



## HOW TO MAKE YOUR DATA TALK

Vibrant, vibrant, vibrant music teaching. Proven and practical tips, strategies and ideas for Music Teachers.

This is Episode 121 of the Vibrant Music Teaching Podcast. I'm Nicola Cantan and in this episode, we're talking about data.

Hey there. Welcome, beautiful teachers. First of all, let's just get one thing out of the way, shall we? I say data; you say data, potato, potato, tomato, tomato, okay? We're going to go forward with the pronunciation data because that's what comes out of my mouth naturally although I think more people pronounce it data. So you can replace that in your head as we go through this episode.

But that might not have been what put you off today quite likely. But you might have been put off by something else, which is just the whole concept of data. Oh my gosh. It does not sound fun. Aren't we supposed to be having fun on this podcast? Isn't that point? Okay. We're going to make it as fun as possible but I do need to talk to you about these numbers because they matter.

Data is one of the most empowering things you have as a business owner. It can help you to make better decisions because you're not just randomly guessing at things. You might have to do a bit of that in the beginning in each area, but once you get the data back, once you have those numbers, you can base your decisions on actual fact, right? And that's what we should all be doing as business owners. Even if you're only teaching a couple of hours a week, you still need to make clever decisions about your business.

It also helps you avoid second-guessing yourself or questioning yourself or feeling like an impostor, uncertain; like you don't belong as the business owner. If you have those numbers to back up the decisions that you're making, it's going to mean that you don't have this question mark hanging over your head.

You don't feel like, "Oh, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know. Is this the right thing? Is this the wrong thing?" You just move forward because you have those numbers to say, "Yeah, black and white, this is the right decision for now based on the data that I have available."

Okay. So let's dive into it. What types of data should you be collecting in your studio? The first most obvious one I want you to start with is to track where your inquiries come from. This is one of the most important things you can do for your marketing.

When you first start marketing your studio, you're going to have to throw a lot of paint at the wall. That's the truth. You're going to have to try some Facebook posts and set up a



website and follow the best advice there is out there. And if you're a member, follow the Modern Music Teaching Studio Marketing Course.

But different things work in different places. In some areas, everybody looks everything up on Yelp or the Yellow Pages. In some areas, nobody ever does that. In some areas, Facebook really matters. And in others, they still look at the bulletin board at the local supermarket. Okay?

So if you do not track where your inquiries are coming from; the people who get in touch with you, where did they hear about you, then you're not going to know which one to double down on. So that's the first one to track and if you keep a spreadsheet of this stuff, you can make it talk, right? You can make the numbers clear if you're tracking the right things.

So track where your inquiries come from. Then you need to track which inquiries convert best. So the people that got in touch with you, which one of those become students? This is going to take longer to build up enough data that you actually can make it talk, right?

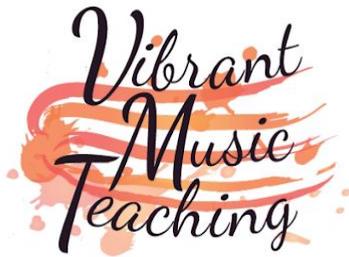
So if you're just getting started out and you're a solo teacher, it's only going to be a few people. It's not enough to actually make a difference or make a call on it. But if you keep tracking this over years, you can start to see, "Okay. I get a lot of inquiries from Gumtree but very few of them actually sign up with me," or "The people who get in touch with me by calling me always convert better than those who email me."

And then you can start to think, "Well, why is that? Is it because the people who call me come from a place where they're naturally warmer? They know more about me. Or is it that I'm better on the phone than in email? And what can I use, what can I do to improve the quality of the emails that I sent back to lead to people being more interested in signing up with me?" Right? That's just an example.

If you track all these things in a spreadsheet or a notebook; I really recommend a spreadsheet in this case. I often say it's fine to do things by hand if you want to and it is. But I really think a spreadsheet is best in this case because you can easily do the calculations, right? Just something simple like Google sheets and just keep track of these things as you go and then you can make it talk later.

The biggest issue with data, honestly, in my business, in both my businesses, is if I haven't been tracking something. And then, you can either go back and try to figure it out retroactively or sometimes, that's not even possible. And so, you can only use it going forward and you can't make decisions based on that if you haven't been tracking it for a long time.

So start this today. Start tracking these things.



The next thing I think you should be tracking or looking at, and this is something you definitely can work out for yourself, is student retention. So to figure out your student retention rate or the average length of time that your students stay as a member, what you need to know is simply when each student started. And if they quit; when they quit.

