

Selling an instrument

There are two options:

- Private sale – where you advertise the instrument in various publications (and/or online) and deal with the transaction yourself.
- “Commission” sale – where a music shop sells the instrument on your behalf in return for a fee.

You will make more money from the sale if you sell it yourself but there will be more work to do to sell the instrument.

Don't forget - if you are selling an instrument in order to raise money to upgrade to a better or different instrument it is worth investigating part-exchange. A shop will never match the full second-hand value of the instrument but it could save you a lot of hassle.

Valuing the instrument

Whether you part-exchange or sell the instrument you need to have a rough idea of the value of the instrument. If the instrument is still currently available as new then find out the current Recommended Retail Price (RRP), this is sometimes also referred to as the Manufacturer's suggested retail price. Retail Websites usually state the RRP and then a “discount” price that the instrument is available for. If your instrument is in playable condition then value it at approximately one half the RRP.

If the instrument you are trying to sell is not currently available then type in the manufacturer and model details into your search engine and find out what price other people are trying to sell their instruments for.

The second-hand market has been under-mined in recent years from the point of view of the seller. This is for three reasons: firstly, because so many second-hand instruments are available on-line the competition has forced the second-hand value down; secondly, many businesses have set up as purely on-line music instrument discount stores and have driven the new prices (and therefore second-hand prices) down; and thirdly, there has been a flood of poor quality Chinese and Indian budget student instruments which are much cheaper than even second-hand student instruments.

Unfortunately, this means you might find it takes time to sell your instrument and you probably will not achieve its true value when you do sell it.

Private sale

Whatever instrument you are selling, it is important that the instrument at least plays throughout its compass – that means every note can be sounded. If the instrument does not play throughout its compass it is best to have it repaired because otherwise it will be very difficult to sell and you certainly will not get the full value of the instrument.

Assuming the instrument is working acceptably it is worth giving it a quick clean yourself; use a shaving brush to remove dust, and buff the metal keys with an appropriate cleaning cloth.

The best time of year to sell an instrument is September because that is the beginning of the academic year and many players will be looking for instruments. It can take a long time to sell an instrument at other times of the year and with that in mind it is best to either play the instrument occasionally (every fortnight or so) or store it with the open pads clamped down (by means of cork wedges) until it sells; this helps retain the pad seatings.

If the instrument is left (un-played or with the pads un-clamped) for a few weeks then the pads can swell and stop seating properly – and when you finally find someone to buy the instrument it doesn't work properly.

Before trying to sell the instrument decide who the potential buyer might be. This will depend on what type of instrument you are trying to sell and whether it is a student, graduate, professional, or vintage instrument. The majority of people are looking for common student instruments such as Flutes; these people will probably be the parents of children who are starting the instrument and they will look close to home at first, perhaps in the local paper; at the opposite extreme will be players of such instruments as vintage Saxophones who will look nationally through dedicated websites.

If you are selling a student Flute, Clarinet or Saxophone I recommend trying the following:

1. Talk to your music teacher if you have one – they might know somebody interested.
2. Place adverts on local school notice boards (Secondary schools only for Saxophones).
3. Advertise in the local paper and other local publications.
4. Advertise in regional publications (with a dedicated music section) such as "Anglia Ad trader" and "Friday Ads".
5. Advertise on dedicated music websites that have a section advertising second-hand instruments (where the buyer makes direct contact with you either by phone or email).

If you are selling a student Oboe, Bassoon, or Piccolo this is a more specialist item and a slightly different approach might be needed.

1. Talk to the music teacher – they might know somebody interested.
2. Place adverts on local school notice boards (Secondary schools only).
3. Advertise in regional publications (with a dedicated music section) such as Anglia Ad trader or Friday Ads.
4. Advertise on dedicated music websites that have a section advertising second-hand instruments (where the buyer makes direct contact with you either by phone or email).

If you are selling a graduate, professional or vintage instrument this is also a specialist item and yet another slightly different approach might be needed.

1. Advertise in regional publications (with a dedicated music section) such as Anglia Ad trader or Friday Ads.
2. Advertise in specialist Music magazines appropriate to the instrument you are selling.
3. Advertise on dedicated music websites that have a section advertising second-hand instruments (where the buyer makes direct contact with you either by phone or email).
4. Contact directly (email) various types of musical establishments (such as music colleges) to see if they have a notice board for second-hand instruments.
5. Sell through ebay.

Commission Sales

If you do not want to deal directly with the purchaser then you could sell through a music shop.

Select a shop that regularly deals with the type of instrument you are selling (possibly the shop where you bought the instrument in the first place). The shop must have an effective website that lists its second-hand stock and ideally the website should appear on the first page of a search. The shop need not be local to you – you could post or deliver the instrument to the shop that you want to act on your behalf.

Different shops have different policies on how they deal with second-hand instruments. Usually any shop will want to inspect the instrument first to assess its condition and value it. Some shops do not offer a warranty on their second-hand instruments and sell them to customers "as seen". Some shops offer a warranty on their second-hand instruments and therefore require the instrument to be in saleable condition (as they judge it) – this might mean that you have to pay them to repair it before they will put it up for sale.

When the shop does sell the instrument a commission (anywhere between 10% and 20% depending on the value of the instrument) will be deducted from the sale price.