

# Raising The Bar

## Putting professional business standards to work in a Music Studio

By Leanne Hoad

### Introduction

Private music studios in Australia are typically small operations run by keen, technically sound, teachers who have limited exposure to, or training in, the commercial aspects of running a successful business.

This often means that these studios operate on tight budgets, with a limited capacity for a certain number of students and inadequate technology and facilities. A 'make do' mentality prevails. This is regarded as normal within the industry yet often presents a detrimental image to students and the general public who are regularly exposed to world-class standards in every other industry.

Why should music studios be perceived to be less professional than any other small business in any other industry?

In general, most small businesses operate on similar key principles which, if understood and well-implemented by the profession of music teachers, can lead to thriving teaching studios and a greatly enhanced profile for the industry as a whole.

Areas such as marketing and promotions, systems and procedures, facilities and technology are not rocket science. But it is crucial to get them right in order to operate efficiently and to generate a perception of professionalism in clients' minds and within public consciousness.

## Three business principles music teachers can't afford to ignore

### Marketing & Promotions

The broader public will not know how good you are or what you have to offer unless you tell them.

Being good at what you do is not enough for the word to spread to the wider public. Some teachers have the misconception that simply being good and having student successes automatically qualifies them for a high profile, recognition, and perhaps even media exposure.

In fact, operating in this manner limits your reach to your peers and a small local client base. It won't reach the broader public, or beyond, without some conscious and consistent marketing effort.

You market your business to inform people about what you do and how your products and services can be of use to them.



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How do you go about letting people know you exist? Have a marketing campaign and put promotions into place.

## A good marketing campaign includes:

Advertising	Promotions	Branding
Often high cost – measurable sales returns	Low - high cost – measurable sale return	High cost – long term awareness – sometimes hard to measure financially.
<p>You get that you pay for.</p> <p>Effective advertising gets results e.g. enrolments.</p> <p>It is a good way to get an influx of students quickly.</p> <p>It is only effective for the time you are advertising and the enquiries usually stop soon after the advertising has finished.</p>	<p>Getting your name in front of your target market other than via printed advertising material.</p> <p>Most promotions do not always cost money, but they do take time and are labour intensive.</p> <p>The results can be instant but often have a latent effect i.e. enrolments as a result of the promotion but weeks or months after the promotion has ended.</p>	<p>Branding is making the broader community aware of you.</p> <p>It has a lot to do with perception. The result of successful branding is when your business comes to mind strong and clear when they want someone in your industry.</p> <p>Branding is ongoing exposure to those whom you want to know that you exist: your “target market”.</p>
<p>e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yellow Pages</li> <li>• Well-designed website</li> <li>• Newspaper classified ads,</li> <li>• display advertisements,</li> <li>• short term targeted campaigns (letterbox drops, mailouts)</li> <li>• TV &amp; cinema advertising</li> </ul>	<p>e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• newspaper and magazine articles</li> <li>• expos</li> <li>• fetes &amp; fairs</li> <li>• sponsorships</li> <li>• website, blogging</li> <li>• TV &amp; cinema advertising</li> <li>• promotional handouts (flyers)</li> </ul>	<p>e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sponsoring an event or a cause,</li> <li>• TV, cinema &amp; radio advertising</li> <li>• articles in journals</li> <li>• website blogging and articles</li> <li>• professionally-designed logo, stationery and banners</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tip:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be discerning where you advertise. You’ll be approached by everyone who has space to sell. Define your target market clearly in terms of age, gender, demographic and be seen where those people will look.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tip:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When preparing articles, know the publication you are targeting and write the article to 100% complete using the language of the publication, including a selection of professional photos, <b>as if you are the journalist</b>. The less editing they have to do, the greater your chance of publication.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tip:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value your logo and corporate identity. Get the logo professionally designed, establish a small palette of unique colours which are YOU. Ensure that your logo and colours appear everywhere.</li> </ul>

# Systems & Procedures

**Documenting the ways you do things** (systems and procedures) at your Studio will help you clearly understand what you are doing and deliver your services successfully. It also helps the student to know what to expect.

You will be more time efficient, maximise your income and portray a professional image.

Big companies and franchises have long mastered the crucial area of documenting a system that works, and then successfully implementing it.

You know exactly what you are getting when you visit McDonalds, Bakers Delight or Lenard's AND it is consistent with each store.

They have identified and targeted their market, determined what they want and provide it every time. This creates consistency and a level of expectation.

By examining how you do things, documenting it and implementing it you are on your way to a professional and successful operation.

