

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

The Unknown Beginner

Consider this scenario. Mom, Dad and the kids are out shopping at the local mass merchant for socks, soap and a new computer monitor. They see a guitar (or horn or violin), and one of the kids wants it. They put it in the shopping cart, slap down the money and head home.

Who is that new musician? I don't know. My fellow music retailers don't know, manufacturers don't know and the "Bulls-Eye store" that sold the instrument doesn't know either. This is a major problem for all of us — except for the non-music retailer. And I refuse to accept the great lie that we music stores lost that customer because we had crappy stores or the customer couldn't find us.

This beginner has no affiliation with *any* music store! And we don't know the buyer to invite him or her into our store for support. That's right: There's no "How's it going with your guitar?" or "We offer lessons to help you develop as a musician." Yep, another instrument for the closet or eBay.

into our stores. Every instrument should have a Wanna Play? postcard in the box, directing this "unknown" beginner to the NAMM Web site and the dealer locator. This locator is non-partisan. (It searches by zip code.) Whether you're big or small, customers get directed to you!

We need to call on these industry associations to spend an extra 5 cents to put a Wanna Play? postcard into every box before it ships from China, India, wherever. In fact, they can boost our prices by that 5 cents, so it doesn't hurt their bottom line. It would be worth it.

This would mean no matter where this instrument ends up (the Internet, Costco, Best Buy, Target, Bed, Bath and Beyond, Motel 6 — just joking), the "unknown" beginner would have direction to local music retailers. What if this caused 10–20 percent of those people to Wanna Play? It would help every retailer and supplier in the music products industry.

It sounds simple because it is. Will it work? It won't if we don't do it. Come on GAMA, MDA and all of you vendors supplying these non-music stores. Do you want to grow this industry or not? We're ready to teach these beginners. Let's turn them into players. **MI**

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People who buy instruments at mass merchants aren't converting to music lessons, and that's a problem. Here's a solution

NASMD REALIZATIONS

Lessons are needed for the survival of this industry. No players equals no future sales. Period. Not making the first sale on top of no music students coming into our stores is a lethal combination. It's time to turn this bus around. But how? I made some connections at the recent National Association for School Music Dealers (NASMD) convention in Tucson, Ariz.

1. There will be fewer step-up sales in the future. During his NASMD session, George Hines of George's Music stated his stores needed to up

the percentage of guitar pack purchasers they were converting to lessons because of this "unknown" beginner factor. In other words, fewer sales of these items has meant fewer lessons for his company, meaning fewer upgrade sales in the future.

2. Get kids hooked on music via guitar programs in the local school, and involve us, the local dealer. At NASMD, Bob Morris of Fender and the Guitar and Accessories Marketing Association (GAMA) discussed how GAMA has been promoting the growth of guitar play-

ers in the industry with its great Guitar in the Schools program. Fantastic!

THE SOLUTION

So how does this all add up? GAMA and Music Distributors Association (MDA) have manufacturing members supplying these non-music stores with product, and they both belong to NAMM.

The Wanna Play? project from NAMM is designed to drive more lessons