

Finding students

Any guitar tutor in private practice needs a sufficient number of students to enable him or her to earn a living. Tony Skinner advises on the best way of attracting new students...

Of course, the first step any serious guitar tutor should make is to join the Registry of Guitar Tutors: the RGT publishes details of its registered tutors in a widely distributed printed directory and on its frequently visited website. The RGT office normally receives a minimum of at least 50 enquiries per week from students looking to find a suitable tutor. These enquiries come largely by telephone and E mail. We do not normally recommend any specific tutors, but instead refer callers to the RGT website or send them a copy of the Tutor Directory free of charge. The RGT also regularly receives enquiries from schools and colleges who are looking for teaching staff. At a maximum membership cost of only £32 per year (about 60p a week) RGT membership is by far the best value method of attracting new students: even if you only gain one new student per year your costs are more than covered once that student has taken a couple of lessons. However if you are still short of students, or if you are new to teaching and struggling to fill your lesson slots, there are other methods that you might consider as well – these are discussed below.

SHOP WINDOWS

Placing adverts in shop windows can bring some results, providing you saturate all the shops in your area. The advantage is that students

will tend to be local and therefore find your premises convenient to travel to. If you 'travel out' to give lessons then this is a particularly useful advantage. If you do advertise in a shop window try to use a well printed advert: a scruffy handwritten advert on the back of an envelope will imply that your lessons are going to be very cheap and will not give a good initial impression. RGT tuition advertising postcards, that you can insert your name and telephone number on, are very helpful and are available at low cost from the RGT office. Shop window advertising can seem like a very low cost advertising option, but keep counting the pennies: 50p to £1 a week per shop across 10 local shops could end up costing about £400 per year.

GUITAR MAGAZINES

Although advertising in a national guitar magazine will help improve your profile, the chances of it being read by students local to you who are currently looking for a tutor is quite slim. Given the fairly high cost of even a single small box advert (about £50) you should keep a close eye on the response rate before committing to an expensive series of adverts. Generally students will only travel great distances for lessons if you offer rare skills and have a known expertise in a certain field (e.g. the North-east's greatest slide player, or Scotland's only reggae

specialist).

As a general rule, national publications are not the ideal medium for people offering solely local services.

LOCAL PAPERS

If you have a local 'free paper' that is delivered freely to all the homes in your area then this can often prove to be a highly effective advertising medium; much more so than 'bought' local papers which tend to have a considerably lower circulation. Many local papers will have a 'leisure and arts' section and this would be the ideal place to advertise – particularly for attracting beginners.

Adverts will be quite pricey (about £40 to £80 for a small box ad each week), so it is best to run a short series of adverts at peak times of year; the most obvious times being just after Xmas/New Year and in September. You'll need to keep the advert in for at least 3 weeks in order to judge its effectiveness; luckily most papers tend to offer '4 weeks for the price of 3' or some such similar offer.

YELLOW PAGES

It's easy to forget that when the average consumer looks for a product or service their first port of call is often the Yellow Pages, or the Thomson Local equivalent. This applies just as much to guitar tutors as to other service providers. Both of these publications will often

offer a free small line listing to any guitar tutor. However, to stand out from the crowd, and to have space to list the styles and levels you teach, you really need to take a box advert. Even a small sized advert may cost about £300 for the year (depending upon your area), however the positive feedback we have had from tutors suggests that this may be the most effective method of advertising – with many tutors reporting such success that they had to begin turning students away. Whilst this may seem surprising, remember that the Yellow Pages benefits from free distribution to all homes in your area – and most people tend to keep a copy by their telephone and more importantly they do seem to refer to it when looking for any service. Currently, relatively few guitar tutors seem to advertise in the Yellow Pages – presumably because of the very large outlay for the year's advert. However, take some time to do the maths: if you charge £20 a lesson and each student comes for an average of 40 lessons a year then providing you gain just one regular student you will have recouped over double the cost of the advert. Due to the high initial expense this is clearly not a decision to be taken lightly, and you could possibly end up with not a single response throughout the whole year duration of the advert, but it's certainly worth thinking about and deciding if it's worth a calculated gamble. If you do decide to advertise, you'll need to find out the annual advertising deadline for your area – you only get one chance as this type of directory is printed in advance for the year.

MUSIC SHOPS

Getting to know the staff in your local music shop can pay great dividends as they are often asked by customers if they know of any

local guitar tutors. If you shop for strings etc. in one local shop then make them aware that you are a guitar tutor looking for students – and in turn recommend any students to the shop for their musical purchases. The shop staff will soon learn to look after your students well if you keep sending a steady flow their way, and should soon reciprocate by sending new students in your direction. Many music shops and rehearsal studios will have noticeboards where you can place a tuition postcard free of charge or for a minimal cost.

RECOMMENDATION

Students will often recommend friends and relatives to you for lessons if they are happy with the services you provide. However, to encourage this even more, it is worth producing a small brochure about your tuition services: stating a little bit about yourself and your musical background, and giving details of all the styles and levels that you teach. You can then encourage your students to distribute this to other potential guitar students that they know.

WEBSITE

It is only worth developing a website to promote your teaching if you are prepared to spend considerable time and effort setting it up well and keeping it maintained. If your website is to stand any chance of being found by surfing students you'll need to regularly prime (and sometimes pay) the main search engines to keep your site high in the search engine rankings. Make sure that you put your job title and location (e.g. guitar tutor Cornwall) in your homepage 'keywords' so that the search engines will respond to the most relevant internet searches.

OTHER METHODS

Apart from those listed above, most other sources of advertising which require you to spend money should be viewed with caution. For example, there are a growing number of 'music teacher' type websites that claim they will offer you a steady stream of student enquiries, but you will often find that once they have taken your money the only site visitors are other teachers looking to sign up, and very little money is spent on promoting the site to potential students. There is no harm in taking up any free offers of advertising providing the website or publication is reputable.

BEST AD

Whichever method of advertising you choose, try to make your advert look professional. Including a picture or photo of a guitar or guitar player will attract attention, although make sure that it is not style specific: having only a photo of a classical guitar may put off any rock students that you were also hoping to attract.

The RGT is the recognised organisation for guitar tutors, so make sure that you put 'listed with the Registry of Guitar Tutors' in your advert as this will give a sense of security to potential students and their parents. Stating that you offer tuition leading to RGT/LCM guitar examination grades will also help attract students and help give the impression that you are a professional and serious tutor. Copies of the RGT information flyer and all syllabi can be used by tutors as promotional aids and are available free of charge to all registered tutors