

To Market To Market

Texas Music Teachers Association Convention

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Independent Music Teachers Forum *Marti Dudgeon*, chair and presenter

- Brochures, Newsletters, Flyers
- Sign in front yard if OK with local zoning – check first
- Yellow Pages, ValPak, Newspapers
- Business Cards
- Internet
- Long-distance teaching via Skype
- You Tube videos
- Facebook groups
- LinkedIn site

*Ask your local music store if you can display flyers in their window or bulletin board.

Many stores won't have a problem with this, and most won't charge you a penny. In fact, many of the music businesses I've tried this at have a special bulletin board reserved for musical events and opportunities. Make sure your name, address, contact information, and times you can be contacted are on the flyer. For the life of you, make it creative. Pictures make an advertisement more interesting.

*Do a tour of the local schools – get to know all of the music teachers (band, orchestra, and choir too!)

Although you won't earn anything, you will give your reputation a boost, increasing your chances of signing on some students. Make sure you let the students know you offer private lessons. Be in contact with those teachers – encourage your piano student to experience collaborative opportunities. Take time during the private lesson to work on accompaniments for Solo/Ensemble, Choir, etc.

*Offer a free lesson (or two)

This gives potential students the opportunity to see if you're worth the cost, free of charge. Free services go a long way, and will net you many potential clients. Display the free lesson offer on your flyers, or offer it to parents and kids when they call you up.

*Spread your musical capabilities by word of mouth

Of course, word of mouth is the BEST way to market yourself and the skills you offer. Telling about your business on flyers might get you a few clients, but talking about your music lessons will get you even more. Tell your friends, neighbors, the guy that walks his dog in front of your house in the morning, everyone. You never know who might be interested. I find that parents (especially Mom's) enjoy telling other parents who their child studies with – this is how I've received nearly ALL of my students for the past 28 years.

*Carry business cards ALWAYS

I've handed out more business cards in the line at stores, banks, car repair shops, you name it. I've received gigs to play from this practice, and new students as well.

*Internet and Studio Website



Taking advantage of all the Internet has to offer in terms of reaching people is vitally important for any business in general, and for music teachers more specifically. Having a studio website is very important. If you are spending a good deal of time on the Internet working social networking sites or advertising your services on a site like Craigslist, then all of that traffic that you are generating should be headed to your website. Once people are on your website, they can learn more about you and the music teaching services you offer.

Once you know what it is that you want on your website, you will need to find a designer. Finding a quality web designer is much easier than it used to be. There are sites where you can go to find a web designer with a proven track record. Be sure that you have studied their examples of past work. Make sure you check that the sites they have worked on are up and running smoothly. A polished website does not have to be mind-blowing or extremely fancy, but it does need to look professional. With a good website in place and proper utilization of social networking and other online advertising outlets, you should be able to see some new business flowing to your music teaching business in no time.

Communicating with parents is the most important way of keeping students long term. Reminders of recital dates, special classes, or vacation dates should be available to them in all formats.

- Email, studio websites, written reminders help parents know about important news. Many teachers will have a newsletter they give at the lesson, but people don't read them! We have become a society of needing the most important information now.
- Use Facebook, Twitter or paid services like Vertical Response or Constant Contact if needed

Helpful sites:

Craigslist www.craigslist.org

Local TMTA Referral service on Association website – Austin District www.austintxmusicteachers.org

Music Teachers Directory www.musiclessonsdirectory.com

Website templates and ideas offered: The Practice Spot www.musicteaching.com

Music Teachers Helper www.musicteachershelper.com

The Music Teacher Selection Process: Establishing a Reputation for Teaching Excellence

by Katherine Goins

Katherine received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Music and Human Learning with a specialization in Piano Pedagogy from The University of Texas at Austin in 2006, where she studied with Robert Duke, Eugenia Costa-Giomi, Martha Hilley, and Sophia Gilmon. The 2003 recipient of the Lynn Freeman Olson Piano Pedagogy Award, sponsored by the National Federation of Music Clubs, she earned the Master of Music degree in Piano Performance and Pedagogy from Ohio University where she studied with Gail Berenson and Alejandro Cremaschi. In addition to her teaching, Dr. Goins is the co-chair for the Student Development Committee for the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy and has presented her research on group teaching strategies and children's music and motor learning at the Music Teacher's National Association, the Music Educator's National Convention, and the Texas Music Educator's conference.

