

Bob Baker

Company: Wells Music
(part of Schmitt Music)
Specialty: Pianos
Years in the Biz: 26
Annual Sales: \$3–4 Million

“I know exactly how the piano is built. I know exactly what woods they’re made out of, so I’m not relying on a brochure or hearsay.”

Bob Baker was an unlikely candidate to become a star piano salesman. Having spent his early adulthood touring with a rock group called MS Funk, he didn’t own a single suit. But as the swinging ‘70s wound down, he figured it high time to get a straight gig. Wearing clogs, no socks and with hair hanging down his back, he walked into a Denver music store and talked his way into a job.

Today, Baker owns more than his share of suits, and his rock ‘n’ roll look is long behind him. As the top piano salesman at Wells Music in Denver, as well as at the entire Schmitt Music chain, he is personally responsible for \$3 million to \$4 million in sales per year.

How did he go from clogs to riches? The gift of gab and a genuine ability to connect with people gave him a head start. But it was his thirst for knowledge that put him over the top.

ASK QUESTIONS

Baker recalls a formative experience back at his first



employer, Knight-Campbell Music. “My first customers said, ‘We really like you, and if you knew anything about this product, we’d buy it.’”

That challenged him to learn everything he could about keyboard instruments. He talked to piano tuners and grilled them about their craft. He’d find the best organist in town and ask him about stops and settings. He’d read everything he could get his hands on, attend seminars and travel directly to factories to learn how pianos were made.

KNOW THE PRODUCT INTIMATELY

During his vacation time and at his own expense, Baker has visited all the major piano manufacturers in Japan, Germany and the United States. He believes that, more than anything, gives him an edge selling pianos.

“I know exactly how the

piano is built,” he said. “I know exactly what woods they’re made out of, so I’m not relying on a brochure or hearsay.”

Not that Baker doesn’t use brochures; he claims he has a brochure for every piano that’s made. But he supplements that literature with the knowledge he’s gained with his own eyes and ears. He’ll even take pictures of switches or bundles of wood so he knows what’s inside a given piano. He stores them on his computer so if a customer has a question about, say, a particular finish, he can e-mail the pictures right away.

Baker knows so much about pianos, in fact, he can usually repair them on the fly, so a customer needn’t wait an extra week for a technician to show up. Customers appreciate that, and it’s helped build his referral business.

At NAMM Shows, he has even been known to crawl

under pianos to see how they’re constructed. He continues to educate himself so he can help customers make informed decisions, which is how he ultimately views the sales process.

CREATE CONFIDENCE

Baker disdains what he calls the “If I could, wouldja” approach, where a customer says he or she has only so much money to spend and the salesman says, “If I could lower it to that price, would you buy it?” Baker believes it’s better to help customers find what they really want and help them feel confident about their choice.

“You have to talk with the people as if you’ve just met them and it’s someone you want to make an acquaintance with,” he said. “You want a relationship with that person so that they come back, maybe buy something later, maybe refer somebody later, maybe get something for their grandkids later.”

ALWAYS PUSH FORWARD

Drive has a lot to do with it, too. There are many million-dollar achievers in the piano industry, but very few who take it to the \$2-million level or higher, and that takes a special talent. Complacency is one of the most common mistakes Baker has seen other salesmen make.

“They talk about how bad business is instead of doing something else to improve business,” he said. Then, when they make a big sale, they’ll take it easy for a few days. Baker, on the other hand, sees a slump as a challenge to work harder. And when he makes a big sale, it gives him a boost of adrenaline that soon has him on the phone prospecting for new clients. **MI**

—John Janowiak