

# Sales Training—It Works

The key elements necessary for a successful storefront, according to retail giants like Sears, K-Mart, and Federated Department Stores, are, in order of importance, a good location, appropriate merchandise, and good personnel. At music stores, however, the equation for success is markedly different. Store location and product offerings are important, but qualified salespeople are the single most important ingredient for achieving profitability.

The vital importance of the salesperson is graphically illustrated in a special market report on digital electronic pianos in this issue. When asked what sells these hot new products, a cross-section of retailers did not mention consumer advertising, MIDI, good features, or various manufacturer promotions. Rather, they continually cited the initiative of individual salespeople. One dealer summed up the situation by explaining, "Our digital piano sales were lousy in one location until we installed a new salesman. Advertising, inventory levels, and promotions stayed the same, but with a good salesman on the job, things really began to take off."

The music industry is vitally dependent on qualified and motivated front-line salespeople. Yet, despite this generally accepted premise, it is amazing how little time and effort is devoted to sales training. Whenever the topic of expanding the music industry comes up at association gatherings, or at retailer and manufacturer meetings, conversation invariably centers around T.V. advertising, massive direct mail efforts, and assorted other grandiose promotions characterized by lofty purposes and fuzzy goals. The talk of cultivating better retail salespeople generally gets little or no mention.

Comparing the process of training salespeople to other proposed industry promotion efforts calls to mind Aesop's fable about the tortoise and the hare. Unlike T.V. advertising and other large scale promotion plans, sales training is slow and tedious, and it does not offer the promise of rapidly expanding the market. However, it does produce results over the

long term. A handful of the industry's prominent manufacturers have profited handsomely through ongoing sales training programs for their personnel and their retailers' sales staffs. Similarly, a number of the nation's leading music retailers trace their success to a continual in-house training of their sales staffs.

As members of the industry tackle the challenge of selling more musical products, we would encourage them to ponder ways of improving the skills of the frontline salespeople. In plotting marketing strategies, manufacturers should give full consideration to providing funds for training programs. Retailers should also look for ways to enhance the skills of their personnel.

Training salespeople does not necessarily require vast sums of money; all it takes is time and commitment. For starters, consider sending your key people to the various manufacturer-sponsored seminars. The cost is modest when weighed against the potential benefits. Secondly, encourage your staff to read the industry's trade magazines and the wealth of manufacturer literature available. A membership in NAMM is not a bad idea, either. For just \$150, you can tap into a vast library of texts and videos that offer valuable insights. Finally, remember the economic value of a kind word. Providing encouragement and understanding is vital for developing an individual's talents.

The industry's greatest success stories can invariably be traced to well trained and motivated individuals. If you are interested in joining the ranks of the successful, give some thought to cultivating the people who can help you achieve your goals.

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