

## **Professional Development Makes You Recession-Resistant**

*by Gulimina Mahamuti*

Over the past year millions of people have lost their jobs, large banks have failed, and many businesses have collapsed due to a lack of demand for their products and services during the global economic downturn. To ascertain if, and to what extent, the recession has affected the private music studio, an online survey was designed and disseminated electronically to local Music Teacher Associations throughout the United States. From the responses, I have learned that while the private music teaching business has been affected by the current economic crisis, there are specific steps one can take to make the private music studio recession-resistant.

### **Overview**

The survey, disseminated in January 2009, was designed to gather demographics, professional, pedagogic, economic, and business information about music teachers. The goal was to measure the effects of the recession and to identify potential factors that could help music teachers maintain a thriving business. In one month, 842 music teachers responded. The survey results, however, have two limitations: First, 90% of the respondents were MTNA members and, secondly, 92% of them taught piano.

While music teachers are a diverse and highly individualistic group, economically speaking, they can be grouped into four business models: part-time self-employed, full-time self-employed, extra-cash, and full-time employer. Among the respondents to this survey, 43% were part-time self-employed, 32% were full-time self-employed, 21% were extra-cash, and 4% were full-time employers.

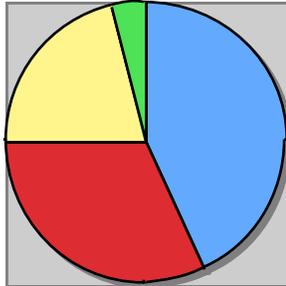
### **Demographics**

Approximately three in four, or 72%, of the respondents lived in communities with a population of between 10,000 and 500,000; 14% lived in a community with a population under 10,000; and the remaining 14% lived in communities larger than 500,000. In terms of business models, the results were understandable: Fewer full-time and more part-time self-employed teachers lived in communities of less than 10,000, and more of the full-time employers and full-time self-employed teachers resided in communities larger than a million.

It was surprising to find that the age distributions were virtually the same regardless of business models, with the exception of the extra-cash group, where there were more teachers older than seventy-five compared to the other groups. The respondents were well educated, with 93% holding a collegiate degree. Degree distributions were similar across all business models with one exception: the extra-cash group had twice the percentage of doctorates as the other groups. The distribution of teaching experience was the same across all business models, as was the distribution of the average length of student study.

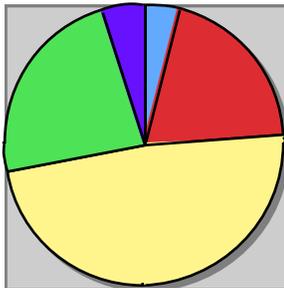
## Profile of Survey Respondents

### Business Models



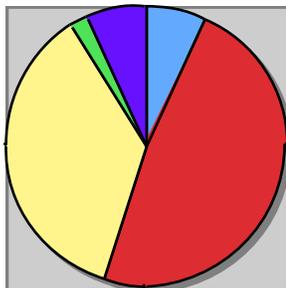
- Part-time self-employed (43%)
- Full-time self-employed (32%)
- Extra cash (21%)
- Full-time employers (4%)

### Age



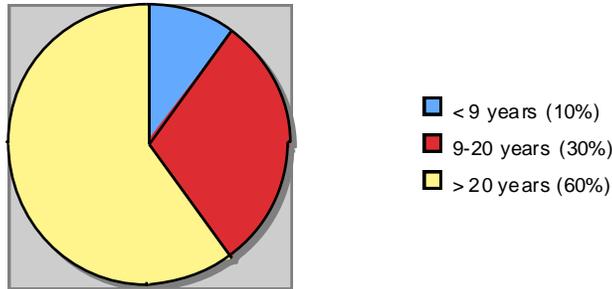
- <25 (4%)
- 25-40 (20%)
- 41-60 (48%)
- 61-75 (23%)
- >75 (5%)

