

TECHNOLOGY | BY GORDON O'HARA

Print Music Revisited

In the past, the mere mention of print music brought shivers to many piano, combo, and band and orchestra dealers. The endless SKUs, the threat of obsolete inventory, the expertise required to sell it and the low sales volume all, at first glance, make a case against carrying these lower-revenue products. But today, everyone is a print music client. High-end instrument buyers and renters, potential music lessons students, band step-up buyers, multiple-guitars owners, accomplished adult musicians, band directors, and choir directors — all can be marketed to regularly if you cater to their print music needs. And did I mention the typical 25–40 percent margins?

LAUNCH A SITE, OUTSOURCE FULFILLMENT

Fortunately, technology and new business opportunities make it easier for non-print specialty dealers to sell print music without the pains of the past. One method is to launch a Web site with print products. “Good idea,” you’re thinking, “but who’ll maintain the data and fulfill the products?” More recently, companies have emerged that provide in-depth sheet music data at a store’s Web address. So that first hurdle is easily overcome.

This year, key distributors, publishers and local sheet music dealers have also improved their abilities to fulfill orders, pack them, add a store’s shipping label and send them directly to customers. The margin may be smaller, but you don’t have to order, stock, process, ship, pack and track shipments. And you still earn margins on each sale.

SHEET MUSIC ON-DEMAND

It’s 9 p.m. The wedding is tomorrow. Where will a musician get the latest hit that the couple just asked for? It could be your store. With a sheet music download service on your Web site, buyers can browse the latest titles, view them, purchase in real-time, set the instrumentation or notation, and

download scores directly to their printers. They’re happy, and you’re the hero.

There are two versions of sheet music download services. You can have a store-branded download Web site service, a system that lets you retain your store’s branding under your own domain name and provides content management tools to update your site. This way, you can cross-promote instruments, events and music books. The other is through affiliate programs, which redirect customers to a centralized site with the publisher’s branding, though this can be less attractive if you want to retain customers on your site.

DEALER ALLIANCES

Alliances between local print music-only dealers and instrument/lessons stores offer real profit potential. Each dealer sets up its displays at the other’s store. Each store installs a hotline to the other dealer for customer service.

Online, a cobranded Web site presents the remaining stock. Customers buy in-stock items or create special orders. Each store handles its fulfillment and service. Each store earns a percentage of sales from the other dealer’s sales. A piano dealer could launch a sheet music site with outsourced fulfillment and an alliance with a print dealer. Likewise, print stores can expand their reach with these alliances.

A COVER IS NOT ENOUGH

Many sheet music customers still want to leaf through every page of a book before they buy it. Publishers have invested in sound scores, writer videos and links to sample pages. The sheet music downloads have also helped to bridge that experience. The next step could be a presentation similar to how books are sold — with the full content of the book online, accompanied by a video explaining the book’s benefits. This would increase online sell-through. **MI**

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Technology makes it simple for non-print dealers to sell and profit from the category