

IDEAS

Inside **IDEAS** > The Customer Whisperer Page 34 > The Retail Doctor Page 36 > The Lesson Room Page 38 > Lessons Learned Page 40

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

SELLING SOLUTIONS

It's easy to get bogged down in the "business" of business. Stocking shelves, straightening displays, monitoring gross margin levels — we ponder buying decisions and selling strategies based on the mundane stuff: what we hope our customers will be doing with our products.

If your business is wired simply to acquire and move "stuff," let me suggest an additional dynamic that could energize all levels of operation, purchasing, merchandising and sales training — the notion of solutions. At the recent NAMM show, Bob Phibbs, a.k.a. The Retail Doctor, introduced his modification of classic FAB (feature-advantage-benefit) selling: "It has ... so you ..." In a nutshell, this puts the focus on application and context *before* the goods themselves.

YOU'RE THE THERAPIST

With old-school retail, we filled our stores with goods we thought we could sell, and we waited for customers to come in and buy them. If all worked out, we talked customers into needing the goods. Now, with turbo-charged competitive new-school retail — and proper attention to turns and gross margin return on



'The best mindset is to think of our goods as prescriptions to problems.'

investment — we can ill afford to warehouse deeply anything that won't meet customer needs and yield near-immediate profits. Stale inventory stunts cash flow and kills retailers. It's more important than ever to track customer needs and stock inventory around those wants and desires. To do so, the best mindset is to think of our goods as prescriptions to problems. We become shelves and

hooks filled with solutions. Just as important, our staff becomes the face, counselor and therapist equipped to help the consumer enjoy and grow in the craft.

At NAMM, Roland founder Ikutaro Kakehashi mentioned this notion, likening the music store to a family doctor. We may not always have the remedies for the entire music community packed within our store walls, but we can frame our businesses as the go-to place. It starts when a musician needs a resource or tool to advance his or her art. When we go to trade shows looking for solutions, we equip ourselves for greater relevance in our markets.

For example, consider the Apple iPad's growing popularity. At NAMM, we looked at a lot of new implements that would bridge iPad use with the musician. It's not just a gadget, and seeking out iPad clips, mounts, pouches and devices became a show priority. The ravenous market hunger for ukuleles also had us on the hunt for method books, class materials, and an array of new body styles and designs to bring this activity home. And an increasing interest in niche folk instruments had us checking out new guitar, mandolin and banjo lines that

local competition wasn't stocking.

IN-STORE CONSIDERATIONS

Our stores should be clean and logically arranged. Essential accessories and instruments can't be displayed on opposite sides of the showroom. Again, associate activity (playing guitar) with need (instrument maintenance, chord book, strap), and display with minimal physical barriers.

We also need staff trained and tuned to these evolving requirements. Our employees need to be able to speak intelligently about the goods or at least know how to access outside resources for more information.

Plus, solution selling is about "delivery." A storefront's not enough. Today's retail is about having displays marked effectively for a consumer who would rather read signage than be sold by a salesperson. Outside the store, we need a cyber presence that, at minimum, advertises how we can get goods to consumers in-store with sensitivity to a busy culture.

A good store is a prescription — medicine for the soul. **MI**

Ted Eschliman is a 30-year veteran of music retail and co-owner of Dietze Music in Southeast Nebraska. Mel Bay published his book, *Getting Into Jazz Mandolin*.