

Miniatures Marketplace - June 2001

TODAY'S "NEW CUSTOMER"

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Miniatures BY BARB

We live in the age of instant satisfaction. People have become accustomed to immediate communication via the cell phone. A quick meal can be obtained by driving through a fast food restaurant. Any information we should need or want can be found by surfing the web.

Successful changes have been made by retailers to accommodate the desire for immediate satisfaction. Many seed companies have expanded into selling live plants. The grocery industry developed salad "kits". How are you satisfying your customer's desire for immediacy? People have also become used to service, even if they have to pay for it. We can order our groceries via the internet and have it delivered to our homes. As one of the fast food company says "have it your way". Are you helping your customers to have it their way?

Customers want to make things themselves as much as ever. In their busy lives they often don't have time or don't want to make the time. We need to keep this in mind when creating and evaluating new products. Much of the time the perfect product is one in which the manufacturer completes most of the work and the customer has the satisfaction of saying I made it myself.

Dollhouses are available with the wallpaper already applied. If not you as shop owners can offer this service. Many manufacturers offer furniture already packaged in sets to furnish a whole room. These quick "microwave" projects will fill the needs of the consumer who needs immediacy. Yet the quick and easy project will never be considered a collectable heirloom. It is also necessary to stock items which can help personalize or individualize these quick projects.

Since our world has become so fast and hi tech, people need a means of decompressing. Those of us involved in the world of miniatures know how relaxing our hobby can be. Planning out a miniature project, choosing the supplies and furnishings and assembling the project removes you from the stress of life. In many ways it brings us into the world of fantasy. We need to convey this in our advertising, our displays and in our shops.

Very few people walk into a shop because they are "just looking". They are looking for something. They are looking for a way to enrich their lives. They are looking for a new creative outlet. They may be looking to buy something that makes them feel good or a project to transport them out of their everyday lives. They may be looking for a project that can bring the family together during a time when lives are going in so many different directions. Make your shop the right place for them to have come.

Make sure that your shop is bright, clean and attractive from the first glimpse of you shop window to the very back of your shop. I have visited a shop that had their restroom papered in dollhouse wallpaper and had miniature projects displayed on the walls. Customers were given project ideas even here. Display made up projects in all areas of your shop. Show the products needed to complete the project near by. Make sure you and your staff are prepared with

information to help your customer customize the project to his or her needs.

Soft music will set a soothing atmosphere. Quick and easy projects should be shown alongside more time consuming projects. Let the customer see the juxtaposition of the different levels and choose which is best for them.

Remember, entry level projects are for beginners and customers who perceive they do not have enough time for a more intricate project. Do not make the mistake of training your customers to purchase smaller projects or the less expensive items. You sell what you promote. Even a project perceived as less time consuming can be expanded into a more intricate and expensive undertaking.

When a customer comes into your shop asking for something specific or chooses a project, offer more than they asked for. If a customer asks for a wild animal wallpaper show her the wallpaper along with an animal print rug, dinnerware with an animal print on it, a tiger print lamp and any other items that might complement her choice. Remember your customers see you as the expert. They look to you for information, opinions and ideas. They ask for your advise and follow your lead. Showing the customer the benefits of purchasing the entire package is giving her the information she needs to make a choice. Her choice will most often depend upon on your suggestions.

Keep in mind that a quick and less time consuming project does not have to be less expensive, nor do the items you suggest to go with the project. Listen to your customers desires and provide them with the information and merchandise they need. You will have then created a customer who will return to your shop and will be wonderful advertisement for our miniature world.

Authors Note: I will not be giving a seminar at the CIMTA trade show in June. There was no time spot available. I will be leading the Retailer Forum at the MIAA trade show in August. If you have any topics you would like to discuss I look forward to hearing from you.