

IDEAS

Inside**IDEAS** > The Customer Whisperer Page 28 > The Lesson Room Page 32 > From the Trenches Page 34

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

ASK FOR THE SALE

You've presented the most convincing pitch, complete with every logical reason a customer should hand you a credit card and walk out with the instrument you've demonstrated and justified. You can see it in his eyes. The price is perfect, and it's exactly what he needs. You want him to buy it, he wants it, and out spills the deal-killing words: "This looks good, but I really need to shop around more."

From here, you have three options. You can opt for hard core closing tactics that risk tarnishing his impression of you, Mr. Nice Guy sales pro. This could include wrestling him to the ground with empty threats. ("The product isn't likely to be around much longer.") But if your store is like ours, we don't like to push too hard — maybe a fault. It's not our company culture.

The second response is to acknowledge the customer and thank him for shopping. Maybe even hand out a business card with the commission-inducing, "My name is John. If there's any way I can help in the future ..." Unfortunately, the conversation is usually over at this point.



How to respond if customers say they need to shop around more

I suggest you aren't doing your business or your customers a favor if you use either of these responses. The first is rude, the second downright lazy. You need to acquiesce, but there's no reason to end the conversation, especially if you sense the customer's committed to a future purchase. So, I'll propose a third, more creative option.

Remember, we're in the Information Age. We interact with news and resources unheard of 10 years ago. We're ensconced in blogs, specialty magazines and *Consumer Reports*, all telling us what to think and devoid of a surface agenda. We betray our hard-earned cash when we don't thoroughly research purchase decisions. Our customers feel duty-bound to get as much information as they can up front, and we need to indulge them. Conversely, there's so much misinformation floating around, we need to help them sift through the debris. So when customers throw down the I-need-to-check-around stumper, consider these more productive responses.

"Where else are you going to look?" Another brick-and-mortar store? Internet? Pawnshop? You may find customers have no idea where to look next. They could be offering important reconnaissance for your next sale. They may be comparing your business to a pawnshop, a cue to say, "We have an onsite repair tech for after-the-sale service." One thing's for sure: If their next-stop competitor matches your price, they won't drive back unless you give them

compelling reasons to.

"Who or what is helping you make this decision?" A brother-in-law musician? Teacher? Internet user forum? If it's a musician or relative, it may be someone you know, and you can exploit the relationship. If it's a teacher, you can mention what other teachers are saying. If it's an online forum, find out if it's one you frequent or should frequent.

"What were you planning on spending?" Maybe you overshot the budget, and now's the time to back down to another stock item. Maybe your best offer is still in striking distance.

"How soon do you need this?" If the need is immediate, you can help save the customer time and gas.

The independent brick-and-mortar retailer has this advantage more than any other venue. Granted, folks don't like to be sold, but you can't underestimate the power of a human being, even a total stranger, validating an intent to buy.

Ask for the sale. **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*.