As piano teachers, we believe children should have the opportunity to engage in music making throughout their lives. For this to occur, the selection of a piano teacher becomes a critical process, involving careful research, interviews, observation, and discussion. Yet for many parents, music lessons are only one of a multitude of activities they wish to provide for their children. How do parents choose a music teacher or program for their children? Are there differences between the process of choosing a music teacher and the process of choosing a teacher for other types of extracurricular activities? How are music programs and studios advertised? Are advertisements, brochures, and websites effective in attracting parents and students?

What's out there?

College music students, graduate music students and recent graduates across the country attempt to supplement their income with private teaching. A common answer to the question, "What are you going to do after college or graduate school?" is "Well, I guess I'll just find some students and teach." Depending on the size of the university and city, piano students can be plentiful or a rarity in high demand. How does one begin to "find some students and teach?"

Little empirical information exists about marketing for private piano teachers, making it difficult for teachers, particularly beginning teachers, to make informed decisions about how to promote themselves and their studios. Journals targeting independent music teachers discuss issues of marketing and advertising. *The American Music Teacher* has a column entitled "It's All of Your Business," which features marketing and business ideas for independent music teachers such as developing professional studio documents and tax advice for small studios. Magazines such as *Keyboard* and *Music Marketing* also feature articles on public relations and small business developing, again from a personal experience perspective. A multitude of books on marketing and advertising for independent business owners exist, but are not geared towards a small music school or private teacher.

In music education research journals, virtually no information exists discussing music studio marketing or business strategies. Journals targeting school music teachers and independent studio teachers occasionally present business strategies, marketing, and advertising ideas, but these are usually based on personal experience and not experimental research. For example, the *Music Educator's Journal* created a special focus issue in 1992 that discussed marketing and promoting elementary school music programs, testing a music program's promotional effectiveness, and methods for raising public awareness of school music performances. Earlier issues of the *Music Educator's Journal* occasionally contained articles regarding support for music programs and advertising strategies, but after the 1992 special issue, marketing and

music has not been a focus area. Additionally, MENC created resources in the early 1990's such as marketing action kits and videos, but less has been done in recent years.

Marketing skills are necessary for success as an independent piano teacher or small music school, but little research exists documenting the complexities involved in choosing a music school or teacher and what type of advertising is most effective. The lack of sufficient research in this area indicates a need for investigation of how people choose music teachers or schools, and how that information can help teachers market their business in a more effective way.

Can research answer these questions?

I designed a research study to understand how music programs and teachers advertise their business and how advertising influences parents' choice of a music teacher. I analyzed the content of brochures and websites of music programs and teachers, asked parents of music students about the factors that influenced their choice of a music teacher/program and other activities for their children, and identified key factors affecting the music teacher selection process.

Seventy-seven parents of children ages 4 through 17 enrolled in music lessons through five suburban music programs participated in this project. One hundred surveys were distributed to eight different music programs or private teachers throughout a suburban area and 77 surveys were returned. Because of accessibility and parent willingness, 62 of the 77 completed surveys came from a university based string preparatory program and a university based piano preparatory program, and 13 surveys were completed by students of three different private teachers, two piano and one voice. The majority of surveys were completed by the students' mothers. To understand what information is generally included in advertisements, brochures or websites from 15 local music schools were included in the content analysis. 10 of the analyzed programs were community music schools, two were university based preparatory programs, and three were private music teachers.

