

Entrepreneurial **Tips** for Your Professional Teaching Studio

by *Noreen Wenjen*



This year, plan and manage your music studio with the mindset of an entrepreneur. Set up an online waitlist, update your studio policy to include self-employment benefits (paid sick days and holidays), and offer online lessons!



Music teachers often reach out to me for suggestions on how to increase or maintain students in their independent music studio. Some teachers have available time and want to increase their student load to boost their income. Other teachers have very full

studios and teach almost every day of the week. Their quality of life suffers because they cannot take any time off for vacation. They teach when they are sick, for fear of losing students or income. Many teachers also worry that they cannot cover their expenses when their students leave for extended vacations and cancel their lessons.

How does a music teacher keep a full studio with enough income to pay their monthly expenses throughout the ENTIRE year, and still have some planned time off for vacation and sick days?

Why You Need a Waitlist

“Having a two-year waitlist creates demand for your studio, conveys the value of your teaching, and confirms your professional abilities”¹

Music teachers are some of the most generous and selfless people that I know. We spend our careers focused on teaching others, and nobody chooses to become music teachers with the intent on making loads of money. However, professional music teachers should strive to earn a good living and have a stable income. We pay monthly-bills, rent, or mortgage and have expenses, like everyone else.

¹ Noreen Wenjen, *Two-Year Waitlist: An Entrepreneurial Guide for Music Teachers* (Maryville: Audrey Press, 2019), p. 11.

A waitlist and an extensive professional studio policy will keep your studio filled to capacity throughout the year. Having a waitlist may help to decrease the number of students who plan to take the entire summer off from lessons without paying for their lesson, expecting to return in the fall.



A two-year wait list ensures a stable income and creates demand as a music teacher

- Create a Contact/Waitlist form on your website.
- The Contact/Waitlist form will be your waitlist when your studio schedule is full.
- Include waitlist information such as age, level, grade, years of study, previous teacher, and availability for lessons.
- Promptly relay to waitlist students via email or phone.

Studio Policy Updates: Paid Sick Days and Planned Holidays

Music teacher tend to possess super-human traits; some teach over 50 students weekly with 8 hours blocks without breaks. However, like most mere mortals, we still get sick and need to take a vacation or time off from teaching. Create your own “benefits,” based on the standard benefits in the corporate world. Plan ahead for the inevitable sick days or vacation time, while earning a steady monthly income.

“A good studio policy keeps the students and parents within the studio informed of expectations and guidelines and helps an independent music teacher maintain a steady income (like other professionals).”²

² Noreen Wenjen, *Two-Year Waitlist: An Entrepreneurial Guide for Music Teachers* (Maryville: Audrey Press, 2019), p. 39. ▶



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The Benefits of Offering Online Lessons

- Pro-rated monthly payments that divide the annual amount of lessons and recitals, divided by 12 months for steady monthly fees.
- Plan your holidays to align with federal and student school holidays (these dates are planned holidays, not included in your monthly payments, but not *deducted* monthly).
- Plan your own vacations during these holidays so you do not lose student income when you take a vacation.
- Allow for a minimal number of “paid” sick days, days off that you would take only in the case of illness that would allow you to cancel lessons without having to reimburse or make up lessons.
- I give myself a total of a week of sick days, although I usually only use one or two days a year.

I have taught online piano lessons in addition to in-studio lessons for the past 4 years. The technology related to video,



sound, connectivity, delays, interruptions, and access continues to improve each year. Offering online lessons can increase or stabilize your student base, despite unforeseen changes.

It is easier to initially try teaching online lessons to your current students, due to the familiarity with the student’s technical skills, learning pace, and level of comfort in working with that student. Teachers also usually own the scores to the students’ current repertoire, which is necessary for online lessons.

Plan ahead!

- Give the parents in your studio at least 4 weeks notification of any changes in your studio policy or studio offerings.
- Use the timeframe of the fiscal year beginning January 1st through December 31st
- The calendar year fiscal year from January through December aligns with the tax year.

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Optional Online Lessons

Although I do not offer makeup lessons, due to my full teaching schedule, my students appreciate the flexibility of optional online lessons.

