

## Piano Marketing at Its Finest



It is a sly way to cause you to believe you have a grand piano and confuse the terminology so that no one has any idea what you are talking about.

Marketing is an extremely interesting topic as it deals entirely with psychology. It's function is to get you to do something by giving you information or feeding you a story whether or not the information or story is true. Sometimes the info is partly true and partly false, making it hard to discern truth. As a product for sale, pianos have their own marketing clichés, and some of them are very strange.

The “upright grand” piano is a strange one. An upright piano and a grand piano are completely different instruments, but at some point, a salesman decided to call his large upright piano this term, convincing the layman that such a beast exists. Saying “upright grand” is like saying “tractor-sedan” or “18-wheeler

motorcycle.” It brings up imagery of a strange contraption that makes little sense. The reason this term was used was to make whatever large upright piano seem more desirable because everyone wants a grand piano but not everyone has the space or funds for a grand piano. A large upright was the next best thing because it has a large soundboard to promotes good tone and resonance. It did not, however, have a grand piano action nor any of the other features of a grand piano. It is a sly way to cause you to believe you have a grand piano and confuse the terminology so that no one has any idea what you are talking about. The strangest part of all of this, is that I have heard people refer to their small pianos as upright grands even though they are barely 40 inches tall.



One of my favorite companies for marketing is Kimball. They went out of business a few decades ago, but they were masters at creative marketing. I had read that Kimball did not produce spinet pianos, but did produce a model in between a console and a spinet piano called a consolette. The definition of a spinet piano is a piano with a drop action; this means that the action sits below the keys and the keys pull up on the lever to get the mechanism to work instead of pushing up on it like in modern upright pianos. I tuned a Kimball consolette recently and I am not convinced that it is not a spinet because it fits the definition and functions the same as a spinet. They chose to call it a “consolette” so that anyone with animosity toward spinet pianos would believe they were getting something better when in fact they were getting a spinet with a fancy name. And don’t even get me started on the Mezzo-thermoneal stabilizer, whatever that is supposed to be.

Steinway’s contrary claim about preowned piano value is completely irresponsible and the company has actually been sued by people believing that the piano is an investment that will increase in monetary value with age.

A more problematic marketing scheme is that Steinway says to treat your Steinway piano like an investment similar to a stock or commodity and that it will go up in value over time. Here is a video of John Paulson, CEO, claiming exactly that along with a few other things I question <https://www.steinway.com/news/articles/a-conversation-with-john-paulson/>. Of course, a company spokesperson denied they say this and he blamed it on the “rare” rogue salesman, yet the company CEO said it on record in 2013 and the video is still on their website. If you have ever been in the market to sell a piano or buy a piano, you likely noticed that used pianos always sell for less than what a new piano of the same model sells for regardless of condition; Steinway & Sons pianos are no different. The only reason a piano might become more valuable is because someone famous signed it. Many parts of a piano are constantly under stress by merely existing causing it to wear over time whether it is being played or not. It has organic materials for parts that decay over time and will eventually need replacement. Steinway’s contrary claim about preowned piano value is completely irresponsible and the company has actually been sued by people believing that the piano is an investment that will increase in monetary value with age. Steinway has been making this false claim for decades.

Marketing in the world of pianos is no different than any other industry. Be careful what you believe and always try to verify what people say instead of blindly trusting.