

It's ^{all} ~~None of~~ Your Business

Think Outside The Home: Teaching Options And Opportunities "The Middle Man"

Editor's Note: This is the seventh installment in a series of columns exploring various teaching options.

The previous six columns examined alternatives to the home studio, including online teaching, teaching at a for-profit organization, teaching at a non-profit organization and teaching in students' homes.

There is another scenario—a middle ground where the teaching may occur in the home studio or online or in students' homes, but someone else provides marketing, invoicing and other business tasks. This is a growing business model in our profession, with technology igniting new ventures. It is not a new model though—consider the many professions

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where an agent or consultant finds work for the artist or client.

Kari Krafft is pursuing a master's degree in violin performance in Oklahoma. She has prior teaching experience but is not sure that establishing a home studio in Oklahoma is wise, given start-up expenses and the uncertainty of where she will be after graduation.

Kari has recruited her own students, but most of her studio is the result of active involvement with three organizations—takelessons.com (5 students), musikalessons.com (4 students), and thumbtack.com (10 students).

Takelessons.com

At takelessons.com, the teacher sets the lesson rate, keeping in mind that takelessons.com will keep a percentage. The percentage is a sliding scale; the teacher starts out earning 60 percent of the lesson price the student pays. For every five lessons taught to that student, the teacher earns 10 percent more of the student's price, up to 90 percent.

The teacher sets the schedule and posts availability on the website. The teacher can offer lessons in the home, another studio location, at the student's home or online. A parent will book a lesson time, which the teacher can then accept or decline.

The parent pays takelessons.com. Takelessons.com notifies the teacher

that payment has been made and provides contact information for the student. Teachers are asked to contact students within 48 hours. Takelessons.com pays the teacher via direct deposit.

Parents have two schedule/payment options: 1) Recurring Schedule—reserve a recurring lesson time with the teacher and receive a monthly bill, which is paid in advance; and 2) Schedule As You Go—schedule lessons individually with the teacher and pay for lessons online as you go.

Kari likes the aspect of setting her own rates and schedule. However, if the teacher increases rates, the price increase does not affect students who have enrolled on the Recurring Schedule plan.

Parents search for a teacher by zip code and instrument. All teachers available within the zip code are displayed, with pricing and distance. Click on a teacher for a profile that includes background, teaching philosophy, ages and levels taught, availability, map, background check, and reviews (5-star rating system). An interesting feature is the "Ask the teacher a question" button, with the average response time noted.

Musikalessons.com

Founded in 2001, Musika describes itself as an independent music teacher referral network. At first glance,

musikalessons.com looks very similar to takelessons.com. Musika's webpage allows parents to search by zip code and instrument; teachers within the zip code appear with the distance, but not pricing. Profiles are similar to takelessons.com.

Parents request a teacher; Musika sends the request to the teacher. The teacher can accept or decline the student and determine the lesson length. Pricing is a set rate based on location, not individual teacher. It was challenging to find pricing on their webpage (look under FAQ); input your zip code and pricing is quoted for 30-, 45- and 60-minute lessons. The parent pays Musika; the teacher is paid by Musika at a rate determined by Musika.

A distinctive feature is Musika's "100% Risk-Free Trial Lesson." If the student enrolls after the trial lesson, then he pays for the lesson. No payment is required if the student is not satisfied and does not enroll.

Kari likes the control over accepting/declining a student and deciding the type of lesson. She wishes she could set her own rate. Her contract with Musika requires that she not discuss rates with her students.

To compare sites, I searched takelessons.com and musikalessons.com for a piano teacher in my hometown (a rural area) and where I work (an urban city). For the urban city, Takelessons.com yielded 13 results, with prices ranging from \$18–\$35 for 30-minute lessons. For the rural area, there were three results, with prices ranging from \$20–\$35. Musika yielded four results for the urban city and zero results for the rural area; both had a set price of \$28 for 30-minute lessons.

Thumbtack.com

Thumbtack is a multi-purpose site for finding a professional, from music lessons to house painting. A parent requests a service in a zip code area. Thumbtack will review the customer request and send it to experienced professionals in their network. If the professional(s) is interested, he/she responds to the customer with a quote.

Kari pays \$3 per quote to Thumbtack. The prospective student does not see the teacher profiles until after the quotes. The student can contact the teacher(s) and enroll directly with a teacher of his/her choosing. Kari comments that this process is safer for parents than "just searching online" for a teacher.

Kari has had the most success with thumbtack.com. It also provides her with the most control over her business. She sets her own rates and availability, and keeps 100 percent of the rate charged to parents. She feels she has been

successful because she responds quickly to quote requests.

For teachers like Kari, an organization that provides marketing, scheduling and/or invoicing can be a valuable resource in building a studio. If exploring this option, I advise consideration of the following:

- Location is important. Some areas may be saturated with teacher listings.
- Lesson pricing varies significantly; give careful thought to your own rates.
- A professional profile is essential; this is your "first impression."
- Evaluate the website's ease of use, for the teacher as well as the parent.
- Each organization has its own policies about makeup lessons; know the rules.
- Read the fine print. Understand your obligations and financial relationship.



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