Teachers and students will get sick at some point in the year. My students have the option of taking their piano lessons online during their scheduled lesson time if their parent cannot bring them to lessons, or if they are too sick to go to school (yet feel well enough to have a piano lesson). This keeps the sick student at home, without missing their lesson! If I feel like I am coming down with a cold, I teach my students online instead of exposing my students to a virus or cancelling all of my lessons.

During the summer, many students travel to visit grandparents or friends for several weeks. Rather than missing their lessons, we are still able to have their lesson online. If there is not a piano available at their location, we focus the lesson on music theory and music history! Parents can even “virtually attend” the lesson by joining the video call!

(photo above: International online lesson with student and “virtual attendance” by parent (in another country!))

Not Computer Savvy? No Problem!

Candice is an advanced, adult student that studied with me for 5 years. She moved from California to Idaho to take care of her aging mother. I offered to help her find a new teacher in Idaho, but she wanted to try online lessons with me, with periodic in-person lessons during her visits to California.



Candice admittedly is not very “tech savvy,” but she is very resourceful! She visited her local Apple store in search of a small, external speaker with a

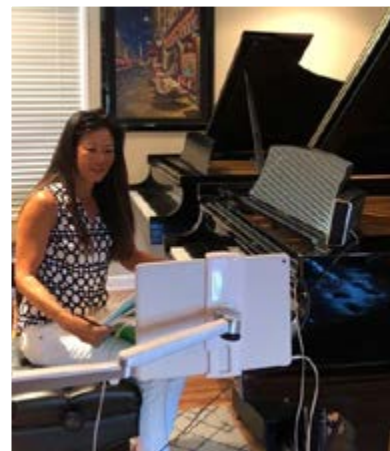
built-in microphone that would provide excellent sound quality during our lessons. She also purchased a computer stand for her laptop that enables the best view of her during the lessons, at a comfortable view distance.

Candice’s son set up her laptop and speaker and we enjoyed our lessons from Idaho to California each week. Candice enjoys studying and performing piano concerti, which currently cannot be facilitated online with two pianos due to internet latency. I video-recorded the piano accompaniment, uploaded it to a private YouTube channel, and she was able to practice her piano concerto with my video recording.

Facilitating online lessons does not require a large financial investment for the teacher or students. Students can start with what they have, and upgrade as needed.

(photo above: Adult student computer/speaker setup for online lessons)

International Online Lessons



(photo: Noreen teaching an online lesson via Facetime™ to a student in Germany)

Many teachers do not have a strict or thorough studio policy. If their students go on extended vacations or travel abroad with their family for the summer, it can affect the teacher’s livelihood!



Teachers can keep their monthly income stable and keep their lesson schedule stable by offering optional online lessons or requiring students to pay for any unattended

lessons in order to hold their lesson time throughout the year.

One of my students moved to Germany for an entire year and we continued weekly lessons via Facetime and through my private Zoom™ account.



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Some of my students go to China for the entire summer! We are able to continue our weekly lessons via Skype or Zoom during the regular lesson time, or with a slight adjustment for time zones. Some countries may require the user to have a private Virtual Private Network (VPN) to facilitate international video calls.

Break up Longer Lessons

One of my students has Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). He needs an hour lesson to get through all of his repertoire and theory, although he cannot sit for an hour at one time with focused attention. His mother did not think he would be able to focus during an online lesson. However, it turned out that he focused even BETTER, looking at a screen! Of course! “i-generation” kids have grown up using screens every day! The solution we found is to break up his lessons into two 30-minute lessons; an in-studio lesson on Monday, and an online lesson on Wednesday. This also encourages him to practice on Mondays and Tuesdays, in preparation for the lesson on Wednesdays.

Online Lesson Options and Social Media

Offering online lessons can help maintain your studio and building a strong social media presence provides opportunities to gain new students!

