

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Guitar Teacher Loaner Program

How often do you talk up new gear to students, only to have your teachers play a brand you don't sell? You're fighting against "subliminal" advertising, even if the teacher isn't telling the student, "Buy this type of guitar." He or she is playing one during the lesson, and guess what brand the student remembers? You've got it—the instrument the teacher plays.

I once noticed that a teacher, while giving lessons, wasn't playing the new guitar he had bought at my store. Instead, he used a brand that we no longer sold. When I asked him why, he said, "My good guitar is getting too beat up, so I'm using this crappy guitar." In the meantime, all of his students probably thought it was his favorite instrument! They might go to another store or online searching for the guitar, and we'll lose the sale.



THE LOANER PLAN

Consider loaning your teachers a guitar or bass to use while teaching or playing gigs. Each month, give them a new model to try out, and rotate different guitars between teachers. After every teacher has used a particular instrument, sell it at a blowout price. Also, put product literature in each lesson room and advertise student sale prices.

I'm not talking about expensive guitars, but rather good "step-up" models and instruments your competitors don't carry. Use instruments that are targeted to your students. It will cost much less than spending money on ads, and in the end, you've still got something to sell.

This plan will:

- Eliminate subliminal advertising for brands you don't carry.
- Put the "My teacher plays a (your brand)" in students' heads, thus boosting brand awareness.
- Make your teachers familiar

with the gear you carry. (If teachers are familiar with your gear, they won't say "I don't know" when a student asks them about brand ABC.)

- Increase sales, as you're now creating a "buzz" about your product.

GETTING STARTED

Contact your suppliers, starting with manufacturers' reps. Explain this plan and how it will increase sales of their gear. Ask if they can offer samples, extended terms, extra discounts or "B" stock, as well as literature

and banners. Have backup stock on the walls so you can always make the sale.

Explain your predicament to teachers, as well. You need to sell gear to keep the doors open and to keep students coming in. Explain the subliminal messaging that can occur. Ask the teachers for their help.

Also, explain the pluses of this program. These include less wear and tear on their good guitars; not having to bring a guitar to and from lessons; playing a new guitar each month without buying one; and helping the store by providing evaluations and opinions on the instruments. (You can even ask teachers to fill out evaluation forms.) Make them an important part of this idea, so they know their input is important.

Talk to the sales staff to make sure they understand this program, too. They need to support teachers with any problems that arise. Make sure they are up on the student deals and trained on this product.

Will all your teachers jump on board right away? Maybe not, but some are better than none. And if you stay with it over time, the program will become part of your store's policy. **MI**

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