

Where To Find Customers

One of the most significant developments at the recent NAMM show was not a new product or technology, or a hot new marketing concept. Rather, it was a dramatic shift in the outlook of virtually everyone who deals in synthesizers and related electronic products. Having sold keyboards to the overwhelming majority of professionals, semi-pros, and accomplished amateurs during the past five years, manufacturers and retailers are now facing the grim prospect of a saturated, stagnant market. Unless, that is, they can devise a means to cultivate a new group of customers. Thus, as manufacturers and retailers conversed at the show, one of the major topics of discussion was, "Where do we find more customers?"

The good news is that we already know how to develop more customers. All it takes is education. One hundred years of industry history, as chronicled in our columns, has irrefutably proven that if you show someone how to make their own music, they will buy an instrument. The bad news is that education is a tough job. It's time consuming and frustrating, and lacks the instant gratification that comes from closing deals on the sales floor.

While teaching is a tough undertaking, the power of dealer-sponsored education programs in generating a market can be awesome. In the fifties, by going door to door, offering musical aptitude tests, private lessons, and the promise of learning to play, retailers built the accordion business into a 300,000 unit a year business. In the sixties, a similar approach helped the industry sell over 2 million guitars annually.

Regrettably, there are no carefully crafted teaching efforts in the industry currently that compare with the guitar and accordion studios of the past. It's almost as if a large number of retailers, lulled into complacency by the strong sales of recent years, have concluded that they can survive on walk-in traffic alone. (Businesses can survive on walk-in traffic, however, prospering requires a more active effort to create new cus-

tomers.)

Countless studies have shown that if children are not exposed to music making between the ages of 6 and 12, there is little chance that they will ever develop even modest proficiency on an instrument. Despite this conclusive evidence, few manufacturers or retailers have done much lately to ensure that children at this critical age are exposed to music. Elsewhere in this issue, we report on NAMM's recently unveiled market development program that focuses on promoting music education for young children. This is a praiseworthy effort deserving of support. However, industry members should not expect NAMM to shoulder the entire burden of introducing an entire generation to the joys of music making.

Before succumbing to despair, retailers should ask themselves, "What am I doing to try and get more children involved in music making?" Manufacturers for their part should be examining what they can do to assist their retailers in running effective education programs. Furthering music education can take a variety of forms, from working with school systems to expand the music curriculum to offering in-store lessons, to encouraging and supporting local music teachers. Every little bit helps.

The number of children between the ages of 6 and 12 is expected to rise sharply in the next five years, as the baby boomer's children start growing up. If a concerted effort is made to introduce these young children to active music making, the industry stands to enjoy a great sales gain. If however, we just continue trying to sell the existing body of music makers by offering bigger discounts, a great opportunity will have been lost. Teaching people to play is the key to expanding the market.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor

International Guitar Month

Now in its third year, GAMMA's "International Guitar Month" promotion has evolved into one of the more effective association efforts in recent memory. The secret of the promotion's success is the fact that it's easy, it's effective, and virtually anyone with a shred of imagination can make it work.

At the heart of the program is a national radio tie-in effort that assists retailers in staging promotions and sales events in conjunction with their local radio station. In addition to the radio program, GAMMA has compiled an International Guitar Month handbook that is overflowing with proven programs for raising the profile (and sales) of the guitar. From staging "Best Guitarist Contests," to running a successful drawing, the handbook contains dozens of useful tips that could assist any retailer's business.

At a seminar at the recent NAMM show, Jeff Rosenfeld of

West L.A. Music, Los Angeles, and Randy Rumore of Paragon Music, Tampa, FL revealed how International Guitar Month promotions resulted in record sales for their stores. There's no reason why International Guitar Month couldn't have a similar affect on your business.

To get your copy of the International Guitar Month promotion kit, write to Jerry Hershman, GAMMA, 136 West 21st St., New York, N.Y., or call (212) 924-9175. This kits are free. Taking the time to get one could be the best investment you'll make all year.

Paul A. Majeski
Publisher