



Creating the Right Fit: understanding key recreational music making criteria

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While prior concept papers have focused on establishing foundational insights and marketing to the wellness consumer, this article is intended to serve as a guide for the successful development of Recreational Music Making (RMM) programs. Our goal is to present key RMM components in a manner that will enable both manufacturers and dealers to rationally decide whether to develop or modify their existing programs to serve the emerging wellness market.

Perhaps we should begin by reviewing what has rapidly become a well-accepted definition: “Recreational Music Making encompasses enjoyable, accessible and fulfilling group music-based activities that unite people of all ages, regardless of their challenges, backgrounds, ethnicity, ability or prior experience. From exercise, nurturing, social support, bonding and spirituality, to intellectual stimulation, heightened understanding and enhanced capacity to cope with life’s challenges, the benefits of Recreational Music Making extend far beyond just music. Recreational Music Making ultimately affords unparalleled creative expression that unites our bodies, minds and spirits.”

In keeping with these criteria, for a program to be considered within the realm of RMM, it must be:

- enjoyable, accessible and fulfilling
- offered as a group-based activity
- capable of uniting people regardless of their challenges, backgrounds, ethnicity, ability or prior experience
- based on promoting or supporting some or all of the following: exercise, nurturing, social support, bonding and spirituality, intellectual stimulation, heightened understanding and enhanced capacity to cope with life’s challenges
- offered in a manner that fosters creative expression

Essentially any music-making program that places competition or heightened performance over non-musical outcomes will not meet the RMM criteria. It’s important to note that even though senior programs, such as Weekend Warriors and New Horizons Band promote performance opportunities, they both emphasize the joy and camaraderie of joining a band to help a person feel young at any age. These programs welcome individuals who have played in the past, as well as those who have never participated in a band. With goals of meeting new friends, boosting self-esteem and working with other musicians to improve one’s skills, these model RMM programs continue to enhance quality of life for their participants.

When considering the option to offer Recreational Music Making programs in your area, a careful market assessment is warranted. From a business perspective, attention should be focused on determining whether or not existing and/or emerging markets are currently being served. If, after careful review, it is determined that either children or adults are literally falling through the cracks in terms of music-making opportunities, further consideration is justified for identifying rational opportunities to serve rather than to compete.



The next step is answering one key question: Do we proceed to develop a new program from the ground up, or is it possible to utilize an existing RMM program? While it might appear that developing a new program may be more expedient, such is not always the case. It is altogether possible that an established protocol with an effective marketing approach is the primary element needed to enter the RMM arena.

Another important consideration is the amount of time, energy and funding required to develop, offer and sustain a successful RMM program. This issue should be carefully addressed in the context of a solid financial investment that may not yield immediate dividends. Long-term considerations should take precedence over immediate possibilities.

Furthermore, one should carefully consider instrument selection in order to precisely meet the specialized needs of the targeted RMM audience. From hand drums to electronic keyboards, numerous possibilities exist. Each instrument should be considered an enabler of creativity, self-expression and fun that fosters immediate enjoyment rather than frustration.

Success, however, requires more than just instruments, technology and protocols that meet the RMM criteria. Selecting appropriate locations or venues is critical to ensuring ongoing participation. A program that might not draw a single customer into your store may result in a desirable waiting list if held in a community center. Consider addressing this issue by determining where other wellness programs are flourishing in your community.

It must be emphasized that prior to developing an RMM program, retailers should first consider utilizing existing programs offered by their suppliers (i.e. Roland, Yamaha, Lowrey, Remo, etc.) or NAMM. These RMM programs have been meticulously developed with considerable investments of time, effort and expense. Many have a proven track record in the marketplace. Some protocols have successfully undergone the rigors of scientific investigation—a key point that will add credibility to your offering.

In summary, your choices and decisions today are likely to determine where you'll be five years from now. The bottom line is that RMM is rapidly evolving from hypothesis to reality. Having already captured the attention of the media and the public, it is on the verge of becoming a movement. What is needed to sustain its growth is access.

This is your chance to become part of a widespread service-delivery system that will ultimately meet the needs of a silent majority—those who will not remain silent for long, as they finally begin to realize they are musical after all!