

Good Article for Music Teachers

How to get customers fast when you're new and keep them

Posted on January 27, 2014 by Joel Fortner 11 COMMENTS

The other day I was chatting with my wife, who's a private piano teacher, about how much piano teachers kind of stink at marketing.

She spends a lot of time engaging in piano teacher forums and networking with other teachers, so she shares marketing-related conversations with me all of the time.

And here's my conclusion – the advice so often given is flat-out wrong. “Start a website.” “Use social media.” “Improve your SEO!”

This is not only terrible advice for piano teachers; it's terrible advice for most other new businesses, too. Now don't get me wrong, a website is very important and I'll get to that later, but it's only one part of what you should do to market a new business.

Instead, Do This to Get Customers Fast

Meet people where they're at. In other words, stop trying to attract people to you and go to them.



When you're new, no one knows you exist. Obsessing about attracting people to you is like moving to a new town, building a house in the middle of nowhere and expecting people to just show up with pie.

You'll never get pie if no one knows you exist! Today's prevailing marketing advice – build your online presence and optimize it to attract people to you – is central to why many businesses fail. Why?

Because it's hard to do that well! So stop spending all of your time on that and go meet people where they are.

Now obviously I'm not anti-online marketing. The fact you're reading this online right now should tell you that.

In fact, part of meeting people where they are includes reaching out online. So let's break this down.

Here Are 4 Ways to Get Customers Fast

1. Leverage existing relationships – Ask yourself, “Who do I know already I can talk to?” Even the most introverted people have friends and acquaintances. Tell them about your business and ask them if they know anyone who may be interested in what you do.

Now let's compare something for a second – trying to attract people vs. talking to people who know you already. The goal of the former is to get people to know you. The latter involves people who **already know you**. Where do you think you spend most of your time?

2. Build new relationships – When we moved from Tennessee to Alexandria, Va., my wife only knew a few people. So what did she do? She looked up local piano teachers and invited them to have coffee. What?! She engaged the enemy? That's right, and one of the most successful local teachers responded. They formed a relationship and the veteran teacher, who was well-known and respected, referred students to MaryBeth within weeks. Do you see how that worked?

MaryBeth simply leveraged the authority and popularity of a teacher who gets loads of referrals but can't handle them all. Once the relationship was there, she now had somewhere to send them – to my wife. Any business can do this! So reach out to other businesses that complement you – to include the competition – and build a relationship. You never know where that will lead.

3. Post info where your target market is – Whether online or off, it's essential you reach your target market where they're at. I've grown my small business marketing coaching business by guest posting on a blog that's heavily trafficked by small business entrepreneurs. I didn't just post here and hope they found me through a search engine or social media. Nope. I went to them and leveraged the popularity of that blog.

Other ways to do this include:

Craigslist listings; flyers at local businesses, community centers and churches; yard signage, attending networking gatherings; and going door-to-door to hand out flyers.

This is guerrilla marketing and it works. Marketing isn't always about being super sophisticated; it's about doing what works.

4. Have a basic and professional website – See, I love the Internet. 😊 When no one knows you exist and you're busting your butt to change that by doing the things I listed above, you need to have somewhere to send people. That's your website.

Every flyer, posting and conversation should include your website address. This is where people will go to learn more about you. So have your website up before you do anything else otherwise your other efforts will fall short.

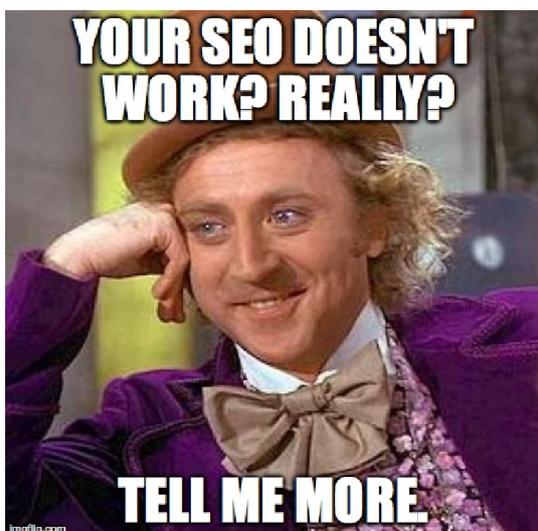
Once You Have Customers, How to Keep Them

Piano teachers, like many entrepreneurs and business owners, often say things like “Music will always be last” and “Sports always take priority.” I’m sorry, but that’s victim speak, and it often comes from very nice people who simply haven’t been taught what to do.

