

10 Mistakes All Music Teachers Make When Starting Their Teaching Business

Starting your own music teaching business is an **exciting venture**, filled with so much **promise and potential**. As **excellent musicians and creatives**, the desire to teach and share our skills often come hand-in-hand. We want to pass on this **passion** for music, and encourage our students to form a **lifelong love** of music and learning too.

However, building a **successful** business around this requires a completely different skill set, and one that is often overlooked when starting your music teaching business.

Knowing and watching out for these **top 10 mistakes** will place you in a far better position to avoid the problems that all music teachers make when starting their teaching business.

The more time you take to recognise and mitigate all of these problems, the more success you will have right from the very beginning. It can be so costly and time-consuming to correct these things further down the line, so **getting them right from the start will save you time and money!**

In this guide, we dive into all of the common pitfalls that trip music teachers up, whether you are just starting out or refining your model. We explore all of the challenges, and invite you to get in touch if any of them resonate with you. For me, the biggest mistake is number 7! **What do you think?**

Let's get started:

MISTAKE

01

Waiting for everything to be perfect



Things you do **NOT** need to launch your music teaching business:

- A fancy website
- A booking system
- A business name
- A logo
- Professional photographs
- Marketing materials
- An entire syllabus for every type of student
- Personalised stationary and practice diaries

Things you **DO** need to launch your music teaching business:

- An instrument to teach on
- An appropriate space to teach in or tech to teach online
- Public liability insurance

Waiting for everything to be **perfect** is just a form of **procrastination**. Telling yourself that you'll just do one more thing, one more thing, one more thing, is an **endless pursuit**. **Nothing will ever be perfect**, and each day that you put off getting started is another day of not being paid for your expertise!

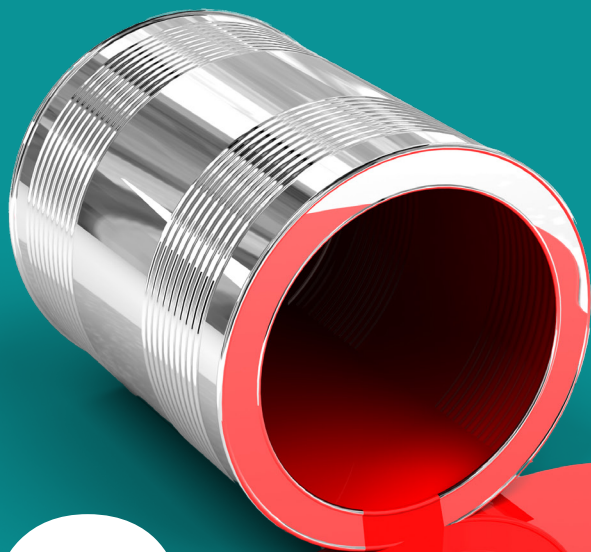
The desire to present a perfectly formed business often leads to **analysis paralysis**. We become so **overwhelmed** by the to-do list we create for ourselves, that we **don't really do anything**. We spend a full day deciding on what our brand colours should be, and lose the ability to make quick decisions. All of this stems from a **fear** of putting ourselves out into the world, and getting started.

How long have you been delaying your launch, waiting for things to be perfect?

MISTAKE

02

Not looking after existing customers



How many times has this happened to you:

You receive your renewal quote from your broadband provider, and it has gone up significantly. Just as it has year-on-year for the 5 years you've been with them. When you visit their website to find a contact number, you see their brand new offer to new customers - a third of the price that you have been quoted, **AND** with a load of bonus freebies when you sign up!

How do you feel? Annoyed? Confused? Unwilling to continue as a customer?

This happens **ALL** the time, and is a typical example of a company that values new customers over loyal ones. It can be so tempting to throw all of your time and attention into attracting new students, and expanding your reach. Forming new relationships and the prospect of inspiring new students is so exciting!

However, your current students are not just participants in your classes; they are the foundation upon which your music teaching business is built. They entrusted you with their musical tuition, and their loyalty is a testament to the value you've already provided. While the allure of new beginnings is strong, nurturing these existing relationships is equally, if not more, vital.

In fact, your existing students are **ESSENTIAL** to your success for these 5 reasons:

- They are **ambassadors** of your teaching prowess
- They can genuinely **endorse** you through word-of-mouth referrals
- They can provide **invaluable feedback**, allowing you to fine-tune your offers and address any concerns before they escalate
- They foster a **sense of community, connection and trust**, in the space you have created for them to learn
- They are a **safe group** for you to trial and test new techniques, methods and ideas - they will enjoy being a part of your innovation and your journey.

What do you do right now to reward brand loyalty?



MISTAKE
03
**Not charging
enough**

How do you price your services? By looking at your local competition and taking an average? By undercutting them perhaps?

If you are the cheapest in the area, you will have the most customers right?

Maybe.

