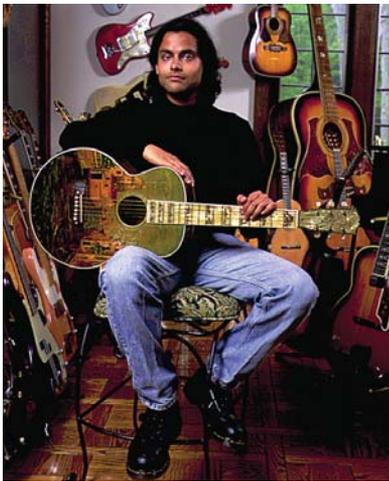


THE CUSTOMER CONNECTION | BY RAVI

# Choose Your Customers

For more than a decade, I've been giving a seminar at universities and music business conferences called "Maintaining Artistic Integrity While Running Your Career as a Business." One of my messages to up-and-coming artists is, "Don't learn to write for the market. Learn to market what you write." Essentially, I'm advising to not give consumers what they want but instead attract those who want what you offer. Even better, make consumers want what you have.



## TARGETING THE 20 PERCENT

This isn't often-preached business advice. We're more familiar with, "The customer is always right." Well, I believe in the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of business comes from 20 percent of customers, and vice versa. As such, I also believe that 80 percent of customers are wrong, at least as it pertains to your business. Why would I want to work so hard trying to win their business, which only amounts to 20 percent of my revenue?

The point is that you have to know who you're relying on. Ultimately, if you subject your core 20 percent to marketing efforts and inventory targeted at the peripheral 80 percent, you'll lose that loyal base due to non-aligned interests. Trade brick-and-mortar for a Web-only business if you want to serve the masses. Otherwise, by the time you dole out your best deal to that 80 percent, the effort and cost of closing that sale is often hardly worth the margin.

Focus on your top 20 percent in the community — the ones who buy from you because of you. They want to do business with you and enjoy your environment. It's easier to purchase musical merchandise online than in a store, and product info combined with customer reviews is enough to seal most deals in one's pajamas. Add a

return policy that permits trying out gear delivered to the comfort of home, and it's pretty hard to beat. Moreover, you don't want to be primarily a showroom for the majority who Googles the cheapest price and "clicks to buy."

## BRAND STRATEGY

Your store is the place where your 20 percent makes its big purchases and everyone else can pick up accessories in a pinch. Forget trying to figure out what the finicky public wants. Instead, develop your customer

base around your personal preferences and other complementing products — the stuff you really know and love. Your stock must be an extension of yourself. Inventory may be imposed on you by certain manufacturers, but remember: You exist first to serve your 20 percent, not the manufacturers. Maybe you can push the "other stuff" to your own "click to buy" 80 percent.

You cannot just carry brands — your store has to be a brand itself. Today's consumers are inundated by "friends" they've never met and mass marketing from companies all over the world. No brand is more powerful than a genuine personality with which one can interact.

Another message I tell artists is, "Only the best succeed, so be the best you." Bitter musicians falling back on owning music stores are not going to win customers. If that sounds like you, pick up your ax, get out and play. Become one of your 20 percent. You'll attract a loyal core clientele, not only because the people you jam with will probably want to buy from you but because the empathy you share with musicians of all levels will seduce one out of every five. **MI**

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