

How to Build and Maintain a Private Studio

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Growing a Studio

I. Identify a target market

It does not matter what business one is endeavoring in. To be successful, one must have something one is aiming for. If that is to be the best piano teacher to 4 years old kids, do that. It is only to teach high school tuba and euphonium students, do that. One person cannot do everything, and it is better to do some things well than to do all things poorly.

II. Establish Credibility

University Teaching

Performing Experience

Website/Recordings

III. Contact

Have a business card with contact information! It is an easy and handy way to pass along your information to prospective clients. Have them on your person and in good condition.

Who to Contact

- A. Band Directors – volunteer to do a masterclass, be generally helpful, present yourself as the expert, be a solution to a problem they may not know they have.
- B. Students – meet them at the masterclass
- C. Parents – get the contact info from the students
- D. Other local professionals

Email – have a template email with lesson information, with prices, locations. Be quick to reply, even if the answer is no. Have a quick and easy way to collect contact information from students. I use a Google form.

IV. Details

Prices – things are only worth what people are willing to pay. Factors that establish credibility MAY increase perceived worth.

If the going rate is \$40 an hour, you won't get many student students if you charge \$60 an hour.

On the other hand, do not devalue your work, experience, and the profession. If you charge \$20 an hour when the going rate is \$40, you are:

- A. Going to have to work A LOT to make enough money to live.
- B. Hurting anyone else trying to make a living teaching lessons and burning bridges in the process.

Location – This will vary depending on your situation. If you can, teach at the school. It provides an easy place for students and parents. It will also give you the teacher, a ton of free exposure to prospective students.

Maintaining a Studio

I think the first and most important step to long term success in running a freelance studio is a change in mindset from that of an artist to that of a small business owner. We should NOT forget about the artistry, but we should prioritize being the owner of a small business!

I. Communication

Probably the most important skill is communication. When you're teaching at two universities, four high schools, and playing on the side, communication is key! Students and parents need to know where to go and when to be there.

I send out a weekly email with the schedule, any information about upcoming events (including personal performances and university ensemble performances), and payment information. I also use this email as an opportunity to praise student accomplishments when applicable.

Reply to emails in a timely and professional manner.

II. Money

Money is always an awkward issue among artist-teachers who typically prefer to be more artist than a teacher or a small business owner. I have found that using a monthly fee has stabilized my income, improved lesson attendance; as a result, improved student outcomes.

Keep a written record, digital or analog, of all money transactions. The record is for you AND your students. You never know when a student's parent will ask for an invoice. It's also for you. You'll thank yourself around tax time.

Diversify your income. If a new band director comes into the only school you work at, you could find yourself out of a job.

Taxes are hard. If you can, you should hire an accountant. I did not do my taxes correctly, and I almost did not qualify for my mortgage! People value you for your expertise. You should do the same and hire an accountant.

Many students will not take lessons over the Summer or lessons will not be as regular as they are during the academic year. Make sure to save money throughout the year so you can enjoy a few lighter months.

III. Artistry

After talking so much about the nuts and bolts, it can be easy to lose sight of why we started this endeavor in the first place. For our students, we need to fuel their passion with our passion. Keep making music. Introduce them to new music. Your students will ultimately be more successful if they are well-rounded musicians, and it'll help keep you sane!

IV. Sanity

As you build your studio, you get busy. I usually cap my teaching at 40 students. That's 40 students, three academic classes, practicing, a recital, playing obligations, seeing my family, and you still have to sleep. It can be hard, but it is perfectly fine to cap your studio. I keep a waitlist. You should too. If you work too much, you will not be teaching at your best, you will be completely miserable, and ultimately that is a disservice to your students.