But only until someone cheaper comes along. And then it's just a **race to the bottom** - who can charge the cheapest price? You will find yourself **working all hours, for an unsustainable income!** And if your customers are only interested in the lowest cost, they will have **no loyalty** to you and your brand. They will **jump ship** as soon as someone cheaper comes along.

Underpricing can also send the wrong message to potential students. A price that's too low may lead them to question the quality of your instruction. Music education is an investment in skills that can last a lifetime, and students are often willing to pay for a **superior experience** that promises **growth** and **advancement**.

As musicians, we have been conditioned to believe that our time is not very valuable. That we should **LOVE** our art so much, we should be prepared to give it for free. That if we were **truly passionate** about our work, we would **sell our soul** to work every waking hour for the good of our creativity.

How many times have you been asked to work unpaid 'for the experience'?

This messaging rings through the whole of society, and is very difficult to break free from.

You are worth so much more. You are a talented, hard-working, creative person, who has spent so many hours honing your skill - you deserve to be paid your worth.

How much are you currently charging? How does this figure feel to you?



MISTAKE 04

Not dreaming big enough

'If your dreams don't scare you, they aren't big enough'
(Muhammad Ali)

Without goals, dreams and desires, we can drift fairly aimlessly. If we don't know where we want to be in a year, 5 years, 10 years time, how will we ever make progress towards the life that we really want? It can be tempting to stay modest and small, not wanting to show too much ambition...but what do you have to lose by shooting for the stars?

When you dream too small, you **limit the potential** of your impact. Music education has the incredible ability to **transform lives, spark creativity, and foster a lifelong love for the arts**. By daring to dream big, you're opening doors for more students to experience the magic of music, inspiring them to explore their potential and embrace their musical journey.

Dreaming big also encourages you to **innovate and push boundaries**. It sparks your creativity to design **unique and engaging teaching methods, curricula, and experiences** that stand out in the competitive landscape. Your willingness to push beyond conventional norms sets you apart and attracts students who are seeking something **exceptional**.

Big dreams will also see you through tough times. As a business-owner, you will face a whole array of challenges, and having an exciting and impactful vision will help you to keep moving forwards in the right direction for you and what you want to achieve.

Take a minute right now to visualise your future teaching business.

Are you excited by your vision? Does it make you feel nervous? It should, a little!

MISTAKE

05

Not creating agreements for their customers



Several years ago, when we were just starting out, I used to drive to a few students in their homes on a Friday evening. Every week, I would sit in traffic, with journeys taking up to 30 minutes between students. I was hugely undercharging, and had no formal agreements in place with any of them. On one particular night, I had several (unpaid) cancellations, and then crawled through Friday night traffic to my next student. I knocked on the door, and was greeted by a smiling Mum. 'Oh, I forgot you were coming. We're in the garden having a BBQ. Go home, have a drink and enjoy your Friday night.' And the door closed. I went home, unpaid, humiliated, and cried. **AND**, I vowed to make a change there and then to the way that our business operated.

This mistake is accidentally fallen into so often!

It happens frequently when teaching your friend's children, or your neighbour, or a student that you've had for so long you can't remember where they even came from. You don't have a written agreement because you don't want the awkwardness of any forced formality. You tell yourself it's ok, they are your friend, of course they will always act with your best interests at heart.

But then...

The arrangement is so informal, you often fall victim to **last minute cancellations, late payments, feeling unable to chase or increase fees, regular rearrangements**. Even with a little generous allowance given, you feel completely undervalued and stuck for how to enforce rules that you didn't put in place to begin with.

From day one, it is vitally important that everyone knows your rules, your terms, your expectations. That way, everyone knows where they stand.

Have you ever experienced problems when having no agreement in place?



MISTAKE **06**

**Not spreading
the news**

This is imposter syndrome rearing its head again! We should be bursting to tell **EVERYONE** we know about our new business endeavour, but something holds us back. Shyness? Modesty? Fear of failure? **Fear of stepping outside of our comfort zone.** I mean, if we don't tell anyone, it doesn't matter if it doesn't work...right?

In the digital age, where information travels at the speed of a click, your music teaching business thrives on **visibility and awareness.** By not spreading the news about your business, you deny potential students the opportunity to discover your **expertise** and embark on a musical journey under your guidance.

Word-of-mouth advertising is so valuable, especially in the early days. People always prefer to hire the services of someone that has been recommended to them, and this is a completely free way of securing more students. **But how can anyone do this if they don't know about your new endeavour?** Friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances can become your most enthusiastic advocates, spreading the news to their own circles. Their endorsements carry authenticity and trust, lending your venture a strong foundation from which to grow.

Is something holding you back from sharing your news with all of your networks?



MISTAKE
07
Not offering group lessons

This is my favourite mistake, and the one that I see most often.