### Education

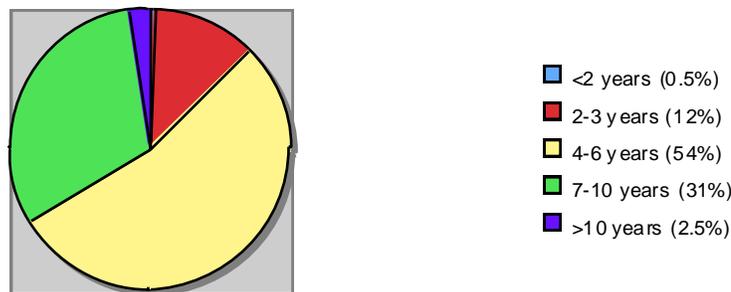


- High School (7%)
- Bachelor's (48%)
- Master's (36%)
- Artist Diploma (2%)
- Doctorate (7%)

## Teaching Experience



## Average Length of Student Study



## Economic effects

The survey showed that one in eleven music teachers was severely affected by the economy regardless of age, educational level, or business model. One in five music teachers lost students regardless of community size, age, or business model. Perhaps because of the economic downturn, two in five reported recently increasing lesson fees.

Faced with these facts, what can private music teachers do to become recession-resistant under today's economic pressure? The survey results show that the answers lie partially in specific aspects of professional development, which will be described in the following details.

## Professional development

Beyond what is necessary to operate a private music teaching business, such as salary, health insurance, facility, instruments, and studio teaching materials, the respondents valued professional development so much that it ranked in the survey as the

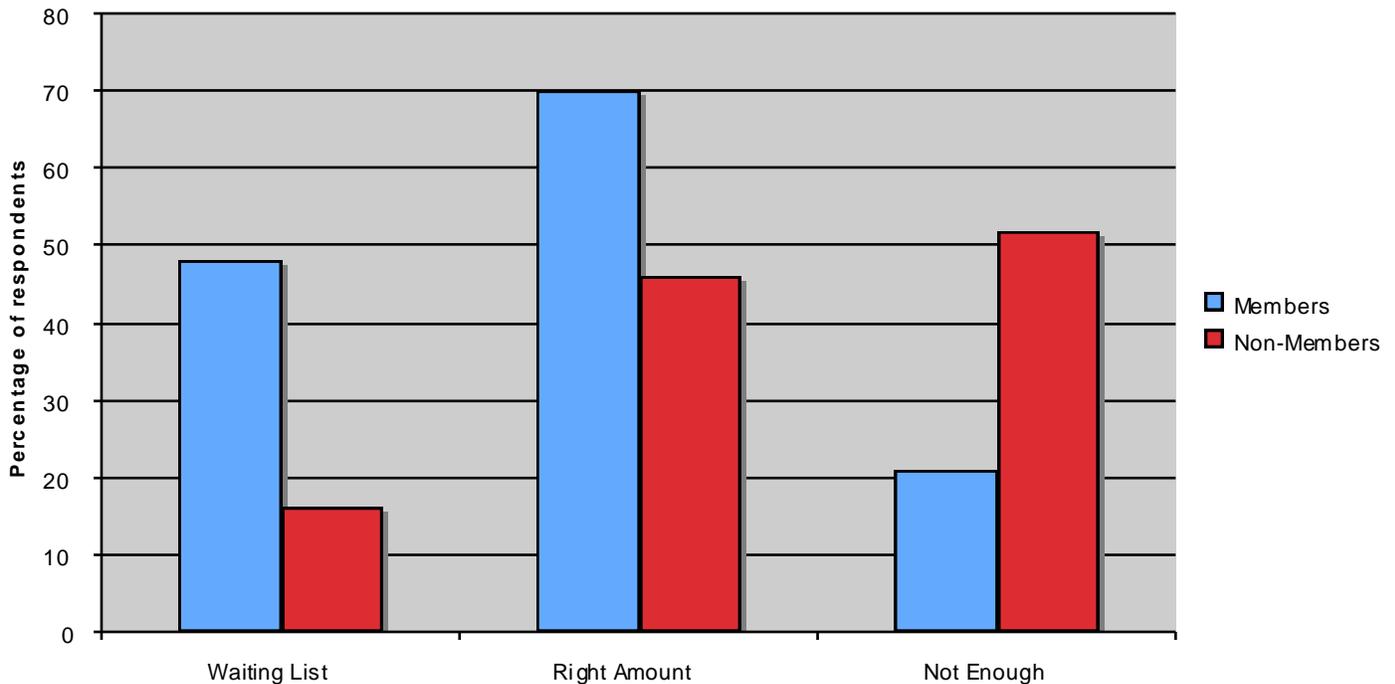
next highest expense, outranking accounting, professional services, utilities, and office expenses.

