

# 45 Ways to Make Your Business More Successful

PTG Economics Affairs Committee

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## **Purpose:**

One piano technician may be “just getting by,” while another may be supporting a comfortable lifestyle and saving for retirement. Where are you on this scale? For the piano technician, there are four ways to increase your bottom line: (1) Earn more money per client, (2) Service more clients, (3) Diversify (offer more products and services to each client), and (4) Expand : grow your business to the point that you must hire others to support all the work).

As you go through this list, try to identify just a handful of ideas that inspire you to make a positive change. Take those ideas home and make a point of implementing them every day. Even if you can only find one idea from this class that you are excited about, it might just be the spark that boosts your business, and your lifestyle, to the next level.

## **Advertising**

### **1. How did they find me? (Which advertising worked?)**

- a. It's perfectly okay to ask how a client found you. This is the only way you can monitor the effectiveness of your various methods of advertising.
- b. Drop the advertising methods that are not paying for themselves and invest more of your ad budget into the ones that succeed.

### **2. How awesome is your web site?**

#### **a. What? You still don't have one yet?**

- i. Most clients in search of a technician now use the internet to find a technician. This is really bad news for you if you have no web site, because the number of calls you receive is but a small fraction of what it would be if you had a decent web site.
- ii. Do you already have all the work you want or need? Even if so, are you servicing mostly higher quality clients and nice grand pianos? If you have succeeded in building your business to full-schedule capacity without a website, imagine what having a website could do for improving the quality of your client base! As you take on more quality clients, you can subcontract the lower quality jobs to other technicians. The extra advantage of this approach is that you can still make a little money on the tunings that are subcontracted, raising your profit, and should you ever sell the business, you will be glad you did not just give those clients away for nothing.

#### **b. The secrets to a successful site.**

- i. The domain name should be brief and easy to say over the phone, without it's being easily misunderstood or misspelled. The name should be pertinent, and best if it contains the word “piano” somewhere. Avoid domains that are too similar to other pre-existing domains.

- ii. Should be clean and easy to read and navigate – no subpages beyond two deep from the home page.
        - iii. Contact information must be readily available on every page.
        - iv. The site should list or demonstrate your expertise and full range of services.
        - v. List every city and neighborhood that you service.
        - vi. Provide useful content. Search engines love content! Basic sites with minimal information will rank lower. Sites that contain articles, FAQ's, helpful information about piano care, and explanations about various services will do much better. Don't clutter the main page with any of these high-content items; they should be located on sub-pages that can be navigated to easily.
        - vii. Portray yourself as a friendly, trustworthy person that people will be comfortable having in their homes.
        - viii. Use good keywords in appropriate ways to match what customers are searching for to find you. *For example, we call ourselves technicians, so we would be inclined not to use the word "tuner" with your location, because people will be generating Google searches like, "piano tuner in Palm Springs." With that in mind, what exact phrase might you want to consider including somewhere on your site if you tune in Palm Springs?*
        - ix. Do not use "black hat" search engine optimization techniques like keyword stuffing, hidden keywords, duplicate content, etc. Some web sites do these things unintentionally and ignorant of the fact Google will punish you severely. You must learn some basics about web sites and Search Engine Optimization or have your site reviewed by an expert before you publish it, so you are sure not to get blacklisted.
- c. No web design skills? No problem!
  - i. Years ago, having a web site meant learning HTML or other languages. It's getting easier and easier for non-technical business owners to create web sites. No language-learning is necessary at all, now, but there is still some effort involved. A web site is just a set of documents. If you've used Word, Powerpoint, or Publisher, you have the skills to create web pages. So how do you get started? The notes here may be of some use, but the internet is full of great tutorials, videos, and tips designed to help a beginner learn to make a web site for the first time. Find those resources and use them.
  - ii. There are two approaches you can take: The first is to find a web hosting company that offers built-in tools to help you design your web site. A webhosting company offers space on a server where your website exists on the internet. There are too many to list, so you must do some research and find one that has good reviews and seems to fit your style. These built-in tools often give you basic templates that you can choose from to establish the look and feel of your web site. Once you choose your template as the framework, you can then produce pages with text

and graphics in a similar fashion to how you would develop a Word document. Most of the tools will look familiar and similar to programs you've already used (inserting tables, changing fonts, justifying your text, etc.) The weakness of this approach is that your options will be limited and confined to the structure of the tools. After all, they were designed to make it easy to get you up and running, but not as a complete set of tools that will allow you to do everything you may wish to do later on.

