



**Urgent**

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## **END-OF-SCHOOL YEAR MARKETING PACKAGE-PLEASE READ**

Dear Affiliate,

Can you believe we're in the middle of March already? We've started working on the school database (teacher start date, student report date, teacher names, program types, etc.). You should also be working with educators at this time and planning for the fast-approaching rental season. I've enclosed the following resources to help with your preparation:

### **-Music Educator Survey**

Use the survey when calling on educators. Find out what book they're using, what size reeds they like, and recommendations for music stands, care kits and metronomes. It's a great tool when contacting teachers by telephone, as well. Do not count on a response if you simply fax this to a teacher. You'll be disappointed. Completed surveys should go into a notebook for easy reference (see additional ideas in enclosed Affiliate Tips and Tricks). Additional forms can be downloaded from Affiliate Resources.

### **-Avoiding Instrument Returns**

A collection of marketing materials aimed at keeping customers renting through summer; use these as silent salesmen or visual aides. Regardless of our efforts, instrument returns will happen. Make sure you have Return Forms on hand. Those Affiliates who can't (or will not) recycle returned instruments are asked to forward them to Veritas as soon as they are received (except Affiliates in FL and GA). We will need adequate time to prepare and ship opening orders to other Affiliates.

### **-Affiliate Tips and Tricks**

This is a top ten list of proven strategies used by successful Affiliates. Not every idea may work or be applicable to your situation, but it is very important that you are, at least, armed with the knowledge gained over the years by fellow retailers and service professionals

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 800-578-9724 Ext 227 or direct by cell at 727-410-7535 with your questions, concerns and/or needs while brushing the dust off your rental program.

With warm wishes for a successful season,

Dawson Flinchbaugh  
Director of Marketing

# Music Educator Survey

Help your local music retailer help you by letting them know what your students need this year. Take a moment to complete the following survey and keep copies on hand for inquiring vendors.

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
School Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Music Room EXT. or Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Planning Period or Best Time to Call: \_\_\_\_\_

1. In addition to Flute, Clarinet, Trumpet, T-bone, alto and Tenor Sax, will your students also need any of the following instruments?

Snare Drum Kit \_\_\_\_\_ Bell Kit \_\_\_\_\_ Snare/Bell Combo \_\_\_\_\_ French Horn (S) \_\_\_\_\_ (D) \_\_\_\_\_  
Baritone Horn \_\_\_\_\_ 3/4 Tuba \_\_\_\_\_ Euphonium \_\_\_\_\_ Oboe \_\_\_\_\_ Bass Clarinet \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any brand preferences? Please list below: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What band/orchestra method book will your students be using? \_\_\_\_\_  
Supplemental books: \_\_\_\_\_ Student purchase or school provided? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you recommend a music stand for home use? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you require a music manuscript book? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, please specify size and style. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you recommend a metronome for home or school practice? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, please specify electronic or mechanical if there is a preference: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you recommend the purchase of a maintenance kit? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

7. Please list any accessory recommendations for the following:

## Woodwinds (Reeds)

Reed Size: \_\_\_\_\_

Reed Brand: \_\_\_\_\_

Mpiece Size: \_\_\_\_\_

Mpiece Brand: \_\_\_\_\_

## Brass (Mouthpiece)

Tpt: \_\_\_\_\_

Tbone: \_\_\_\_\_

Bari: \_\_\_\_\_

Tuba: \_\_\_\_\_

## Percussion (Sticks/Mallets)

Stick Size: \_\_\_\_\_

Stick Brand: \_\_\_\_\_

Mallet Size: \_\_\_\_\_

Stick Bags: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you have a parent/rental meeting? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, may we attend? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, where and when? \_\_\_\_\_

Are students issued instruments that night or is this a "paperwork-only" meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

Any other important information? \_\_\_\_\_

Will there be other vendors? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If so, who? \_\_\_\_\_

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# ***Returning Your Instrument?***

Are you thinking about returning your rental instrument for the Summer? for good? Before you decide, please consider this:

With each payment made, you've been building equity in your child's musical instrument. 100% of the Base Rent paid has been automatically applied toward the purchase. Thus, you will eventually own your instrument if your payments are continued.

For example, if your monthly Base Rent is \$20 and you've made 12 payments, you've accumulated \$240.00 in rent credit. In many cases, that's over a third of the purchase price!

