

THE LESSON ROOM | BY PETE GAMBER

Networking Your Staff

Music retailers hear a lot about how online social networking can enhance their businesses and create a strong Internet presence. We're all busy figuring out how to use Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to bring new customers in and keep regular customers updated on store events. But in reality, much of this will only yield small returns.

Developing strong relationships, on the other hand, is not a trend. While you're in the back office tweeting, what's your staff doing on the retail floor to network with your music lesson students? Don't get me wrong: Online social media is important. But what good is it if customers come in and have to deal with a staff member who has the personality of a brick?

Cyberspace isn't the instant fix we're all looking for. Students come into your store every week for music lessons. Shouldn't your staff know who they are?

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR PEOPLE

Try this test. Hand each of your employees a blank sheet of paper and have them fill out the names, first or last, of all the students who are going to come in tonight. How many names can they list? How many, as the store owner or manager, can you list? I bet you know more names than your staff do, and you spend less time on the retail floor.

Veteran retailers have learned customer networking chops from traditional shopping experiences, both good and bad. We've taken that knowledge and developed our own approaches to retail and selling.

Be aware that new, younger staffers have gotten most of their shopping experiences from the Internet or at large self-serve box stores. These experiences don't naturally lend themselves to face-to-face networking. You need to

show them how to network.

Here are 10 things to teach them.

1. Get out from the safe zone behind the counter.
2. Greet the student and parents.
3. Introduce yourself.
4. Find out the student's name, parents' names and which teacher the student takes lessons from.
5. Write down this information, and include the lesson time. I use a low-

tech steno pad and keep it where I can access it quickly.

6. Find out which school they go to, what music they're working on and any other information that puts the focus on them. A simple "How's the lesson going?" will work, too.

7. Make students and their families feel as if they have a trusted contact in the store. That's something that doesn't happen at Wal-Mart or online. Tell them, "I work every Tuesday, and I'm here to help you with anything you need."

8. Update the student and parents on upcoming clinics, recitals, summer programs, YouTube postings and new gear. Give them the verbal pitch and a handout.

9. When the student leaves, use his or her name. ("See you next week, Billy.")

10. Use those steno pad notes to reference a student's name when he or she comes in the following week.

Greeting customers by name when they arrive makes them feel special. It's much better than, "Hey dude, how's it going?"

Increasing face time, not Facebook time, will create more sales, lesson enrollment and referrals for your music lessons program and your products. **MI**



Tweeting won't matter if the employee behind the counter has the personality of a brick

Pete Gamber is the owner of Alta Loma Music in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. He welcomes questions and comments at pete@altalomamusic.com.