Areas to document include:

- **Your teaching method**  
Document what you teach. It will clarify in your mind what you are teaching and highlight any gaps.
- **Lesson Structure & Progress**  
It is mandatory for teachers in educational institutions to have lesson plans. Private studios should not be any different.  
A record of each lesson will avoid memory lapses by teachers, maximise student progress and facilitate smooth handover of students between teachers if and when required. **Our Studio has even provided lesson notes to interstate teachers, on occasion, when students have relocated.**
- **Policies**
  - Cancellation policies
  - Students who smoke - how to deal with them (for vocal students)
  - Abused voices (for vocal students)
  - Parent feedback
  - Enrolment form
  - Terms and Conditions
  - Payment terms
  - Making up for missed lessons - how to handle it
  - Copyright and licensing
  - Borrowing/lending sheet music and songbooks
  - Physical contact with students during lessons
  - Auditioning/accepting students
  - Students who do not practice between lessons
  - Duty of Care towards students (inc sick students)
- **Administration**
  - Enquiry procedure and follow up with promotional material
  - Lesson confirmation letters
  - Occupation Health and Safety guidelines
  - Keeping students updated about in-house concerts, industry auditions, performance opportunities via newsletters, regular handouts, email, website or online blog

- **Financial management**

Organised finances are essential for your financial well being, the growth of your business and for your students to know where they stand (how much do I owe? When's my next payment due?).

Financial software programmes are essential for all businesses to keep finances in order. Computer-generated receipts, or at worst, handwritten receipts, are essential because:

- *you could be acting illegally if you take cash under the counter (cash economy or black market).*  
'Cash under the counter' doesn't give our industry a good name. Encourages the 'back yard' perception towards music teachers which is still strongly prevalent.
- It denies opportunities for those students who can claim lesson fees as a legitimate tax deduction
- It help students understand the lesson fee structure and helps them- and the teacher- to budget for their lesson fees esp. over an extended period of time

Consider documented procedures for the following:

- Issuing Accounts and receipts and payment handling  
**Tax Invoices** (for those who have an ABN) or **Receipts** for those who don't are mandatory.

### **A note on ABNs and GST registration**

Since the introduction of the GST in July 2000, EVERY business must have an ABN (Australian Business Number).

**This is different from being GST (Goods and Services Tax) registered.**

Businesses which gross more than \$50,000 should register for GST.

**Even if you are not GST registered or do not gross more than \$50,000 per year, you still need an ABN.**

### **TIP: does your business have a budget?**

A '**budget**' does not have to be a dirty word or one which conjures guilt.

A well-structured **realistic** budget is essential for business survival and growth. It doesn't have to be complex. It just needs to be meaningful to you.

You should at least know:

- a) your forecast (educated best guess) annual **turnover** (income from students)
- b) your forecast annual **costs** (inc tax and all expenses, inc your wage)
- c) your forecast **profit**

If you're only meeting expenses, you'll never grow your business.

## Facilities & Technology

Every Music Studio needs facilities to conduct lessons and run the business efficiently.

These will obviously vary from Studio to Studio depending on the styles of music taught, the preferred business model and how lessons are conducted.

The use of these resources gives the student a better service by providing more opportunities in lesson as well as value for money. It will give you a competitive edge. It will also lift the profile of our industry.

*Designate an area solely for teaching that feels like a studio.* Remove personal items and distractions including phones, kids and pets from the teaching area.

### **Facilities in the Studio** – bare essentials for any Studio

- Clean, tidy, uncluttered, well-presented, well-organised, comfortable room, free from odours, which offers privacy, good lighting and is clearly dedicated solely to lesson activities
- Keyboard or correctly tuned piano
- Ergonomic chair for teacher (and student, if student needs to sit)
- Voice students - Rehearsal mirror
- Voice students - Recording facility to record lessons
- Voice students - Anatomical model or chart of larynx
- Voice students - Microphone & Microphone stand
- Voice students - drinking water at room temperature (not chilled)
- Music Stand

### **Facilities in the Studio** – optional extras for a contemporary studio

- Transposable keyboard (change key/pitch as you play) with MIDI
- Transposable CD player (change key/pitch as the music plays)
- PA System
- Computer and software for use as teaching aides

### **Suggestions for Additional Facilities**

- Air cleaner for odour-free, allergy-free experience
- Music Catalogue (CDs and print music, tapes, videos and DVDs)
- Document your music collection manually or, better still, use computer software (database) to keep a searchable list of all your music
- Software to compose, transpose & edit music and create backing tracks
- Computer software teaching aides for music teachers e.g. Sing&See <http://www.singandsee.com>
- Software to keep your financials in good order e.g. MYOB or QuickBooks
- Computerised Student Personal Details records and lesson booking details e.g. Microsoft OneNote <http://www.microsoft.com/office/onenote/prodinfo/default.msp>
- Website as a resource centre for students to access forms, studio promotional material, lesson handouts e.g. singing exercises, warm-ups, timetables, gig guides, inhouse concert dates
- Email mailing list to communicate with students quickly, easily, cheaply and regularly and maintain your profile with them