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# Control Your Own Destiny... Start Teaching Today

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Most music retailers view starting an education program the same way long-time smokers view breaking the nicotine habit. They acknowledge the many benefits music education offers, but they can never seem to get around to starting a teaching program in their store.

There always seem to be at least 50 good reasons for postponing an education program until some date far off in the future. The refrain goes something like this: "It's too busy in the fall to launch a program; by the first of the year most kids have already made their commitments to extracurricular activities; no one is home during the summer, but I'll get to it..." etc., etc.

The past 12 months, which experienced disappointing "walk-in" retail activity forcefully underscore the benefits of music education. A combination of uncertainty generated by a new President, fear about the Federal deficit, and high levels of consumer indebtedness made many individuals cut back on their discretionary purchases in the fourth quarter. This translated into a generally soft Christmas season for retailers, ranging from Wal-Mart and Sears all the way down the average Ma & Pa music store.

While stores that depended on walk-in traffic were disappointed during Christmas, anecdotal evidence leads us to the conclusion that music stores with a thriving education program did just fine. This revelation should come as a surprise to no one.

The selling process in a music store can be divided into two basic elements: selling the relative benefits of brand "X" versus brand "Y," and selling the benefits of music making. The real challenge lies in persuading people to want to make their own music. Any retailer who can accomplish that task will have no problem

dealing with competition from other stores or other product lines.

An in-store teaching operation is possibly the single best advertising and promotional device a retailer could ask for. Every satisfied student becomes a walking, talking endorsement for the store that will generate countless referrals. For those who visit the store, the presence of students is a forceful illustration of the benefits of music that will turn many "lookers" into active customers. It's also worth mentioning that in-store teaching generates additional steady income, increases walk-in traffic and accessory sales, and creates a loyal customer base.

For in-store teaching to be successful it must be legitimate, and it must be managed with the same care devoted to managing the retail selling effort. Today's customers are too sophisticated to fall for teaching efforts that are just a thinly varnished sales pitch.

If you are presently involved with music education, keep up the good work; it will pay handsome dividends in the future. If you are not, make a New Year's resolution to get started soon. Simply stated, by creating a customer base through music education, you have greater control over your own destiny, and you are less affected by the inevitable fluctuation in consumer buying habits.

There is no time like the present, so get started today.

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