

Breakout 1 Notes

Best practices for rental season.

- Recommend bringing technology up to speed; e.g. communication/texting and getting rentals online.
- Agreed with having technology set up. Most rentals come from going into the schools and displaying them at the school. They also invested in computers to take with them to electronically complete contracts and process payments.
- Will do contracts online, but then the parent needs to come in store to sign the contract and pick up the instrument.
- Created reports to tell what instruments are rented from each store to organize inventory. Having a relationship with nearby stores is helpful so that if they are in need of, for example bells, but another store has a large stock of them, they can trade/buy/sell from each other. Had to create a waitlist last year because they couldn't fill every request. They're on Podium. Their challenge: way of tracking instruments when they are rented other than paper contracts (i.e. when an instrument is rented, tracking that it was sent to the school to be delivered to the student).
- Had a huge rental season this year. Couldn't get into schools because of COVID so they set up appointments to come into the store. When they came into the store, they then sold them on their lesson program.
- Record-breaking rental season this year. Best practice moved away from paper. Online rental platform for in-store rentals has been tremendously successful. Computer able to gather necessary info vs old paper apps, plus it was legible. Can send it all digitally to customer.
- Best practice this year: used Google forms for rentals. Keep everything school-specific. Largest rental season this year (3 years in rentals). Biggest struggle is collection side of things - they run rentals on the 5th & on the 6th have to follow up on payments/collections.
- Shared they do rental auto payments every Tuesday - Podium integrates with AIM/Tritech and sends text saying payment did not go through. Very helpful. Friday they go after delinquents from bounces on Tuesdays. Delinquencies have dropped.
- Use an employee with good phone skills to make sure rental is going well & answer any questions. Podium text could replace human phone call but the human connection has been strong for them. Difficult because people are busy.
- Struggled with rental customers contact info being correct. Made postcards, but undeliverables forced them to update information and make sure its correct. Good support from local music directors. Friend first then the sale.

Breakout 2 Notes

Best practices for balancing web store and brick & mortar inventories as the holidays approach.

- History is in repairs so retail is newer for them. Technology and web sales is something they are just branching into. Using Raine application. Their challenge bringing people into their store. They're coming up with plans such as coupons and a Halloween event at the store.
- In the process of switching over to the AIMM software. Focusing on the quality of pictures they are inputting for their website. They're currently doing a promo with musical Lego figurines on their website in a "where's Waldo" theme, hunting for those figurines on their website. They are concerned they won't have any inventory for the holiday season with everyone saying you need to purchase gifts now due to low stock.
- Using Vortex for their web side of business. Purchased the store 5 years ago, and there was no ecommerce whatsoever. They've been working to build that. Pushed curbside pickup during COVID closure. The web was beneficial to their rental season. Challenge is keeping the site up with quality pictures. Feels they still have a way to go.
- Have their own warehouse for all their stores. Biggest challenge is having inventory. Their focus was also distributing product to stores so that inventory was kept up. Online sales are sent out directly from their warehouse and the warehouse team keeps up the website so that the stores can focus on brick-and-mortar sales.
- Current shipping backlog has made it very difficult to get product. Has never seen a convergence of so many things - container, shipping, chip shortage & truck driver shortage - very rare & will probably last thru next year. Adding new lines, trying to get creative & get products in however they can - predominantly online.
- Some customers want to be in-person, others want to be fully remote. Varies customer-to-customer.
- Small store that carries minor lines. Has adapted inventory to what they can get. Used to have 30 acoustic guitars; now they have 10. Trying to convert customers perception about what they can buy vs what they thought they wanted. It has worked well. Being cautious. Not filling all back orders; getting what they need right now. Masks optional in their area has resulted in a lot less aggravated customers now vs when masks were mandated.
- Chip shortage has affected inventory too.
- Educate customer on other choices that would work for them if inventory is limited. Many customers are students so they look to the staff as to what they should purchase so their opinion is valuable. Completely masked store is open & going well.
- B&O inventory well stocked from last year so they stayed ahead, but small things like stands and mouthpieces were hard to get. Predict seeing inventory shortages for another year. Marching band was done indoors during the rain, and audience had to wear masks though some band performers were not wearing masks.
- Psychology of customers has been affected by pandemic - am I allowed to practice music or touch this? Shows up in retail.
- Significant 6-month back orders that have taken the Add to Cart button off website; Replaced with Call For Info so they can explain to customer about the delay.