When crafted well, group lessons are **fun, inspiring and exciting**. They encourage **friendship and ensemble, healthy competition** between students, and are a strong contributor to **mental wellbeing**. They help students to develop **performance confidence**, enhance **aural skills**, and create a positive and **supportive atmosphere** where **students celebrate** each other's **achievements and collaborate** to overcome challenges. They are also a more **affordable** option for parents!

For you, they offer a way to teach more students, for more profit.

Let's look at Model A:

10 hours per week of 121 piano lessons, priced at £38 per hour = £380 per week.

39 teaching weeks per year = £14,820

Now Model B:

10 hours per week of group piano lessons, with 8 children per group, each paying £25 per hour = £2,000 per week

39 teaching weeks per year = £78,000

To generate the same revenue, you would need to work **53 hours per week teaching 121 lessons**.

Teaching in groups allows you to leverage your time, creating more time in your week to do the things that you love!

Have you ever taught in small groups?

MISTAKE

08

Not booking their time-off first

Have you ever heard the age-old adage, '**Work for yourself, and you'll never work another day in your life**'?

Well...

This isn't exactly true...

Yes, it is amazing to work the hours that you choose, and it's amazing to be your own boss. But **YOU** have to assert that discipline around your downtime. **Nobody is going to tell you to stop working.** No one is going to tell you to close your laptop at 10pm. And no one is going to tell you when you can take your holidays.

Time-off is essential to recharge your **creative energy and prevent burnout.** It is an integral part of running your own business, but something that is frequently overlooked. If it is not planned in to your diary, in the same way you plan concerts and projects, you will lose the space in your year to enjoy **well-earned downtime.**

Whether you work with the calendar year or the academic year, sit down at the start and **block out your holidays first.** **Set auto messages** on your emails and messenger apps during these dates, saying that you are on holiday and you will reply when you return. Block out whole days, weekends and weeks where you will **step back from your business** and rest - your mind will benefit from this so much. Finally, **schedule in time to reward yourself** for hitting milestones and achieving goals in your business. When you need that extra little push to keep going through something difficult, a incentive at the end can really help!

How much time-off do you take from business?



MISTAKE 09

Not having a niche



Who are your music students?

- Primary school children?
- Secondary school children?
- Preschoolers?
- Children with SEND?
- Children who want to achieve music scholarships?
- People who want to learn online?
- Retired ladies?
- Professionals?
- Adult beginners?
- All of the above?

Are you differentiating at all? And, if not, how do you market your lessons?

When you are just starting out, you may feel like accepting any student who wants to work with you. But, you should still start **carving your niche out** from the beginning - which means choosing one group of people that you specialise in helping. This helps to provide focus and clarity, helping you define your expertise and showing potential students why they should choose your over others.

Specialising cultivates a **reputation for excellence!** Teaching in a specific genre, age group, or teaching method showcases your **dedication to mastering** that particular aspect of music education. This builds **trust and credibility** among students and parents who are seeking an instructor with deep **knowledge and experience** in their desired area.

Understanding the **unique needs and preferences** of your niche enables you to create custom lesson plans, select appropriate repertoire, and design engaging activities that resonate with your target students. This personalisation enhances the learning experience and fosters a stronger connection between you and your students.

Who do you love to teach the most?

MISTAKE 10

Not creating good systems



Pen, paper and an excel spreadsheet may work well for you when you have 2 or 3 students. But, you will quickly find yourself weighed down with admin if you don't create systems that can manage a much higher volume.

Consider some of these questions. How are you going to:

- Store student information?
- Manage bookings and scheduling?
- Take payment, issue invoices, and send receipts?
- Manage agreements, terms and conditions, photo permissions, policies, etc.?
- Manage your lessons planning and student progression?
- Share resources, learning materials and exercises?
- Record your financial information?
- Communicate with students?
- Manage your marketing?
- Manage your social media?

These are just some of the administrative tasks involved in running your music teaching business - and this doesn't include the actual teaching! There are systems you can use from the early days, that **automate** a lot of these processes - and hugely reduces the manual time spent on the others. Be your **future friend**, and find systems that work for you in the early days, so that you don't get **overwhelmed** as you grow.

What systems do you use right now?



About the author

I am Lauren Elliott, co-founder of Music Monsters, a learn-through-play group piano programme for young children. We work with hundreds of children every week, inspiring them to love music through games, missions and challenges. We have built our business by working through each of the challenges outlined above, getting excellent systems in place, and now have franchises across the UK. Our franchisees do fantastic work, making music education fun and accessible to all children.

We help driven music teachers to go from unappreciated and sick-of-the-system to rocking their own impactful music teaching business. We help them to realise their worth and break free of self-limiting beliefs about how much money they can earn and the impact they can have in the world. We help them to create businesses that they love, and that completely align with the life that they want to lead - and ultimately to make more money!

Do you want to:

**Earn more money?
Inspire more children?
Teach fewer hours?**

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