With the help of a statistics consultant, I identified certain aspects of professional development that could help make the private music studio recession-resistant. These included joining professional music organizations, becoming nationally certified, pursuing an advanced degree, developing a professional teaching model, and participating in professional music activities. The survey showed that these benefits helped private music studios decrease the effects of the recession in all four business models, as follows.

### Professional organizations

The survey results showed that membership in professional music organizations positively affected work load. Among teachers who were members, 48% had a waiting list of students, compared to only 16% of non-members. 70% of members had “just the right amount of students,” compared to only 46% of non-members. On the other hand, 52% of non-members did not have enough students, compared to only 21% of members.

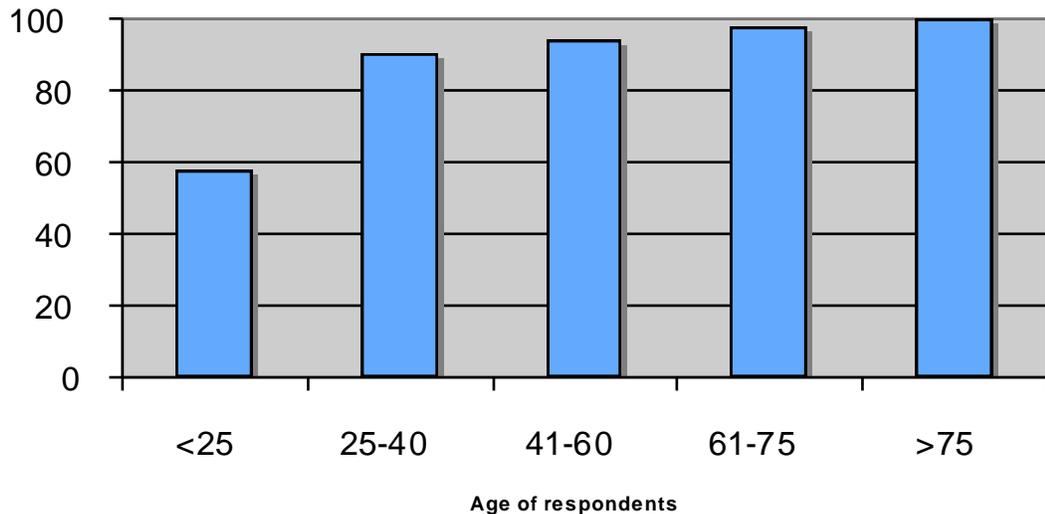
### Work load for members vs. non-members of professional organizations.



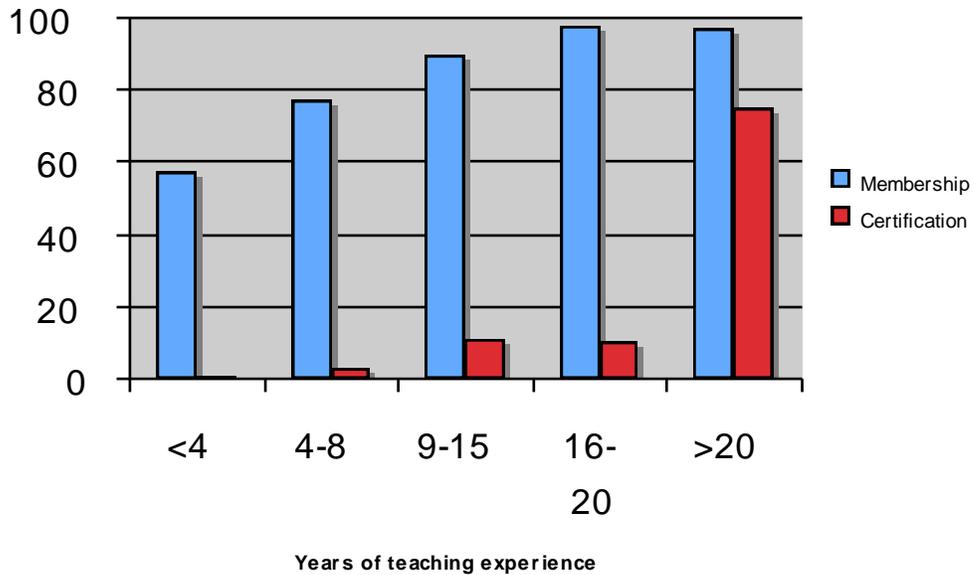
Membership, it turns out, also helps teachers retain students. Among teachers whose students stayed with them longer than three years, 97% were members of professional organizations. Among teachers whose students took lessons for three years or less, only two-thirds had membership.

