
The Human Side of MIDI

As of late, there has been a widespread tendency to lament the lack of cooperative spirit within the music industry. Self-appointed spokesmen point to the lack of funding for NAMM's MTV promotion and similar efforts and deride the industry for being "selfish," without vision, and "unwilling to contribute to a worthy cause." This grumbling strikes us as highly ironic, especially in light of the fact that the music industry recently pulled off a cooperative tour-de-force that is the envy of the computer industry and has substantially enhanced business over the past 18 months. Specifically, we are referring to MIDI, the Music Instrument Digital Interface.

From a technical standpoint, MIDI represents a cost-effective method of interfacing electronic instruments of different makers to expand creative horizons. But from a human standpoint, it represents the joint effort of competitive manufacturers to set aside their differences in pursuit of a common goal.

The challenges and the amount of cooperation necessary to create a standard instrument interface simply cannot be understated. In developing MIDI, intensely competitive manufacturers sat around a table, shared proprietary designs, and agreed to alter the configurations of their products in order to make the interface workable. Given the deep-seated competitive animosi-

ties that exist, the fact that these manufacturers could agree to a standard, let alone share sensitive information, is nothing short of amazing and reflects a powerful commitment to serve the world of music. Interestingly enough, no such spirit of cooperation exists in the micro-computer industry, as a standard interface has yet to emerge.

Dave Smith, founder of Sequential Circuits and the de facto "father of MIDI," and all the other manufacturers who made important personal sacrifices to bring MIDI into being are deserving of high praise and gratitude. Their efforts and vision will benefit the music industry today, and for years to come. The creation of MIDI graphically illustrates just how selfless and cooperative the music industry can be, when presented with a workable challenge that offers tangible benefits.

In light of the tremendous joint effort expended to bring MIDI into being, the case for a lack of cooperative spirit seems groundless. Chances are that if the industry fails to cooperate on a given program, the problem lies with the program and not in the outlook of collective industry members.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor

Stop Complaining And Call A Customer

Business managers invariably want to take credit for success but are quick to shun any responsibility for failure. As piano sales have declined over the past five years, retailers and manufacturers have tended to cite large social factors, like demographic shifts, as the culprit. While not to dismiss the impact of any of these social factors, precious little attention has been focused on certain industry failings in effectively selling pianos.

Recent market research conducted by Yamaha reveals one glaring industry failure that has certainly contributed to the woes of the piano business. A survey of 5,000 Yamaha piano purchasers revealed that 91.7% never received any form of communication from the retailer after the sale was made. In other words, in 91% of all sales, retailers ignored a proven and cost-effective method of ensuring customer satisfaction, promoting good will, and generating future prospects by foregoing a simple phone call.

Millions of dollars and considerable time and effort are devoted each year to retail advertising, presumably to generate prospects and build store image in the community. Yet apparently only a scant minority expend even a phone call to cultivate past customers as a new source of prospects. This imbalance does not reflect well on general selling methods in the piano business.

Every piano market study over the past 20 years has cited the referral of a friend as a major factor in influencing the selection of a store and a particular brand. Given the vital importance of referrals, how can any piano merchant pass up the opportunity to contact customers immediately after the sale to see if they are

pleased with their purchase and if they have any friends who might be interested in a piano? For ten minutes and 20 cents, such a phone call will make your past customer feel as if you really care and are interested in his welfare. And if he is well disposed to your store, your chance of getting referral business increases substantially.

Methods of contacting customers after the sale don't have to be limited to phone calls. We know of retailers who send flowers or personal letters, or actually visit their customers. The method is not important. What is important is that a consistent effort be made to solicit the good will of every individual after he makes an important purchase. Personal contact after the sale represents one of the cheapest and most effective methods of spreading the good reputation of a music store. Why then is this practice overlooked by the majority of piano dealers? We can think of only two reasons, each equally blameworthy... laziness or ignorance.

Rather than wasting time lamenting market problems caused by working mothers, declining personal income, demographic changes, or you name it, we would urge every piano dealer to pick up the phone instead and call a recent piano purchaser. The call won't do anything to change current demographics, but it might make a customer feel good about your store and help generate some referral business. As the old saying goes, "Retail Means Detail," and this is one important detail that should not be overlooked.

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