To develop a questionnaire, I conducted a pilot test with the parents of five piano students about the music teacher selection process for their children, and if or how that process differed from their selection of other activities or teachers for their children. I revised the questions based on the replies from these five parents and developed a questionnaire about the music teacher selection process and advertising influences.

Survey Results

How do parents choose a music teacher or program for their children? Are advertisements, brochures, and websites effective in attracting parents and students? According to this study, parents choose music teachers based on word of mouth. 82% of participants identified word of mouth as their most influential advertising source, with 52% citing a recommendation from family or friends as most important. This news is not surprising to experienced piano teachers and community music schools, who rely less and less on marketing strategies such as websites and brochures and instead depend on their reputation and students to advertise for them.

Additionally, results showed that 53% of parents surveyed did not think the process of choosing a music teacher or program was different than that of choosing another teacher or program for

their children. However, parents who had taken music lessons in the past answered differently. 58% of parents who had taken private lessons in the past thought a difference existed in the process of selecting a music teacher for their children, as opposed to the selection of other activity teachers, while only 32% of parents who had not taken private lessons thought there was a difference in the selection process. This finding is very important, implying that successful past experience with music lessons leads to more careful selection of a music teacher in the future.

Parents who thought a difference existed in the teacher selection process for music versus other activities placed more emphasis on the music teacher's reputation, philosophy, and actual teaching skills. Parents who did not think a difference existed between choosing a music teacher or choosing an extracurricular teacher for their children did not indicate strong feelings about the music teacher's reputation, philosophy, or teaching ability.

Why does this matter?

The selection of a music teacher is an important decision, and results indicate that parents put thought into the decision making process. Although 53% of survey participants did not think a difference existed in the process of choosing music teachers versus other teachers, 47% did think a difference existed. For this group of parents, program reputation, philosophy, and teacher quality played an important role in the decision process, outweighing factors such as location, cost, and other opportunities. Out of 37 comments parents wrote on the survey about why the process was different, 18 comments related to the value or priority of music over other activities. Parent comments included statements such as:

- "I'd like music to be constant. Other activities are just activities, and I would like for music to be a way of life."
- "In the music teacher choice, I was discriminating and kept trying options. For other activities, if the most convenient choice does not work, we do not participate."
- "A music teacher has more personal interaction and closer influence on the success of my child."
- "Music is a higher priority."

For some parents, no difference existed in teacher selection for different activities. Comments included statements like "I care about both activities" or "I let my child choose because I did not have a strong opinion." These parents could value all the activities their children are involved in, and care about teacher quality, program reputation, and philosophy for all programs, or they could care equally little about the activities and teachers.

What can we do?

Because the majority of people in this study based their teacher selection on word of mouth and recommendations, advertising becomes more of a problematic area for new piano teachers. Experienced teachers often do not advertise, simply because their reputation precedes them and there is no need for continued marketing. But for beginning teachers who do not have the advantage of word of mouth recommendations, developing a reputation as a careful and effective teacher is important. Beginning teachers should contact other music teachers in their area, get involved in professional organizations, and become visible in the field.

As a beginning piano teacher, how should I market my new studio? How can I develop a reputation for excellence?

- Get involved in your community music teacher organizations
- Become active in local, state, and national organizations
- Network with other local teachers, both private and public school teachers
- Offer to serve as an adjudicator or accompanist for local music festivals
- Collaborate with more experienced teachers to fill a need in your community - start a music festival, organize a recital series, get involved with community outreach

As an established teacher, how does this information apply to me?

- Serve as a mentor for beginning teachers
- Open your studio for college student and beginning teacher observation
- Establish and maintain high expectations for all students
- Create public awareness of what is happening in your studio and in music lessons in your community
- Continue to market yourself through excellent teaching

As piano teachers, it is our job to continue to promote excellence in music teaching, serve as resource persons for people in the music teacher selection process, and act as mentors for beginning teachers. Awareness of the need to educate people about the music teacher selection process and care for the future of music teaching will allow our field to continue to develop and improve.

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