

Miniatures Marketplace - February 2001

ATTEND INDUSTRY TRADE SHOWS

Give your customer better service

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Miniatures BY BARB

We have always heard, “service to the customer” is the backbone of a good business. In the year 2001 customer service is even more necessary. With competition strong, among brick and mortar and virtual shops, meeting customers needs is more important than ever. The Miniature Industry is holding two trade shows this winter. CIMTA, the Cottage miniatures Trade Association held it’s Trace Show in Las Vegas in January. MIAA, the Miniatures Industry Association, is holding it’s International Miniature Collectibles Show in Orlando on February 24, 25 and 26th. Attending at least one of these shows will help you gain knowledge as well as product to better serve your customer.

Advertising reinforces your shop’s recognition with existing customers and informs prospective customers of who you are and what you sell. Coupons can help you keep track of which advertising is working for you. Punch coupons can keep customers coming back. Some distributors and manufacturers participate in cooperative advertising. While at a trade show take the opportunity to speak with the dealers. See if this form of advertising is available.

Referrals are a wonderful way of obtaining new customers. When a customer brings in, or refers a friend, thank the friend with a note and certificate towards a future purchase. At the trade show ask dealers if they have small giveaways you can use as thank you gifts for special customers.

Promote special services and take special orders from your customers. The trade show is the place to get to know which manufacturers and handcrafters will assist in special orders for your clients. Accumulate a file of these dealers so you can help your customers with their special projects. Take time at the trade shows to get an overview of all of the products being sold. Do not only look at the products that you think will sell in your shop. When you have a special request you need to know where a product is available. Become known as the authority who can find any miniature your customer may want.

Guarantee satisfaction. Most customer problems arise when people do not know how to properly use the product. Be sure you and your sales associates are assisting customers in the uses of your product. Trade shows offer workshops, seminars or demonstrations. Attend as many as you can. This is where you can learn what you need to know in order to better educate your employees and your customer. Offer classes and demos right on your shop floor. If a customer needs instruction, be prepared to give a lesson right then and there. Invite others in the shop to join in.

Have an open dialog between you and your staff and your customer. Ask customers for input on your shop. What do they like? What do they not like? What products would they like to have available to them? Remember. They are exposed to a larger miniature world than your shop. Through T.V., catalogs, books and the internet your customer are introduced to a vast array of miniature products. Be ready to answer any question your customer may have. Put up a sign in

your shop stating, "No question too silly...just ask." You will have the answer to their questions because you gained the information from the producers of the products at the Trade Show. It is also important to have a dialog with the dealers at the Trade Shows. What do the vendors need to provide that you customers want you are the contact with the consumer. The manufacturers are looking to you to inform them of your customer's desires.

Give your shop a make over. We are all guilty of getting comfortable with a place we see every day. Enter your shop as though you were seeing it for the first time. Have a friend or customer view your shop with a critical eye. Or, take photos of your shop. Photographs can isolate problems, letting you see your shop as others see it. Look for dark corners, dusty displays, messy shelves or bins, poor signs, lack of color and excitement. At the trade show take notice of the displays that catch your eye. What is it that makes them appealing? The creator of the product knows how to best display their creation. Have a brainstorming meeting with your employees to see how you can creatively liven up your shop. Products get noticed when placed in a different setting.

Attending Trade Shows can be a big boost for your business. Most dealers have special items available at trade shows that are not normally available. Some also have special purchase prices which can make attending the trade show worth the trip. Get to know the vendors. When you have met with a supplier personally and have created a relationship with him you have a better chance of understanding each other's needs. Working together can benefit both of you. The knowledge and communication gained at a trade show can be worth much more than the trip costs you in both time and money.

I will be leading the Retailer forum at the MIAA trade show. See you there.