- iii. The other approach is to build your web pages independently, using any number of available software programs designed for web creation. Some examples are Dreamweaver, Sharepoint Designer, or free tools like NVU or Amaya. The learning curve may be higher, but once you get the hang of it, it will be much faster to make changes to your site or create new pages. Still, you will want to make use of templates if you are just staring out, so you don't have to create graphic buttons, backgrounds and other time-consuming details. There are templates you can purchase you can work from. You will still need a webhosting company, but if you will not need on-board design tools, there are many companies to choose from that will suit your needs. Once your website is created locally on your computer, using your web design software, you upload it so that it will reside on the server of the webhosting company. A good webhosting company will make this process user-friendly so you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out how to make it all work.
- iv. Regardless of which approach you take, you should have your site planned out on paper before you start dabbling with software! Have the basic text written. Organize the images and photos you want to use, and know where they will be placed on the various pages of your site. Look at other technician websites and borrow ideas that you like. If you decide what you want your website to be before you start playing with the design tools, the process will be much easier for you. Once you get lost in the tools, it's easy to get distracted, but having a basic paper design will keep you on track.

### **3. Make a visual impact without going broke.**

- a. If you can learn to be your own graphic designer, you will be able to set yourself apart from the competition.
- b. What kind of image do you want to present when you give your business card to a potential client? If you offer high-quality service, don't run low-quality ads, and don't hand out business cards that look like they were designed by Microsoft Word and printed by HP. You've probably seen the boring and unimaginative cards that many piano technicians hand out. What's in your wallet?
- c. To start, you will need an image-editing program like Photoshop. There are much less expensive programs that will let you do what you need, and even some free ones (like GIMP).
- d. Once you learn the basics of your image editing program, you will be able to create professional-looking business cards, magazine ads, glossy reminder

postcards, and graphics for your web site. You can use your new graphic skills to make coffee mugs, signs, t-shirts mouse pads, and the list goes on.

- e. Having all these items printed professionally probably sounds expensive. It certainly can be expensive if you don't know where to go.. Most of the things you'd ever want to have printed (and some you probably never thought of) can be done by Vistaprint (<http://www.vistaprint.com>) The real trick to using Vistaprint is to search for their online coupons, which offer very big discounts. For banners and signs, <http://www.esign.com> is another great resource. Put some thought into your image and do it right – it's not that hard or expensive.

#### **4. Free (and cheap) methods to boost your internet presence.**

- a. Participate and contribute to website forums like PianoWorld, where you can help people with their questions about pianos, etc. Blatant advertising is not welcome, but it's okay to put a link to your website in your signature. By building a genuine presence online, you create links to your site that can enhance your Google rankings.
- b. If you don't already have a Google Maps listing for your business, do it now! Many people use Google Maps to find local businesses and do not even bother with a regular search engine. This is even more common now since smart phones have become the norm.
- c. Create listings with free advertising sites like Kudzu, Yelp and Thumbtack.com. This will increase the chance of being found, and even give clients an opportunity to post positive reviews about you.
- d. Make a Facebook page for your business, and invite your online friends to check it out (and ask them to click the "like" button). When they click the "like" button, all of their friends will see it. Some of those friends may be local piano owners. A Facebook business page is also another way to help your search rankings.

#### **5. Advertise in local school publications.**

- a. Many high schools have journalism departments with student-produced periodicals that are read by many parents. This can be a way to target certain neighborhoods you want to work in.

#### **6. Localized marketing pays off.**

- a. Many technicians cover a larger geographic area than they really need to because they fail to take advantage of opportunities to reach out to potential clients closer to home.
- b. Some local magazine publications offer highly-localized advertising options that target small areas.
- c. Advertising on web sites for local retirement communities or housing developments.
- d. Get creative and claim your territory. The more clients you can get close to home, the less time you will spend in the car.
- e. Use your own web site to focus on and target the closest communities.
- f. Get involved with local events, like donating tunings to fund raisers, where you can network with people in your own neighborhood.

