

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

# Lessons from DCI

A mom recently came into my store to buy piano books. I asked her where she was taking lessons, and she said she'd found a teacher on Craigslist, an online freebie bulletin board. When I told her my store offered lessons, she said, "I didn't know you could take lessons at a music store."

My first thought was, "What an idiot!" But then I realized that if there's one mom or dad thinking this way, there are probably more. Yikes! How could this be? I mean, everyone knows music stores teach music lessons — don't they?

I, of course, had made a bad assumption. If you buy a car at the car dealer, it doesn't offer driving lessons. If you buy groceries at the supermarket, it doesn't teach you how to cook. Why would a music store be any different? So what are you doing to let everyone outside of your store know that you teach music lessons? Probably nothing.



## THE DCI MODEL

I recently went to the Drum Corps International (DCI) World Championships via NAMM at the Rose Bowl in California. It was awesome — more than 40,000 musicians, directors, fans, parents and music junkies. But in an area heavily populated with music stores, I was the only retailer to take NAMM up on this marketing promotion. And guess what? Most people in attendance weren't taking music lessons.

This event was beyond educational to my personal learning process. Did you know that more than 65 percent of the kids involved with

DCI go on to become music educators or performers? That's what I call a success rate. I discovered that most of the attendees prefer having an association with an independent music products retailer and that DCI folk don't talk about the DCI "culture" — it's DCI "family." These are my type of people.

## BECOMING BETTER PROMOTERS

This marketing event, along with NAMM's Warped Tour

promotion, made me think of how all of us — retailers, manufacturers and NAMM — need to be better promoters of lesson programs at our stores. Here are some ideas on how we can spread the word.

**Retailers:** Does your community have a weekly street fair or a fall harvest festival? Try setting up a table at one of these. How about a music lesson flier in the band and music rooms in your community? Volunteering to help with sectionals in a band, choir or guitar class can bring in fresh students. You

could get involved with a Boy or Girl Scout troop. They have music-related merit badges to earn. How about arranging field trips to your store for youth groups or schools? Career days at the local schools are another good place to have a booth. Or try highlighting your lesson program at a local coffee bar's open mic night.

**Manufacturers:** How about adding a list of dealers with lesson programs to your Web site? Be selfish — you might sell more gear because people will be learning to play. It's low-cost and promotes music making to people of all ages. Get daring and put a Wanna Play? postcard from NAMM in all the products you distribute. That card will send consumers to the NAMM dealer locator where they can find a retailer in their zip code.

**NAMM:** Develop that Wanna Play? program into a Web site with a consumer front end. Get dealers that teach music lessons to opt in.

We all need to get out and hit the streets. What if we could get the over-65-percent success rate that DCI gets? Do you think DCI sat behind a desk waiting for this phenomenon to happen?

P.S. I've since listed our store on Craigslist, too. **MI**

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