And I'm going to assume for most cases, you can look that up or you can-- you already have it somewhere or you can figure it out, right? At least pretty closely; at least within a month. So write down when each student started, mark in if they quit when they quit. And if they're still a student, then you count up to today in your spreadsheet and you can put the other formula that'll do that or you can just do it manually when you want to investigate this. And then, just average it out.

Now, in the beginning, if you're a new teacher, it's not going to average out to very much at all because all of your students are pretty new. So even the ones who are still with you right now are only staying for six months officially because they've only been there six months because you just started six months ago.

But as you go forward, the longer you've been in business, the more you can see this and start to average it out and see if you can increase that number. That's a really good goal for music teachers because it's not just a business goal; it's actually about improving your teaching in a lot of ways.

Now, having said that, I don't want to make anyone feel bad if they're in an area where retention is just naturally poor. That does happen for sure. Absolutely. I know I hear from many teachers; I've done coaching calls with teachers and things where they're in military areas in the US.

And if you're in those types of communities and people are moving every few years, you can't do anything about that and you're not going to be able to improve retention beyond that. But if you're not in that kind of situation, it's definitely one to track and keep trying to improve upon.

Another piece of data that's worth collecting is parent satisfaction and you're going to need to do some kind of a survey for this. So if you're not already doing some kind of an annual survey of your parents, that's a great thing to implement.

Make it really, really simple if you're going to do one. Just a few simple questions and one of them should be about their satisfaction. We all, you know, it's kind of almost cliché it feels to us to have a survey. Like, "How satisfied are you with our service?" or whatever. Ask it a bit better than that, a bit less generic. But you do need to ask some version of that or some version of, "How likely are you to recommend Colourful Keys..." whatever your studio is "...to a friend?"



That does matter; that really does. And that friend wording is popular for a reason. It's because it makes people really think about it and give a bit of an honest answer that you can gauge things by, you know? Are they going to actually pass on your name to a friend? Like, would they? That's an important statistic to measure and to track.

Another one to track is student satisfaction. And yeah, I mean, even the littlest ones. So we do a goal-setting exercise normally at the end of each year in my studio, the end of each academic year that is. And with that, I ask them about their experience with lessons. Like, what's their favourite thing about it, how much do they like their lessons, what could we improve?

You can ask these things simply to students even at a young age and you can write in their answers if they're not writing yet and track that over time and see if you can improve how much your students are enjoying their lessons because that's an important factor for you.

This isn't-- this data stuff isn't all about business, business, business, you know, numbers and profit and all of that. It's also about those fuzzy feelings, those fuzzy statistics about your students being happy, parents being happy and all of those good things.

However, the next one I have to suggest to you is one of those businessy ones and that's your profit each year. I said profit not revenue; please don't track revenue. I mean, do, sure. Why not? But really, the profit is what matters because we all know that many music teachers can be a bit guilty of spending too much on our students, and therefore, not actually making very much at all even if we're charging enough.

So there are two sides to that and if you track the profit, that's going to be more important to you as a general gauge on how you're doing. This isn't when you're diving into the nitty-gritty of your financials and your budget, this is just about general overview, "How am I doing? How's my profit going? How much am I making after I take away all of those expenses?"

The next one is a really interesting one to track and that's your effective hourly rate. If you haven't ever investigated this, it might give you a bit of a shock. I'm sorry about that but it's definitely a really valuable one to do.

What you're going to do is count up the hours that you spend on your studio. And you don't have to track it super accurately, you probably figure it out or average it out. But if you do want to track it, that can be a great exercise as well to actually track exactly when you're spending time on your studio like counting everything - teaching, admin hours, looking up stuff on Pinterest; everything.



Out of all of those hours that you're spending working in some capacity for your studio and then count the money that you make, so basically your profit, and then divide that in. I should mention though, I'm using the word profit there a little bit loosely. But that's because most of us are one-person studios. And if that's the case, then really, your profit is just your income essentially.

When it comes down, do it as a self-employed person. So you want to count it based on what you're actually making and dividing that by the number of hours that you spend working per week, per month. Per month works well because you're averaging out different weeks that have a bit of variance in them.

So that is your effective hourly rate; what you're actually making per hour that you're working and it can be a shocking one. But it's definitely worth doing and getting real with yourself about because if you don't analyze that, if you don't find out that you're only making \$8 an hour, then you can't do anything to improve it and you just feel like, "Oh, I'm running around, I'm doing all these things, I'm working so much, I'm teaching all these people. They're paying me enough. Why am I not making any money?"

And then, you realize, "Oh, right. I'm spending thousands of dollars a year on music books and I'm working every hour in the day. That's why I feel a bit mad." Okay? So effective hourly rate is a great one to track so that you can improve upon it.