**7. Obtain customer testimonials for your web site and online listings**

- a. I'm sure you have a few favorite clients that you know well and feel comfortable with. Ask them if they would be willing to write a brief testimonial and submit it to your Google Maps listing as a 5-star customer review.
- b. Do not ask everyone to do this all at the same time, because it will look fishy if your listing suddenly has a lot of reviews all posted within a few days.
- c. Many other review sites will "spider" your Google Maps reviews, and you will likely see those reviews show up on other web sites.
- d. Finally, you can use these reviews as testimonials that you can put on your web site.

**8. Deliver flyers door-to-door.**

- a. If you are a runner, or just want to get some exercise by walking, you can deliver flyers in a local neighborhood to reach out to potential clients.
- b. Piano owners will tend to stuff your flyer away somewhere for future reference. Since it often takes more than one mention of your name for someone to call you, a flyer is easy to deliver and very inexpensive.
- c. Remember to place your flyer on the door step, not in the mailbox. There are federal laws that govern who can place ads in or on a mailbox.

**9. Set goals for your marketing efforts and contact-building**

- a. Good marketing requires planning. The potential to reach new clients in a local business is far greater than most business owners realize. It takes creativity, time, and hard work, but the marketing opportunities available to piano technicians are largely untapped. Network, advertise, get involved with the community, do something interesting to get a story done by local TV or newspapers. Make a plan and set goals to accomplish these tasks, and establish your name as the local expert everyone will want to hire.

**Interpersonal Skills**

**10. Give a great experience with your product.**

- a. Talk to the client about the services you are performing, and let your enthusiasm for your work show.
- b. This generates an interest and helps them to learn about the piano.
- c. An educated client will have more appreciation for your work and will be more inclined to have you perform full service instead of minimal work.

**11. Talk on the phone as if face-to-face with the client. Smile, even when on the phone.**

- a. Be engaging. A new client hasn't met you yet, but if you want to be invited into their homes they must feel comfortable with who you are over the phone.
- b. Even if the client cannot see you, they can hear if you are smiling or frowning, because this comes through in the sound of your voice! If you smile on the phone, it will put the client at ease, and increase the number of service calls you schedule.

**12. Be part of the local music community.**

- a. Get to know your local music teachers organizations, attend recitals, or advertise in concert programs.
- b. Networking with musicians and showing your interest and involvement in what they do can create new opportunities and help to establish your reputation.

**13. How do you say your name correctly?**

- a. I'm sure you've had your name mispronounced by a telemarketer. How did that go over? Don't do the same with your clients!
- b. You may be treating your client's piano with the greatest of care, but if you don't express enough interest and care toward the people you are working for, this could send a much stronger message that overshadows any technical work you perform.
- c. Psychology can be just as important as Piano Technology when earning your client's trust.

**14. Complement something in the client's home.**

- a. People are proud of their homes, and the piano is often surrounded with items that have meaning to the client. Saying something positive about a piece of art or furniture can communicate that you respect your client and their property. A few positive and pleasant feelings can go a long way in developing a good working relationship with your client.
- b. When the family dog jumps on you, do you look annoyed, or do you use it as an opportunity to endear yourself to the client? People love their pets, so you will likely be judged by the interaction you have with the family pet. This is also very commonly the first impression you will make with a new client.
- c. Ask about the children who may be taking piano lessons. This is often the whole reason you are there.
- d. If you can say something positive about the piano, your subsequent check-list of recommended repairs is less likely to be seen as criticism of the instrument or the owner.

**15. Improve Continually**

- a. Attend your chapter meetings.
- b. Take advantage of regional seminars and the national convention.
- c. Research past Journal articles to increase your knowledge and learn new tricks of the trade.
- d. Look for opportunities to be trained by manufacturers.
- e. Copy ideas that work, and use the wisdom of those that came before us. To do this, you must expose yourself to great ideas: read books and participate on the Pianotek list.