The truth is businesses lose customers to other businesses when they fail to remain relevant any longer. Relevance erodes for a variety of reasons. These include the business stinks, not meeting the core customer need anymore and customer needs changing.

So how do you deal with this? Well it starts with what you directly control – the way you run your business. If I’m a piano teacher bleeding students to sports, the first thing I do is ask the student and parents WHY they’re choosing a sport over music.

Let’s say the consistent answer has something to do with being part of a team.



Boom! Insight! Now how do you change your business to meet this need? My wife added group lessons to the mix, where her students practice, play games and learn together. This creates camaraderie and shared experience amongst them. Now they see each other beyond just passing in the house entryway and so do the parents.

Another reason students quit taking piano lessons is they lose interest.

MaryBeth knew this could happen because she’s seen it before.

So to keep her business relevant by keeping students interested she:

1. Ensures lessons are age appropriate
2. Gives students say with their music to some degree
3. Plays games at the end of each lesson

The lesson for every business owner is know your customer needs and exceed them, find out why customers leave and change what you do, and anticipate reasons why customers could leave and proactively head them off.

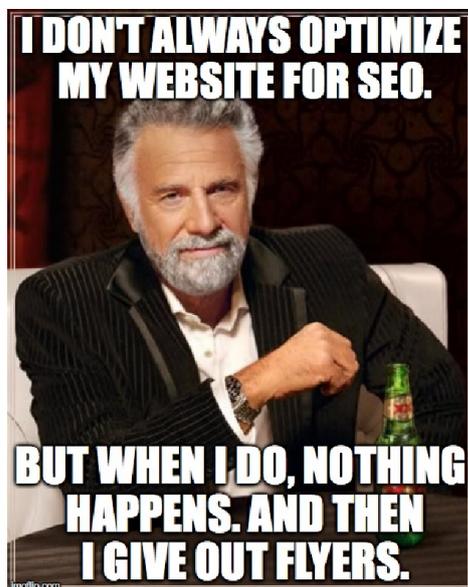
If your service sucks, it doesn't matter what you do

Another key to keeping customers is providing great service and exceeding expectations. Now as I just said, you have to first meet the need. If you don't do that well, it doesn't matter what else you do.

To go beyond the need, my wife writes notes of appreciation to her students, telling them how much she enjoys having them. She also intentionally communicates a ton with parents in person and via email.

And she's flat out likable. I'm here when she teaches, and I see the great relationships she's formed with parents. Those parents know how much she cares for their kids and that's priceless. The thing is this just doesn't magically happen. You must be intentional about it.

Don't be afraid to fire someone



Another under-talked about way to keep customers is to fire the bad ones. No I haven't lost my mind.

Every business has or had (until they fired them) challenging customers. Okay, fine, they're beyond challenging. They're huge pains in the butt!

These customers drain your time, patience and passion for your job, and you must fire them because they're eroding your ability serve your best customers well. Eventually this will catch up with you.

It did for MaryBeth until she fired a student. Before she did it, she dreaded days she had to teach that student. On those days, she hated the job she loved other days. Eventually, enough was enough and she let the student go.

She simply told the parents it wasn't working out and she wasn't the best for their daughter. This wasn't a lie either. It was true. She needed to free that student to find another teacher. Sucking it up and keeping her would have actually been selfish.

And you know what? She replaced the student in no time with one she loves teaching. You will, too.

Bringing These Lessons Back To Your Business

How do you get customers?

Stop trying to only attract people to you and go meet people where they are, especially if you serve a local market. Using only online marketing is the long way around.

Leverage existing relationships, build new relationships with people who can help you to include competitors and post information where your target market spends time already online and off.

Once you have customers, ensure your service is solid, be intentional about exceeding expectations, remain relevant to your customer and be willing to change if you're not, and proactively head off reasons customers may leave.

Running a Business Isn't Easy

Now here's the deal. Running a business is hard. That why it requires hard work and tenacity.

Those who succeed actually start, don't quit and seek out how to do things better. It's not a matter of talent; it's a matter of developing skills.

How To Improve Your Marketing and Selling Skills

Of all the skills you need to hone, marketing and selling should top your list. You will never not market and sell so commit to learning as much as you can. Start by subscribing to Get Serve Keep and [you'll gain access to brand new tips and advice](#) before anyone else. Plus you'll immediately get my 30-page Small Business Guide to Marketing for free.

Also, here's [every post I've ever written about getting customers](#). But don't stop there. Also [learn ways to better serve](#) and [keep more customers](#).

Winning businesses get marketing and sales right, and that takes a commitment to learning and acting on your new knowledge.

With that, I hope you enjoyed this article, and I'd love to hear what you think!

Joel Fortner