

## *Painful Anecdotes*

Since the age of four, famed jazz drummer Peter Erskine has been devoted to making music. Yet, as he relates elsewhere in this issue, as a kid growing up in New Jersey he was intimidated and felt unwelcome at the local music store. Offering a similar scenario, professional music educator Jerry Lopatin explained, in last month's issue, that he purchased his first synthesizer from a Radio Shack store because he felt he was not technically proficient enough to patronize the local music store. These anecdotes, which unfortunately are not isolated, illustrate a serious failing among numerous music retailers: a woeful lack of comprehensive customer service.

The music industry sells to a minuscule percentage of the total population. Given the small size of our customer base, it is imperative that we offer regal treatment to all potential customers. As one dealer once remarked, "Anyone who walks into a music store has already expressed a strong interest in making a purchase. To a retailer, these people are the most important people in the world, and they deserve to be treated accordingly."

Theoretically, the reason a music store can sell specialized music products more effectively than a Sears or K-Mart is because it can offer more effective sales presentations and more comprehensive service. As illustrated by Casio's success in selling keyboards through mass merchants, music dealers have no monopoly on the selling of musical products. Rather, they have to earn the right to sell these products by offering the appropriate sales and service. A music store lacking in either of these vital areas is no better suited to representing musical products than any of the mass merchants.

Implementing effective selling methods and a customer-oriented attitude is neither expensive or involved; all it takes is discipline. Herewith, a few suggestions:

1. You have only one chance to make a first impression. People who walk into a music store are not looking for an elephant; they have a strong interest in music. Any salesperson who is still sitting down when a customer is three feet over the threshold should be horsewhipped, fired, or both.

2. When greeted with the phrase, "May I help you?" 99% of all breathing consumers will respond, "No, I'm just looking." The insipid greeting, "May I

help you?" is a sales deterrent that should be permanently banished from every salesman's vocabulary.

3. Product knowledge is a vital facet of good salesmanship. However, people don't buy features, they buy benefits. Most prospects have little interest in 128 programmable voices; however, they are all interested in an endless variety of wonderful musical sounds. Customers are not interested in a 67 ply pinblock, but they are concerned with not having to call the piano tuner every two months. A frequency response of 10hz-100khz is not very meaningful to most musicians, but all of them want a sound system that will make them sound better. Resolve to a describe a product only in terms of its benefit to the purchaser. A canned recitation of features and specifications serves only to confuse the issue and get in the way of making a sale.

The need to stress a product's benefits is particularly important when dealing with high-tech music products. As salespeople in the computer industry learned, product applications, not bits, bytes, and baud rates, are what sell product.

4. Never pre-judge a customer. As the old saying goes, "They may have gotten the dirt under their fingernails burying their money." Given the small number of potential customers, you can't afford to write anyone off by virtue of age or apparent income level.

5. Remember the Golden Rule. Treat everyone as you would have them treat you. Courtesy and consideration are painfully simple methods of generating customer good will.

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