

Please PIPEDOWN

The source for news about the campaign for freedom from piped music.

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Ruth Schiedermayer, editor

Hello Pipedown Supporters

Understanding the reasons for the presence of music in businesses open to the public may be useful in our requests to have the music turned down. From observations of businesses and reading material used to market music systems to businesses leads me to believe that music is played for the following reasons:

- An assumption is made concerning the specific demographics of the customers. With that assumption, the business will select specific genre(s) to match the demographics. The problem with this is that often the assumption about customer demographics is mistaken
- Management of the business prefers specific types of music and expects all who work or do business there will be happy to listen to the same type of music. The problem with this is that the assumption that everyone will like (or endure) the music is incorrect.
- Management of the business assumes that a specific type of music will enhance the store. Assumptions are made that classic rock and roll goes with antiques or classical music is preferred by people visiting bookstores. Again, the presumption that management can select a specific type of music to satisfy all customers is incorrect.
- Employees in a business play what they like and do not care what anyone visiting the business might like to hear or not hear. The volume may actually be set to help drive away customers if the manager is not present.
- Other reasons for playing music may include attracting only some of the customers and actually driving away others. Social surveys could be conducted to discover other motivations for the music's presence.

It often appears that whatever the reason for the music, there is an associated lack of customer focus whenever the music is more important to the actual needs of the customers.

Comments on Society

One of the more difficult things to make some people understand is that not everyone likes every type of music. We may forget that we might not like a specific type of music yet we make the mistake that the music we like should be similarly liked by everyone else. Many people believe that certain types of music are more universal in their appeal, when that just simply is not the case. I personally do not get offended when I find out people may not like what I like.

Many times the management of a business like a store or a restaurant will play a specific type of music that is intended to create a mood or support a venue. This is the "public" side of the business. Many times the back room, where support staff are busy, has more personal music playing. I can't tell you the number of times I've been in a thrift store with it's too-loud music but when I passed by the area where employees were sorting and pricing goods, I heard a radio tuned to something completely different.

Please Fill Out Comment Cards

Many times businesses have comment cards available for customers. If you do not have any Pipedown-USA comment cards available, it may be worthwhile to ask for a comment card from the business. Some businesses, like grocery stores, make their comment cards readily accessible or it may be possible to ask the staff for one.

Attention readers

I would like to hear from any readers who ever shop at Walmart. Very recently I have noticed that several regional Walmart stores have stopped piping in music. They still have televisions going, but those TVs are not set to the same volume the music used to be played. Stores in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Indiana have been relatively quieter and I am interested in polling my current readers as to the experiences they have with music at local Walmart stores.

Advice: Practice makes perfect

Asking for a reduction in the level of background music is sometimes tough to do. It requires patience and diplomacy and the ability to persuade strangers. Sometimes you have to work your way up to it, especially if the people you ask do not have a customer focus and look at you like you were from Mars.

My husband and I practice all the time, sometimes we are successful and sometimes we are not. We also use new situations as opportunities to practice. When we are on vacation or traveling for business, we are more willing to ask anyone running a business to please turn down the music for us. It sometimes is easy to approach strangers to make the request. If we make a mistake, misspeak, or lose our temper we are unlikely to see that individual again or need to do business in that enterprise in the near future. Any embarrassment or irritation won't follow us the next time we need to make the request. We have the opportunity to learn from any mistakes we make by practicing.

One mistake I made early on in my requests to turn down the music was to use the term "you", as in "You need to turn down the music because it is too loud in this store". The assistant manager took my statement the wrong way and told me it was not his responsibility for the loudness of the music. I did not mean for the "you" to indicate that he was responsible. I actually meant that the business was making the music too loud. I am more careful now when I speak and ask if "anyone" can turn down the music. Because I write my letters of complaint addressed to specific individuals, I also am careful when writing to never ask the executive or owner of a business if "you" can turn down the music. Instead I suggest that "your company" might better serve the public by turning down the music.

Indeed it is often not individuals setting the volume, but company decisions to set a specific volume. Attacking individuals by making them personally responsible for the noise without knowing the exact company policy, is not the most diplomatic way to ask for an accommodation. This is just one example of my learning from my mistakes. I have found that practicing while away from home has made my requests better.

Bibliography

"This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession", Daniel J. Levitin, 2006, A Plume Book (Penguin) 267 pages,, Paperback, ISBN 978-0-452-28852-2. Appendix, Bibliography, and Index included.

NOTE: combines music theory, audiology/neurology, and psychological aspects of music. Some discussion of "Ear-Worms" – those songs that get stuck in your head

In the works

With the current downturn in the economy, now is a good time to tell major retailers that their music does not help us shop. If anyone wishes to help campaign to get the music turned down in retail, I have an example letter. Please contact me by email: pipedownusa@hotmail.com

Quote

"Composers tend to assume that everyone loves music. Surprisingly enough, everyone doesn't" Aaron Copeland, ASCAP and the Symphonic Composer; The New York Times Magazine, February 16, 1964

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