

Reaching the Online Market at Richmond Community Music Academy

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Weigh the costs and benefits of entering a market—the “first-mover advantage.”
- Anticipate challenges with a new initiative.
- Evaluate scaling options for an online music course.

Topics For Discussion

Richmond Community Music Academy (RCMA) and the actors in this case study are fictional. The story and concluding scenario are based on events at a real community music school.

Entering a Market and the “First-Mover Advantage”

In addition to providing private lessons, chamber music groups, and large ensembles, RCMA boasts an extensive roster of academic music classes, offerings which set the institution apart from its local, regional, and national competitors. Director Kathy Keller-Allen aimed to reimagine RCMA’s successful face-to-face classes as online courses, potentially expanding the organization’s market reach, boosting enrollment, and increasing educational access. She partnered with RCMA music theory and aural skills instructor Ashley Collatz to assess the potential value of expanding online: they began by weighing potential risks, identifying market demand, and measuring RCMA’s capacity to implement the project. They also reviewed the financial viability of the initiative.

- Ask students to review Keller-Allen and Collatz’s SWOT analysis in **Appendix 1**. What are RCMA’s strongest assets, and how can the organization capitalize on these strengths as it enters the market? What are RCMA’s biggest weaknesses, and how can the organization not be overcome by them? How can RCMA take advantage of opportunities and address external threats?

Keller-Allen and Collatz note the lack of direct competition from national and international online providers. In addition, Collatz anticipates that free online resources will not compete with RCMA’s online offerings, which will include a high amount of teacher presence and deliberately develop a community of learners. Beyond varying in quality, free online resources rarely offer any live support or peer-to-peer interaction.

- Discuss the pros and cons of “first-mover advantage,” paying particular attention to market share, costs, resources, and brand recognition and loyalty. Is a “first-mover advantage” crucial to the short-term and/or long-term success of RCMA’s online venture? How can Keller-Allen and Collatz eliminate or mitigate any “first-mover disadvantages”?

Anticipating Challenges with a New Initiative

- Ultimately, Keller-Allen decided that RCMA would enter the online market. She and Collatz then faced several challenges as AP® Music Theory materialized, including copyright and permissions issues, limited personnel resources, and technical problems. They worked overtime with RCMA administrative staff to ensure the smooth rollout of the course.
 - Discuss the challenges detailed in the case study. How could Keller-Allen and Collatz have anticipated and potentially prevented these issues?
 - How could Keller-Allen and Collatz adjust their implementation strategy for the next iteration of the course? What do they need to do to anticipate resource- and personnel-related problems?
- RCMA plans to rely on graduate music students from Richmond University to fill the need for online course facilitators. How could this choice present a challenge for future iterations of the course? Discuss the benefits and risks from training, staffing, and financial feasibility standpoints.

Evaluating Scaling Options for AP® Music Theory

- Keller-Allen and Collatz have discussed two non-mutually exclusive options for scaling the pilot AP® Music Theory course. The first option focuses on recruiting individual students through targeted social media and internet advertising. The second option centers on strategic partnerships with educational institutions. Discuss Keller-Allen and Collatz’s ideas for online expansion.
 - Ask students to provide a brief SWOT analysis for each scaling option. Which option(s) would they recommend to Keller-Allen and Collatz? Should RCMA embark on both options simultaneously? Why or why not?
 - Collatz sees the most promise in the second option; she has already heard from several school band directors and administrators interested in arranging for private sections of the course. Keller-Allen agrees in principle but needs to evaluate fiscal feasibility. Ask students to develop an initial go-to-market strategy that includes costs, resource scheduling, and development for the first year of the second scaling option. Students should base their forecasts on data from **Appendix 4**.
- Keller-Allen desires to grow AP® Music Theory at a 50% growth rate over the next four years. What new opportunities and challenges could arise if course enrollment exceeds 100, 300, or 500 students? Refer to the projections in **Appendix 4**.

- In the grant proposal, Keller-Allen mentions that RCMA's online AP® Music Theory course could serve as a prototype for AP®-level course offerings from across all academic departments at Richmond University.
 - Richmond University's graduate school of education has particularly renowned instructional design, program evaluation, and educational leadership programs. How could departments at the university that are developing other subject-specific AP® courses leverage knowledge and skill sets from these program offerings?
 - How can Keller-Allen and Collatz translate the successful pilot course into a university-wide model? What are several of the key factors that provided success for the AP® Music Theory program? How can these success factors be extended into other potential AP® course offerings for other subjects?
- In addition to scaling AP® Music Theory, RCMA plans to create a portfolio of online academic music courses.
 - What other resources and supports might be required to support a second RCMA online course? What about multiple courses?
 - How could new online courses benefit or limit RCMA's face-to-face "legacy" offerings? What challenges could arise with these benefits or limitations?
 - Will RCMA have to set aside other projects to pursue online expansion, given its limited financial and personnel resources?
 - How can Keller-Allen ensure that the scope of the planned expansion accounts for —and is proportional to— customer demand?
- What sorts of planning and on-going systemic supports might be required at RCMA to sustain a culture that continuously examines and implements new opportunities?
- Have students work individually or in groups to design a comprehensive plan for RCMA's large-scale online expansion. The plan should provide a brief project overview, as well as address the potential value of the initiative, market opportunities, capacity for implementation, financial viability, risk mitigation, and timeframe. Students could provide a five-minute "pitch" of the plan to the instructor and classmates, who act as potential funders/permission grantors.