Other ones can vary based on the teachers but I've suggested a few here. So how many pieces your students learn in a year on average? That could be a really interesting figure to know. It's one of my goals as a teacher to make sure my students are learning lots of repertoire because of the exam system here, which I've spoken about before on the podcast.

But it can tend to pigeonhole people into learning just a few pieces a year and be really detrimental to their reading and how well they learn to read, how fluently they read. And so, that might be an interesting one to track – to keep track of how many pieces are my students actually getting through; each student. And then, how many is that on average?

Maybe that's important to you; maybe it's not. Maybe you have exam results that you can track. Again, maybe your students don't do exams. But if they do, keep a track on the percentages they're getting. It's not about each individual student and being hard on them about what they're getting. It's also not about what school teachers sometimes have to face where their standards and they have to get up to a certain grade or whatever.

This is just for your own information so that you can look at it and go, "Okay. My average score in the exams this year was lower. Is that because I didn't spend as much time preparing my students for them? Is it because exams got harder? Is it because I had a



bunch of transfer students and there were just a lot of gaps to fill in?" It could be anything but it can give you some thinking points.

And the last one I have here is happy lessons versus meh lessons. This isn't something I've tracked myself but I think it could be interesting at least for a period of time to, after every lesson, just have some measure for yourself of how it went.

So we can get caught up in the hamster wheel of all the lessons we're doing and we can end the week feeling like, "Oh, things just didn't go great this week. And oh my gosh, so many problems – this student, that student. This student kicked off, that student had a tantrum."

But as people, as humans, we can tend to dwell on the things that maybe didn't go right. And that's one of the reasons why I do Success Stories Saturdays in the Facebook group in Vibrant Music Studio Teachers on Facebook because we need to look back at the positive.

So I think this one could be an interesting one to do so that you actually tally up, "Ah, most of my lessons are actually pretty good." I think this is a result you'll come across. So it could be that you just have a little rating system for yourself.

You know, like the bathroom thing. Have you ever seen one of those? There's like a stand outside the bathroom and it has three faces on it? There is a red, sad face, there is a medium face, a neutral face, which is yellow, and then there's a green, happy face, right? It's like a traffic light system.

So maybe you have your own little traffic light system. And just keep track of it just for yourself; not for students. And it's not about judging students and thinking of this as being, "How do I feel that lesson went?" As in, I was prepared, the student received things well, we had giggles together; whatever measure you like or a whole mixture of those things.

This is more fuzzy data, right? It's not something that is hard and fast but it could be a really interesting exercise for you to have a little traffic light system. Try it out for a week or a month and see if, over time, you end up with happier lessons because you start preparing for those students differently when you do have those sad faces, right?

Okay. So that's tons of different data points that you could track in your studio. Once you have it in place, you can bring it to life in those ways I've been mentioning as we go through there. You can make it talk because you know where it comes from and why it might be going the way that it is and you can analyze those trends.

It's not all about you though. I'm just being silly. But I want to talk to you a little bit about the data that we need as an industry because it's not just about you and your little studio in your little bubble or me and my little studio in my little bubble.



What's also important is how things are going all over the world, right? We need to know what other teachers are doing. We need to know how our industry is developing. And that's one of the biggest challenges, I think, facing our industry is that we are so segmented that so many of us are self-employed and we don't know what's going on in other people's studios, which means that we cannot make intelligent decisions.

Some of the things I think is really important for us to know about the industry as a whole and specific to our area, to our demographic, is the rates that people are charging. So there's a few different places where they publish; they analyze the rates that people are charging. I think you have the ISM and I believe MTNA maybe does this in the US.

But it's not really very global in my view, usually. So it's a really interesting one to know how much are people charging in different places and how does that relate to the type of area they live in. So whether they live in Burley or they're in a major city, that can affect things. And comparing that in different countries even can be really useful and informative.

Another thing I think we should be tracking more is teacher education. And I don't think we should be tracking it so that we can slap people on the wrist if they don't have a degree because I don't have a degree in music. But also, because I just don't believe that's a productive thing to do.

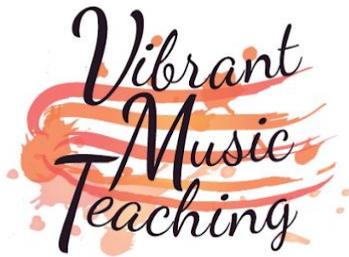
I don't care if people have a diploma like me or a degree like many other teachers do or just went to the school of life. Really, it's not about judging people for that; it's actually about the opposite.

The reason I think it's important to know if how many of the teachers out there have a degree in music, how many have doctorates, how many have different levels of education, formal education in music is so that we can maybe stop all those teachers from emailing me; I don't mind getting their emails, but those emails that come through to me that say, "Oh, well. I'm not a real teacher. I just started this way and I know I'm not like your other readers but I was really hoping you could help me with XYZ in any case." You know?

