

# IDEAS

>>> **Inside IDEAS**

> Lesson Room Page 42

> Management Page 44

> Lessons Learned Page 46

> Streetwise Page 48

> Customer Connection Page 50

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## CELEBRATE THE PLAYER

After banging on his brother's hand-me-down guitar, Seamus decided to scour the Internet and snag his own. He found his first "real" guitar on Craigslist and bought it. The reviews said it was a good ax, but when he took it to the guitar store to get a broken tuner fixed, the salesman treated Seamus as if he had Swine Flu. He sensed an unspoken, you-didn't-buy-it-from-me hostility and began to wonder if he needed a membership card to shop at a music store.

Jeanine couldn't resist the guitar-in-a-box display next to the linens at Bed Bath & Beyond. But what was supposed to be a surprise for her 10-year-old's Christmas stocking seemed hard to get in tune. During her lunch hour, she journeyed across town to her uncle's favorite music store only to get a dose of humiliation. "You really got stuck with junk!" the clerk said. Great, yet another thing to stuff in her closet until next spring's garage sale. So much for music.

Hank's bandmates were embarrassed by his chronic miserliness. "Tip" was not a word in his vocabulary when



So a customer bought his first guitar at a non-music store. Roll out the red carpet to create a lifelong client

the waitress brought the check for post-gig pie and coffee at the local dive. They always had to slip an extra buck under his plate while he wasn't looking to cover his end of the tab. The guy could play, though, and he had a legendary knowledge of music

and guitars. Music store salespeople would pretend to be busy when he came in to avoid his queries about the latest trade acquisition. They knew Hank was never going to buy anything. He just used his weekly drive-bys to pump them for info.

### NO MORE NARCISSISM

Maybe music store employees could afford to have a narcissistic attitude in the days when their shop was the only game in town. Today, our livelihoods depend on how well we treat people discovering music products outside of the traditional music retail channel.

Seamus had never set foot in a music store. He learned what little he knew about guitars from his older brother and, sadly, Craigslist. Jeanine had a great idea: music for her child. But when a music store had the opportunity to set her back on course for discovery, the employees blew it by treating her as if she were a traitor. Hank wasn't exactly the cash register's best friend, but he was immersed in the local music scene. He could still be a player conduit to, if not an advocate of, a music store if treated politely.

What do all three people

have in common? They all have an interest in guitar, and *they all came into your store!*

The guitar market is at a historic high, with the broadening exposure to the instrument through big-box retailers, the Internet and *Guitar Hero*. It's hard enough to get customers into a store. If they do come in, they deserve red carpet treatment.

So how do you rewire veteran staff to cut the attitude and treat these folks as guests? Three words: *celebrate the player*. If someone has graced your storefront with his or her presence, that person's desire to create music needs to be celebrated. So what if the first sale was lost to Craigslist? Guitar players don't just buy one guitar. A child starting on guitar is a latent goldmine of future guitar-buying. And a self-professed expert like Hank may not be afflicted with guitar acquisition syndrome (GAS) but is likely a carrier of this condition. Create a new store culture: celebrate the player. Celebrate the interest and their presence. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 29-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.