

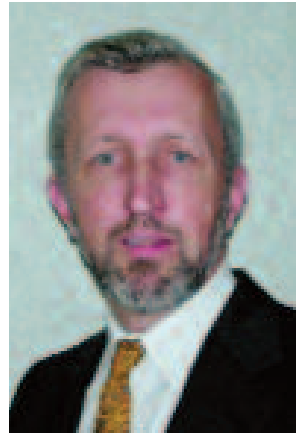
Pushy Salespeople And Other Urban Legends

In interviews and off-the-cuff comments, not to mention advertisements, music retailers routinely describe their business as a “sales pressure free” environment.” “You won’t find any high pressure tactics or commissioned sharks in our store,” declares the tag line in a typical retail ad. During a panel discussion at the NAMM show, another retailer noted, “Our salespeople aren’t on commission because we don’t want to create the kind of pushy atmosphere that intimidates potential buyers.” This anti-sales pressure stance is so strong, it would appear that the industry has effectively vanquished any strong closers from the ranks of the sales staff. In a survey of recent drumset buyers (see page 72 of this issue), 64% said they experienced absolutely no pressure from their salesperson. Another 18% said they felt a little pressure, and only 1% said they felt “strongly pressured.”

Just so we’re not accused of favoring sales scams, let us say for the record that we don’t endorse the kind of high pressure tactics epitomized by the cigar-chomping used car salesman who pledges to fight for a better deal from the manager “if you sign on the line right now,” and has refined arm twisting to a high art. However, the fact that 64% of drum buyers said they felt “no pressure whatsoever,” suggests that the overwhelming majority of salespeople are sitting around waiting for a sale to happen without taking even the slightest initiative...like asking for the order.

At one end of the sales spectrum are the brutal boiler room methods—think the penny stock fraudster whose motto was “the only time you let them hang up the phone is if they die.” At the other is the passive salesperson who is either so nice or so unmotivated that they never get around to bothering the customer about maybe buying something. Obviously, there is a happy middle ground between the two extremes. However, based on our survey, the m.i. industry has tilted a bit too far towards the passive approach, and in the process, is probably leaving a lot of business on the table.

Fortunately, this is one of those problems that has a well-defined solution. A bookshelf in our office is filled with 50 years worth of three-ringed binders produced by industry manufacturers that address the basics of selling. Some of the details change from year to year: a 1955 manual explains how to sell Hammond Organs out of the back of a



1990, the headings are even remarkably similar, with chapters on “Qualifying the Customer,” “Uncovering and Answering Objections,” “The Importance of Active Listening,” and “How To Close the Sale.”

These suppliers were well aware of the truism that good salespeople are “made not born,” and they took it upon themselves to help those in the trenches to sharpen their skills. It’s a lesson that stands to be revisited today. The internet age is less personal, consumers are supposedly savvier, and the retail climate has changed. Nevertheless, there is always a place for the person who can figure out what a customer wants, and then ask them to buy. If our survey is any indication, the music industry could benefit from more people who understand those simple truths.

Space precludes a review of the basics of selling here. Furthermore, there are people who can cover the topic a lot better than we can. (Type in “Sales Strategies” on amazon.com and you get 7,905 responses.) However, from the suppliers down to the retail channel, the industry could do a better job in communicating some basic sales techniques. An inviting, non-pressured retail environment is a good thing. But ultimately, if you don’t pressure the customer a little by asking them to buy, you run the risk of going hungry.

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