

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Turn Your Store Around

We are in the grips of the worst economy that I have seen in 31 years in business. As retailers, we're not just competing with other independent music stores. We are competing with a host of music retail chains and big-boxes in an over-saturated market. Customers don't need to patronize our stores.

To make it worse, music lessons are available at your city's parks and recreation department, dance studios and churches, as well as from independent teachers. The local parks and recreation department and churches in my area even copied my Rock Project program.

We need to increase our sales and lesson sign-ups to keep our businesses afloat. This is challenging during a time when every customer is scrutinizing every penny. You need to scrutinize your business the same way to attract new customers and retain current customers.

THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

You: Get excited about running a music store. Be excited about your lesson program and creating new musicians. Be excited about interacting with musicians of all ages, levels and styles.

Lesson Rooms: Get rid of the funk! Clean lesson studios weekly, at least. Vacuum every day, add a fresh coat of paint, and clean the doors and windows. Try moving merchandise around. That pink drum set isn't selling in the showroom, but it might if it's placed in the drum lessons room with a blow-out student price on it. Remerchandise your lesson rooms every two weeks, and think of those rooms as an extension of your sales floor.

Product: Tuning, dusting and polishing product weekly will help sell it. Remerchandise your store every month. The big guys see customers maybe every six to eight weeks, but if you have lessons, customers

come in every week. Your merchandise can look old really fast. Flip your store's layout every three months.

Don't reorder the same product in the same colors. Repeat customers will think you haven't sold anything. Music stores have to look "merchandise active," not stagnant. And don't let your walls look empty. Rather than letting the anemic look of empty hooks pervade, try buying a less-expensive guitar line in a variety of colors to keep your business looking lively.

How does your store smell? Like last night's pizza? Use some plug-in

deodorizers. Don't overlook any of the consumer's senses.

Brand: We've become reliant on the latest and greatest products and brands to keep the cash registers ringing. In order to stand out from the over-abundant glut of product and services, you need to have your own brand image. Your music lessons program is an ideal way to set your store apart. Your other services, such as rentals and repairs, can also help develop your brand. All of your competitors have the same products that you carry, but your store brand is yours alone.

Set Goals: Set goals for your lesson room numbers. If you don't, they won't improve. Start with a goal of 10 students per lesson room each day, then set daily lesson sign-up goals for your staff. Try five lesson sign-ups per staff member per day. Do the same with add-ons. Challenge staff to sell a music stand with every rental or a string winder with each string sale. This isn't new, but is your staff really doing it? Do you keep track?

10 WAYS TO REVIVE A LESSON PROGRAM

1. Stock product that your students need. Tuners, books, strings, reeds, music stands — this is the stuff students, and others, buy.

2. Get your teachers' input with inventory. They'll help sell it to their students.



The economy won't magically improve by the end of the year. Your business needs an action plan