With these benefits of membership, do music teachers join professional music organizations? The survey showed that older and more experienced music teachers tended to pay more attention to joining professional music organizations. An overwhelming majority (more than 90%) of music teachers twenty-five years or older were members, compared to only 58% of those younger than twenty-five. Furthermore, the survey showed that among teachers who have taught for more than eight years, 96% were members compared to 72% of those with less teaching experience.

### Membership by age group



### Membership and certification by years of teaching experience

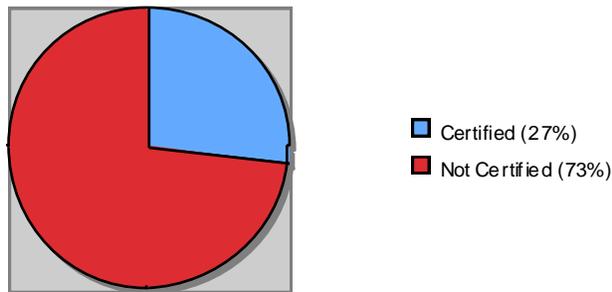


### **National certification**

National certification through MTNA signifies a music teacher’s commitment to excel and to improve professional standing among his or her peers. It increases a music teacher’s visibility and credibility and helps increase referral business.

Despite these benefits, fewer than one in three, or only 27%, of the survey respondents were MTNA certified. Among teachers with more than twenty years of teaching experience, three out of four, or 75%, were certified. Among those with nine to twenty years, approximately one in five, or 21%, were certified, and fewer than 5% of teachers with less than nine years of teaching experience were certified.

### **Survey respondents with MTNA certification**



### **Advanced degrees**

Analysis of the survey results showed that teachers who held doctoral degrees were half as likely to lose students as all other teachers.

### **Studio policies**

Of the survey respondents, 67% reported having a written studio policy that they distributed and enforced. Of those who did so, only 6.5% reported being severely affected by the recession, compared to twice as many, or 13%, of those who did not.

### **Offer group lessons**

Of the teachers who offered group lessons, only 18% reported not having enough students, compared to 25% of teachers who did not offer such lessons. Less than half (44%) of music teachers in this survey reported offering group lessons. Therefore, offering group lessons is a practical step that music teachers can take right away.

In addition to helping music teachers financially, group lessons also help students. A piano teacher from Minneapolis, Minnesota, wrote, "... I have found that [group lessons] are indispensable to accomplishing this [meaning having successful and happy students]. Kids love helping each other and develop a healthy, somewhat competitive but also supportive network." By offering group lessons, music teachers create a healthy and happy environment that encourages students to participate in group activities. These, in turn, will enhance the students' future collaborative performance ability and enrich their professional lives.

### **Professional activities**

The survey showed that music teachers acquire students by performing, giving lectures and presentations, publishing articles, and being involved in school activities. In

all of these activity categories, music teachers who had just the right number of students outnumbered those with not enough students by a ratio of about three to one.

## **Conclusion**

Before conducting and analyzing this survey, the prevalence of daily economic bad news made me think that there was not much one could do to fight back. From the survey, I was pleasantly surprised to discover concrete and practical steps music teachers could take to improve the economic picture. This discovery is empowering.

These practical steps already exist as part of professional development, which we knew would make us better teachers. Now we know that they can help make us recession-resistant; the right professional course also protects us economically, and this is encouraging. The effectiveness of professional development is a reflection of the values that students, their parents, and society bestow upon our profession, and by pursuing such development we can enrich not only our balance sheets, but also the musical lives of our students and our community.

## **Acknowledgements**

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