I get those emails all the time and they have no idea that, first of all, like I said, I don't have a music degree. Although if they read my about page, I'm not hiding it but people don't realize that always and that a lot of teachers don't.

It depends on your country; it depends on where you are. But like, for example, in this country, in Ireland, most people start teaching without a degree. Some people start when they're getting their degree but a lot of people still are starting as teenagers.

I still see it happening all the time just like I did that they're just-- their piano teacher says, "Oh, do you want to take on a few beginner students?" when they're 15 and they have their



grey days and so they get going, right? And there's a lot of that happening and nobody is aware of it. So knowing the education levels of teachers is important I think to understand our industry better.

I also think it's really interesting to track things like teacher attitudes to creativity, to technique teaching, to reading and all sorts of other stuff. Understanding the trends in our industry and not just going by hearsay. We can feel like, "Oh, everyone's improvising now," but it's honestly not true. It's anecdotal at best and we need data to back it up because the more we can say that actually the trend is towards improvising, the more that we can convince more teachers to give it a go.

A lot of human behaviour is driven by what other people are doing. We want to be sort of normal; it's the truth. We want to do the things that other people are doing in a lot of cases; not always, but in a lot of cases. And so, being able to say to people, "Look, most teachers are improvising now. It's time to get on the bandwagon," right? That's a great thing to be able to do.

I also, since I am so into teaching preschoolers, I think it's really interesting to track the ages that teachers are starting students at as well as the lesson lengths and formats. Are teachers teaching on buddy lessons? Are they teaching in groups more? Again, that looks like a trend but is it really happening?

And the final area is online lessons. This year, how many teachers really did go for online lessons and how many just didn't teach at all during that time during the lockdown? Again, this is something where, with all the blog posts and the YouTubes and everything, we can feel like, well, everyone went in for online teaching.

But I know some teachers that didn't; they didn't want to do it and fine. But understanding those trends is really important so that you have real data to back it up. And of those teachers who went for online teaching, how many of them had students who quit, right? That was the big fear, so how much of it actually happens?

If we can step back and actually look at that, we can ask ourselves whether we're being a bit hyperbolic when we worry about these things. So I think it's important for us to know all of those things and more, which is why I'm putting out another survey this year.

We did one last year. We put together a comprehensive report. You can check out last year's report, actually, by going to [ColourfulKeys.ie/report](https://ColourfulKeys.ie/report) if you want to see the kind of thing we put together. We did a beautiful report with graphs to make it easy for all teachers to understand this stuff and see the trends and really get something out of it.



But if we want to do it again, we need data. We need you to tell us about your studio. So if you haven't already, please, please, fill out the survey. It's at [ColourfulKeys.ie/survey](https://ColourfulKeys.ie/survey). Nice and simple. [ColourfulKeys.ie/survey](https://ColourfulKeys.ie/survey).

And if you go there, fill it out. Promise we've kept it as brief and fun as possible. And I know last year, several people told me that they actually enjoyed filling it out, that they actually-- it made them think about various things to do with their teaching and their business and that it was actually an informative process.

So I hope that you'll fill it out. And then afterwards, I hope that you'll share it with at least three teacher friends. This is the really important part. I don't want this to be just Vibrant Music teachers, members and listeners of the podcast. We need this to be broad. We need to reach the people who maybe didn't go in for online teaching or who don't improvise or who don't use games, right?

And I'm not saying you have to do all of those things to listen to this podcast; I'm just saying we want this survey to be as diverse as possible so that we get real information about our industry. So I would super appreciate you filling it out but also sharing it with three teachers that you know; three teacher friends or maybe your local organization if you could share it with them.

Knowing that, we will put together this fantastic report from that. So you're going to get absolutely as much back from it as you put into it. The more data we have, the better we can help you to understand the industry as a whole.

So I hope that you'll fill that out and that you'll look at the data within your own studio. It's certainly an area I'm really passionate about teachers getting to grips with and not being afraid of.

Next week, we're changing gear completely from today. So we're going to be talking about pop music. Why to teach pop music in your studio; some of the benefits for your students. And then, the following week, we're going to go into how to do it if it's something that you have been scared of getting into or you just can't do consistently because it's really hard to find the right music.

We're going to help you with all of that over the next two weeks. So I hope you'll join me back here then. And in the meantime, fill out that survey. I'll see you next week. Bye for now.

If you want to get under the skin of some of the marketing tactics we talked about in today's episode, you should check out the Modern Music Teaching Studio Marketing Course inside the video library. If you're not a member, you can sign up and get access to that course by going to [VMT.ninja](https://VMT.ninja).