

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Give Lessons Face Time

Fewer holiday shoppers buying less means we need to have even better selling strategies in place. This is especially true for intangible products, such as music lessons. It's crucial to make those invisible services more tangible and marketable to holiday buyers, who might be experiencing your store for the first time.

These new customers evaluate music lessons based on what they experience in the store, on the phone and through the Web site. All three entry points should send the same message to customers about the store's products and lesson program.

BEYOND THE STOREFRONT

A Web site gives music retailers the most control over keeping a consistent marketing message. The home page should include an ad for the dealer's lesson program that links to information about the teachers. This ad could be a quick video of the owner or teachers talking about the exciting music lessons at the store. Include photos or YouTube videos of the teachers performing. Any photos or videos of recent student events work great, too. If the Web site has a link to a direct e-mail contact for lesson inquiries, even better.

Giving basic phone training to the sales staff is essential. They need to know what makes your lesson program special to get excited about it. Make sure your employees are inviting callers into the store during these conversations. A great phone call experience will bring in new faces.

Also consider what's playing when callers get put on hold. An FM station will play a competitor's ads. Create a recording of the store's hours, lesson program services and other current promotions. With today's technology, it's easy and inexpensive.

CREATE TANGIBLE LESSONS

Since music lessons are like vaporware, an invisible product, it's important to create that lesson vibe in the store, even in the morning when students aren't present. What do you have to show for your lessons program? I suggest setting up a music lessons information area. This space should include informational fliers with a photo board of student performances and events. Playing videos of teacher performances also lets customers see that your teachers are talented musicians.

Incorporate lesson literature into store product displays and merchandis-

ing. Try placing guitar lesson information next to the entry-level guitars. In the print department, display a sign that reads, "Here are the books our teachers use."

Give customers a two-buck tour of the lesson studios while lessons are going on, so they can see the program in action. These are just a few ways to turn that vaporware into a tangible, sellable product.

CONVERT LESSONS INTO SALES

I cannot stress enough the importance of staff training, especially teaching how to use lessons to close merchandise sales. I recommend the NAMM University sales training videos at namm.org/nammu.

Train your staff to pick up on key phrases from customers, such as, "We don't know if they're going to stick with it," in reference to buying a starter instrument. A response, such as, "Lessons are a great way to get started on the right track," should be automatic. This type of tie-in wins over a lot of customers.

Offer extra instrument discounts if customers sign-up for lessons, or give a special deal for lessons *and* an instrument purchase. Music lessons might be vaporware, but they make an awesome gift. **MI**

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Get the most out of new holiday customers by making your lessons program more visible