
The Importance Of Attitude

The school music market enjoyed its second straight year of growth in 1987, and 1988 promises to be yet another banner year. The most commonly offered explanation for this improvement in the industry's fortune is "better demographics." An increase in the number of school children can only help the band business; however, the recent demographic shifts are so small as to be virtually insignificant.

According to Census Bureau statistics, in 1974, when the band instrument business peaked, there were 37 million school-age children. In 1984, when the business hit bottom, there were approximately 30 million children. For 1987, manufacturer shipments were over 20% higher than in 1984, yet the number of school-age children had increased only 5% to around 31.5 million. Obviously, there is more to the recent market improvement than demographics.

We feel that a subtle attitude shift has done more than anything else to rekindle the growth of the band instrument business. The early '80s were characterized by conglomerates bailing out of the music business, a number of manufacturer failures, and dire predictions about the future of the business from all quarters. Retailer enthusiasm for the business was at

something of an historic low point. And with a dispirited retail salesforce, effectiveness in the field declined.

Whether in band instruments, pianos, guitars, synthesizers, or sound re-inforcement equipment, the music industry relies on creative retail selling. Music, unlike food and shelter, is not one of life's necessities. It is a commodity that has to be aggressively promoted and sold; as a result, the general attitudes of the retail selling force have more bearing on the state-of-the-industry than larger economic indicators.

The GNP may turn down, unemployment may rise, and interest rates may ratchet up a few points; however, if a professional musician is convinced that a certain piece of equipment will enhance his performance, he'll buy anyway. Similarly, a parent who believes that music will enrich the life of his child will generally purchase regardless of the general climate. Economic conditions may not deter these purchases, but an indifferent, ineffectual salesperson probably will.

The moral to all this is simple: great economic conditions won't save your business and a downturn won't kill it. In other words, business will always be good for those who know how to get it.

Making Guitar Month Work

When General Motors decides to offer a rebate promotion or provide low cost financing, its dealers don't just passively sit back and wait for the customers to storm the showroom and snatch up every car in sight. Rather, the car dealers seize on these manufacturer incentives and promote them relentlessly through advertising, direct mail, and store banners. A national organization, be it a manufacturer or an association, can provide a retailer with the tools to do a promotional job. Ultimately though, the responsibility for making the promotion a success lies with the local retailer.

The Guitar and Accessory Music Marketing Association is preparing to launch the second annual "International Guitar Month." Retailers who sit back and expect the promotion to send customers flocking to their store are bound to be disappointed. However, those dealers who make use of the Guitar Month promotional materials will be rewarded with a combination of immediate business and enhanced store image.

GAMMA has deftly orchestrated a radio/retail promotional tie-in in 25 national markets. Designated radio stations in each of the 25 markets will be mentioning "Guitar Month" regularly and talking up guitar playing. In addition, the radio stations will be featuring interviews with scores of noted guitarists. Retailers who participate in the Guitar Month Promotion will receive numerous air-time mentions in conjunction with manufacturer sponsored product giveaways.

What's more, with radio stations devoting significant air time to discussing the guitar, imaginative retailers should be able to find a way to get some good low-cost publicity. GAMMA has supplied the basic tools. From now on, it's up to the individual retailers to take advantage of the tools. We would urge every fretted instrument retailer to contact Jerry Hershman at GAMMA, 136 West 21st. St., New York, N.Y. 1011-3212 (212)924-9175, to find out more about the details of International Guitar Month.