about

nothing on the bigger name brand.

And for those who think this is something that couldn't work today, Charleston, S.C.-based Shem Creek Music's owner Phil Thomas and his staff were fighting a losing battle of dwindling profits trying to sell the same name brands as their larger, better-financed competitors. When I called on Shem Creek, I listened as its sales associates skillfully explained everything that made their store the place to buy. I'd never heard it done better, but they were still losing ground in the marketplace.

This past holiday season, Phil decided that enough was enough. After a conversation with me, he made Wechter guitars his push line. I armed him and his staff with Wechter's story. Along with selling the sales associate and the company, they began talking about the storied past of Abe Wechter and all the famous people for whom he'd built guitars. They talked about our Plek Pro setups and how they make our guitars play like guitars in a higher price range. The sales associates learned some of the fine points of our product design, and they could clearly demonstrate them. In short, they knew Wechter guitars as well as I do, and they spoke to their customers with passion and excitement. By romancing the guitars, they were able to create a presentation that transcended specs and pricing concessions. They involved their customers in an emotionally charged interplay where their own enthusiasm rubbed off on clients and caused them to get every bit as excited.

When you're able to get in the zone with your sales presentations, selling becomes at once more fun and rewarding. You create an experience instead of a transaction with your customer. Even the most hardened shopper will remember that special interaction he or she had with you. And if you're wise enough to promote a product that's unique to your store, you'll be amazed by the positive results. In the case of Shem Creek Music, hardly a day went by during the holiday season when I didn't receive replenishment orders for multiple guitars. And that's a happy ending. **MI**

Gerson Rosenbloom is managing director of Wechter Guitars. He's former president of Medley Music and a past NAMM chairman. E-mail him at [gersonmusicinc@gmail.com](mailto:gersonmusicinc@gmail.com).



Follow Music Inc. on Twitter:  
**@musicincmag**

**Brubaker**

**THE BRUTE™**  
BRUBAKER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

**Unleash the Power  
In Your Performance!**

*THE BRUTE Series is a complete marriage of our obsession with tone, quality and affordability. I stand behind these basses!*

*That's why my name is on the headstock!  
...Kevin Brubaker*

For Dealer Info:  
call: 732-919-6200

**AP**  
INTERNATIONAL

Brubaker Brute Series is a Division of AP International. For More Information, Call 732-919-6200 or visit [www.brubakerguitars.com](http://www.brubakerguitars.com)