Many parents consider returning now because the Summer months include a break from musical instruction (through school programs and/or private lessons). The same number of parents, however, do not realize that returning the instrument cancels the rental agreement and all rent credit or equity is lost. Consequently, a new rental agreement must be established when students return to their music programs in the Fall. Is your child expressing an interest in music education for next year? ASK NOW BEFORE YOU RETURN!

## ***And we haven't even talked about the benefits of music education!***

Unlike competitive team sports, students in school band or orchestra can always participate. No one sits on the bench waiting for a chance to play.

Students who participate in school music programs are 52% more likely to go on to college and graduate.

According to a recent study conducted by neurologist Dr. Frank Wilson, when a musician plays he/she uses approximately 90% of the brain. Wilson could find no other activity that uses the brain to this extent.

The study had also shown students who took more than four years of music and the other arts scored 34 points better on the verbal portion of the SAT than those who took music for less than a year.

A recent Rockefeller Foundation study discovered that music students have the highest rate of admittance to medical schools. Music scholarships are also a great source of funding for a college education.

When a child succeeds at the diverse tasks required to play an instrument, self-esteem is enhanced.

As a student begins to understand the connection between practice and the quality of performance, self-discipline becomes self-enforcing. It may then be a short jump to making the connection between self-discipline and performance in life.

Students in band or orchestra develop higher cognitive skills and increased ability to analyze and evaluate information. They also learn about teamwork and conflict/resolution skills required for success in the modern workplace while enjoying the healthy, positive activity of band and orchestra with friends.



# Affiliate Tips and Tricks

## A Top Ten List of Great Ideas From VIR Affiliates

### **Pre-Fill Your Rental Agreements**

What's the best way to train your employees on the paperwork process of a rental? Have them practice filling out agreements. What's the most time-consuming part of the rental process? Completing the rental agreement. Want to kill two birds with one stone? Gather your employees when your opening shipment arrives, pre-fill as much of a rental agreement for each instrument (instrument info, rental rates, etc.) and place the paperwork inside each instrument's case. Your employees practiced the paperwork process and you cut the time spent with each rental customer in half.

### **Spiff Your Employees**

As the owner of your business, you are more in tune with your ROI and profit margins. It is a sad truth that many of today's high-dollar guitars, keyboards and other combo gear yield less profit than the commissions and related high-profit accessories of band & orchestra rentals. So how do you keep your employees from ignoring the rental customer when another is gazing at the Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul? Spiff your employees \$2 or more of your available per-contract bonus. Each rental customer will pad the salesperson's hourly wage by a couple of dollars, thus, making them look a little more attractive.

### **Incorporate a Free Lesson**

Those who rent space to lesson instructors should take advantage of a golden opportunity that could further solidify your business relationship while offering a value-added benefit to your rental customers. Negotiate a free lesson with your instructors (many will do it at no cost) for every new rental. The instructor will benefit by gaining access to new prospects. It will be their responsibility, of course, to close the sale of regular enrollment. You'll be able to add the "Free Lesson With Every Rental" blurb on your advertising and add value to your services. The student will have a head start going into their first day of school music and the educators will be ever-grateful for assisting them in educating their students in the proper assembling, disassembling and care for their instrument (maybe even making a noise with the mouthpiece, if time allows).

### **Branding Through Incentives**

Here are two strategies that help drive traffic to your store while promoting your trade name. The first is the tee shirt giveaway: One free shirt for every child that rents an instrument from your store. Doesn't sound like a big deal, but it has been for several Affiliates and it can be for you, too. One Affiliate claims that a student not wearing one of their shirts at a particular school is like being the Sneetchy without a star on their belly. Shirts are cheap (under \$2 for two-sided color). Another great idea has been the student discount and/or club membership card. The elite group of students (anyone who rents from you) will be entitled to 10% off sheet music, method books or maybe select accessories. Advertising could include "\$150 value, free with your rental" and could drive additional sales. Cards are cheap, too, if you choose to use business card stock.

## **Accessory Packaging**

Some of the best margins in your store come from accessories such as method books, reeds, cleaning kits, metronomes and music stands. Using the results of the Music Educator Survey and a large format printing of the Accessory Sign template (both available at Affiliate Resources), several Affiliates have created accessory packages tailored to the preferences of each school. It's an easy sale to the parent when you have the endorsement of their child's music educator. Here's an example: "What school does your child attend? Oh yes, Mr. Smith is the instructor there. When I spoke with him a few weeks ago, he recommended the Standard of Excellence Book One, 5 Vandoren reeds, a cleaning kit and a folding sheet music stand for home practice. If purchased separately, these items would cost around \$65, but we packaged them together for Oak Grove Middle students for only \$45." Clean and simple, how can a parent decline?

