

THE CUSTOMER CONNECTION | BY RAVI

Clinics for the Masses

Rock 'n' roll is alive and well. Look no further than commercials with Olympic gold medalists lying on their backs, cradling toy guitars and writhing like Angus Young. The success of *Guitar Hero* and the release of Wii Music is indicative of a market hungry for harmony. I gave a guitar clinic recently where preteens in the audience requested classic rock songs they'd played on *Hero*. The guitar heroes of yesterday are back in the limelight. Best Buy's effort to get a big slice of the pie, as painful as it may seem, is only confirmation of a vibrant market.

If Best Buy proves to be successful, independents relying on entry-level sales and beginner lessons will need to adjust. Beginners, or video game "transitioners," may flock first to Best Buy and close the deal on gear and lessons. However, intermediate players will likely find more value in knowledgeable, passionate salespeople selling more sophisticated models (i.e. boutique brands). "Beyond beginner" students will become the target market for lessons in local music stores. The key for independents is to attract future Best Buy graduates before they hit the big-box ceiling.

TEACH & INSPIRE

In-store events that are more personable and accessible than typical product clinics will help capture that market. Best Buy aside, a recession is ideal for providing free community activities. Stores typically market clinics to existing customers.

However, hosting an entertaining, inspiring event that happens to showcase inventory and services can attract a community thirsty for free entertainment.

Results require investment. Manufacturers often shoulder much of the expense (clinician, promotional materials, etc.), but even if they pull back given the economy, retailers can reach out to clinicians directly and cut a

deal. As a clinician, I can say that we want to work, too!

Particularly if the dealer funds the event, the clinician should focus the presentation on the store, its inventory and the attendees' potential — not just his chops and gear. Ideally, his bio will draw interest, and he'll be able to captivate the audience with entertaining road stories and inspiring skills. He should also teach the questions to ask when researching gear, as opposed to simply listing features between cool licks — demonstrating the importance of an educated consumer is essential to showcasing the value of knowledgeable

salespeople. Plus, good clinicians help train and inspire staff who, along with teachers, should always be in attendance.

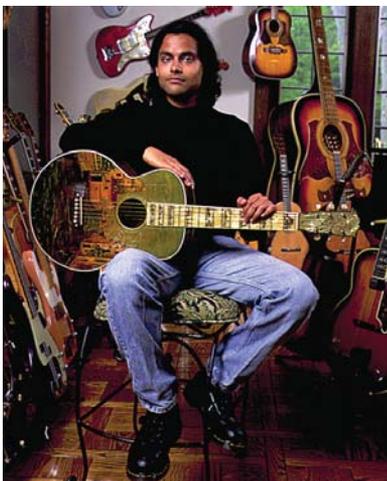
MEDIA GOLDMINE

Events offer a reason for a media blitz. Many businesses are cutting advertising, reducing competition for consumers' attention, and ad rates are likely more negotiable. Community events are often worthy of free press, so distribute press releases to local media and ask clinicians to be available for interviews.

A charitable angle adds value — it's for a good cause and also generates more media attention. Consider a low-cost raffle with all proceeds benefiting a local charity, or charge a small cover and waive it for anyone bringing canned goods. Have an event-only sale so customers see fellow customers buying. There's no better endorsement. Ask restaurants if they'll provide complimentary hors d'oeuvres in exchange for cross promotion.

It takes more than inventory to get customers through the door. Invite the community to experience your service, and once they're inside, don't be shy about promoting your value and requesting loyalty as thanks for a memorable event. **MI**

See Ravi's session, "How to Promote Clinics and Get Maximum Results," at the NAMM Show in Anaheim, Calif. He will be speaking on Jan. 16 at 4 p.m. at the NAMM Idea Center.



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