

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

The Second Mouse

“The early bird catches the worm, but it’s the second mouse that gets the cheese.” Many of us in music retail have unintentionally taken heed of this cliché. The simple truth is life’s often easier when we lay back and watch others fight for the lead.

When Google AdWords first came out, I was plagued by the necessity to purchase expensive keywords for our stores, just to be heard above the din. More consumers were going to Google for location information, prices and places to buy their wares. Still, we pretty much skipped the initial AdWords incarnation, even though we felt left in the dust by behemoth companies with larger Web advertising capital.

But something significant changed.

Last year, Google initiated location-based marketing. Searches used to be “bigger is more powerful,” regardless of geography. But now, when you plug in consumer services and product words, Google leads you by default to nearby locations, based on the computer’s or smartphone’s IP address. This makes for a profoundly relevant search result for local businesses. If you haven’t already looked into setting up a Google Places page, I can’t stress enough the importance of spending time tagging this. It’s also very easy. Unlike Google AdWords (early bird), Google Places (second mouse) is free. It’s also much more relevant.

Speaking of early birds, did anyone plunge headlong into MySpace? Talk about falling off the planet. I’m just glad my time on MySpace was limited to after-hours personal fun.

Today’s hipper version, Facebook, has become a powerful tool for connecting with customers. If you haven’t taken the time to develop a Facebook presence, I can’t admonish enough what a powerful, low-cost tool it can

be to communicate with a targeted customer demographic. You can do a ton of stuff for free, and the cost per action on Facebook banner advertising is a historically unprecedented marketing bargain. Compare the relative empty-air futility of radio and television, aimed at the dispassionate masses, to the prowess of messages to only those with a registered inclination toward music.

STOCKING DANGERS

How about inventory? Tackling new lines and products is a perpetual gamble. You can’t afford *not to* smatter your shelves with the latest and greatest, but we all know today’s clearance bins are loaded with yesterday’s can’t-live-without products. Understand, I’m not suggesting we avoid purchasing new products — that would be asinine. But diving into uncharted waters without a life preserver is reckless.

The wife and I have a simple grocery store rule: Don’t walk the aisles with an empty stomach. (We’ll inevitably leave with more than we would have if we’d eaten beforehand.) NAMM shows can be the same way. So my fellow buyers, plan ahead of time using two principles: Buy only three to five untested, new major “toys,” and never buy anything you can’t unload above cost in six months. On our calendar, we faithfully review the new lines and gear, and failure to sell means liquidation, channeling this discretionary cash into the next new thing. In many cases, we’re only repeating the process, but you have to try new things. The key is to minimize early-bird products.

Avoid the trap. Be the second mouse. **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*.



It often pays to take a wait-and-see approach with new technologies, products