## **Upgrade Promotion**

An analysis of VIR's in-house upgrade efforts show that parents are most likely to upgrade their child's rental instrument between the 12th month and the 15th month. While most of the rentals occur between August and October, this puts the sweet spot right at the Christmas season of the following year. Using the resources available to them through VIR (mailing lists, upgrade samples, advertising templates), as well as the increased traffic in their stores, many Affiliates capitalize on this golden opportunity to increase commissions (sometimes double on each account) and extend the length of a customer's agreement (on average by 18 months). Some great ways to create the hype is to include upgrades in your holiday advertising, rotate samples to the local schools, send personal invitations-by-mail to your qualifying accounts and/or host a promotion at your store. Better yet, get the educators behind it and host exclusive meetings at the schools.

## **Summer Retention**

The national average rate of instrument returns is close to 50%. Even the smallest effort to deter a return can have a big impact on your Summer commissions. A VIR Affiliate recently claimed to have reduced returns by 40% through silent salesmen ([Keepyourinstrument.pdf](#)) and proper employee training. Surprisingly, a large number of rental customers are not aware that our program is equity-building. By retuning an instrument for the Summer, customers walk away from hundreds of dollars of rent credit, only to start from zero again a few months later. A sincere, brief, practiced statement from your employee (in addition to the retention brochure) could save the account. An example of a persuasive argument: "Mrs. Jones, you have nearly \$200 in rent credit. If there is even a remote chance that your child will be in band next year, rent this instrument for a few more months, regardless, if the horn sits in the closet all Summer. If Jimmy joins band again in the Fall, you'll have your instrument almost halfway paid for. If you return it now, you'll walk away from all of that money. Then if Jimmy joins band again, you'll be starting all over again with zero equity."

## **Educator Hospitality**

Music educators are the gate keepers to your customers. There's no denying it. The more frequent and positive interactions you have with them, the more business will be sent your way. Sometimes, the best way to sell your business is not to sell at all. Over the years, Affiliates have been very creative in achieving this objective including golf scrambles and Summer barbecues. One Affiliate found their way to an educator's heart through their stomach with a regular delivery of breakfast sandwiches. Some more traditional ways are to sponsor a hospitality room at marching competitions or offer to work with a section (if qualified, of course!). The bottom line: Give and you shall receive. A sincere gesture of assistance to an educator will go a long way.

## **Bargain Instrument Comparison**

It doesn't look like the bargain instruments (you know, the ones you can buy at the same place you buy your toilet paper?) are going away as fast as we'd like. In the mean time, there are many ways you can protect your market while being a hero to your customers and educators. Many Affiliates who offer instrument repair will not (because they can not) work on these horns. Because bargain instruments are consistently unserviceable, many times unplayable, they make great visual examples for customers. Affiliates are bending keys, melting solder and pulling pads in front of their customers to show them just how substandard bargain instruments really are. Further, Affiliates are educating the educators, many of which are frustrated by a band room full of beginners with instruments that don't play. VIR offers a year-round trade-in promotion where customer can exchange their bargain instruments for rent credit on one of our instruments. There is also a well-composed letter template addressed to music educators available at VIR's Affiliate Resources. It's going to take an effort on all levels to rid the industry of this cancer. An instrument that can't play belongs on the wall of a restaurant, not with a beginning student. Do your part and get involved. You'll be glad you did!

## **Continuous Employee Training**

Since the first Affiliate Convention in 2002, VIR and its Affiliates have placed emphasis on the proper and continuous training of employees. The biggest problem to-date is the failure to train new employees (those who have been hired by the Affiliate long after partnering with VIR and going through the initial training). An honest mistake when you hire someone in February, a time of year where you couldn't be any further away from the rental season. Nonetheless, the problem exists and many Affiliates have taken steps to ensure their staff is up-to-speed and sharp. A recurring seminar at the Affiliate Convention includes a review of recorded phone calls made to unnamed Affiliates. Often humorous, the calls are dissected in an effort to determine what the salesperson did right and wrong. Several Affiliates have adopted this effective means of training within their own retail stores. Aside from the contract pre-fill party (the first tip on this document), another great way to train has been to make all employees read and initial any non-sensitive correspondence received from VIR including the QuickNotes monthly newsletter and the Pre & Post-Season Marketing Packages.