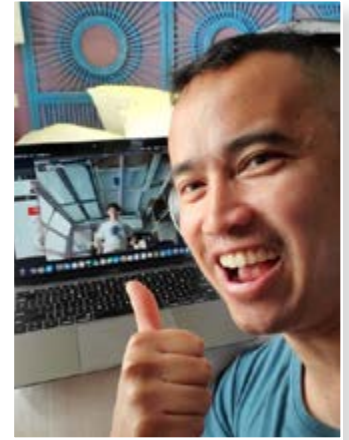
My son, Connor, is a percussionist in the marching band at his high school. Connor’s has an excellent percussion teacher, Karl, also known as @karldrumtech on social media, and his lessons are on Sundays at 5:00 pm. There was an evening that I was not available to drive Connor to his lesson. I asked Karl if Connor could have an online lesson during his scheduled lesson time using Skype. Although Karl had never taught online percussion lessons, he agreed to try it.

To prepare for their first online lesson, Karl and Connor both used their laptop computers, exchanged Skype user names and set up a time to connect for a few minutes to make sure the audio and video worked properly. The online lesson was successful to both Karl and Connor: Connor did not have to miss his lesson, and Karl grew the number of students he taught over the next few months by teaching students online!

I asked Karl about the impact that teaching lessons online has impacted his percussion studio. Karl’s answered, *“While my business initially increased by 50% thanks to opening things up*

online, I’m happy to say that 70-80% of my business is now online lessons teaching students all over the country. However, I don’t think it would have been possible without having a large social media presence.” Karl has amassed an impressive social media following with 17k followers on Instagram, 5k followers on YouTube, and 2k followers on Facebook.

(Photo: @karldrumtech gives Connor an online percussion lesson)



Try Teaching Online!

- Plan a trial online lesson to an existing student
- Parents are glad to try this if the student would otherwise miss his or her paid lesson
- Teacher’s setup includes a large ipad or laptop with an extended speaker (plug in instead of Bluetooth) with built-in microphone
- Purchase scores of all of the repertoire your students will work on during the lesson and number the measures
- Student’s setup includes either a computer, ipad, or mobile phone, and optional stand
- For lessons via Skype™, exchange Skype™ addresses beforehand, and test out the sound
- For lessons via Zoom™, have the student download the Zoom™ app onto their device and try it out during an in-person lesson
- If using Facetime™, determine if you will call the parent’s phone or the student’s phone
- Get permission from the parents when contacting students who are minors outside of their lesson
- Update your studio policy to include online lessons with updated liability waivers
- Type lesson notes and email them to the student and parents after the lesson to give the student detailed practice assignments. ▶



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Give your music studio an upgrade in setting professional business standards for your independent music studio. Set your standards high, dream big, and run your music studio with the mindset of an entrepreneur!

For more extensive information on how to build and run your music studio, visit my website wenjenpiano.com and check out Two-Year Waitlist: An Entrepreneurial Guide for Music Teachers, available at on Amazon and Barnes and Noble. ❁

Noreen is the author of Two-Year Waitlist: An Entrepreneurial Guide for Music Teachers, reaching #1 on Amazon for Music Instruction and Study and available at Barnes & Noble.

Noreen's marketing background and experience in working with Fortune 500 companies, Nissin Foods and Aquent, has helped her bring business savvy to her piano studio, www.wenjenpiano.com website and become a leader in music technology and small-business entrepreneurship.

Noreen is the Immediate Past-President of the California Association of Professional Music Teachers (CAPMT). In 2019, she served on the MTNA American Music Teacher (AMT) Editorial Committee, as MTNA Chair for certification in China, and served as Chair of the MTNA State Presidents Advisory Council.

Noreen Wenjen, NCTM, received a BM from UC Santa Barbara in Piano Performance, and an Artist Diploma from the American College of Musicians. Noreen has received top prizes from international piano competitions and is listed in Who's Who Among American Women. Her teachers include Joanna Hodges, Nancy Rohr, Peter Yazbeck, Dr. Stewart Gordon, and Jim McCormick.

She has given presentations on entrepreneurialism and technology for national and state conferences. She will be the Keynote Presenter in business and technology for the Illinois State Conference in November 2019 and will present a session entitled Tech Necessities 101! Get the latest and greatest technology for your music studio at the MTNA National Conference in Chicago, Illinois in March 2020.



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