

Miniatures Marketplace - January 2002

GATHERING NEW CUSTOMERS

By Barbara Schuckman

Handcrafted Miniatures BY BARB

We are conducting our businesses in the shadow of difficult world and economic conditions. We can see this as a stumbling block or as an opportunity. Our existing and potential customers are watching their discretionary money more carefully. They are also feeling the need for more family oriented activities. They want to use their creativity and return to pastimes that have a homey feeling. WE ARE HERE! Miniatures are what they are looking for. We just need to let them know it. Let's grasp the opportunity!

How are you staying in contact with your recent and long standing customers? How are you cultivating new customers? Have you updated your yellow page ad? This is the first place potential customers will look especially if they are traveling. Have you given your ad in the Miniatures Publications a face lift? The same old ad might be over looked after several years.

The electronic age makes it easy to keep in touch with your existing customers. If you do not have e-mail capabilities on your computer, maybe now is the time to get connected. E-mail is an easy, friendly and informal way of staying in touch. Be sure to have customers list their e-mail addresses when they sign your mailing list. Include your e-mail address in all of your advertising and contact information. It is quick and easy to send out an e-mail. Send out an e-mail saying "I just returned from a Trade Show...come in for first pick of the new minis." Inform your customers if you get in a new shipment of merchandise. Thank them for making a purchase and suggest other items they might want to put on their wish list. Let customers know about workshops or guest teachers. You can even have a short newsletter. The E-letter should not take the place of your regular Newsletter. The E-letter should be short and informative. Leave all of the details for your regular Newsletter. You still want to have a reason to reach your customers by mail. E-mail should leave an opening for two way dialogue. Encourage questions and suggestions.

If you want to get ambitions you can get a digital camera. They are easy to use. Photos taken digitally can be e-mailed to your customers to show them what's new. Smaller, flat items can be put on your scanner and also e-mailed to customers.

Keep in mind that if you receive e-mail from customers you must answer them in a timely manner. People have come to expect quick e-mail responses. Set aside a specific time each day to read and respond to your e-mail. It will be worth the effort. Let your venders know that you can be reached via e-mail. They can e-mail you about special promotions or e-mail photos of new items.

Another electronic form of communication with your customers worth considering is a web site. At the CIMTA Trade Show I lead a seminar on planning a web site for the uninitiated. I will pass along some of the basic information. Look for another seminar at the MIAA Trade Show for more detailed information. A web site can be as simple as a yellow page ad or many pages long.

A simple web page is an ad. It can be one page with your shop name, address, hours, directions and contact information. Both CIMTA and MIAA will post this information on their web sites for free. For a nominal fee they will add your logo and a few photos.

A more advanced web site will take either time or money to set up and maintain. There are many templates for web sites on the market. A template is an outline, written in web language and you fill in the spaces with some ability to personalize. There is web template software that can be purchased. There are web services that will provide you with templates if you sign up for a year of their service. This is fairly inexpensive. Of course you can hire a professional web designer or enlist the help of a teenage "teckie". Photos can be added to your web site in the same way I described for your e-mail.

Don't let electrical communication intimidate you. Once you get started you will find that it is an easy way to reach more people. It is versatile and easy to change and keep current, is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, makes you visible to potential customers who would never pass your shop on their own and makes for informal communication with your customers.. Start small, get your feet wet, give it a try...grab the opportunity!

This article is dedicated to my friend Roy Morgan. Roy passed away suddenly on January 21st. The miniatures industry has lost an exceptional friend and colleague. He was a driving force at Dee's Delights. As a past member of the board of directors of MIAA his insightful intelligence has been meaningful to the miniatures industry. Roy will be missed by his many friends, coworkers and family. Roy's cheerful smile and upbeat personality will be a loss to all who had the opportunity to know him. Roy's family has requested that memorials be donated to N.A.M.E., PO BOX 69, Carmel, IN 46032. Roy, you will be missed. It is my honor to have had you as a friend.

Miniatures By Barb, 7 Aron court, Bethpage, NY 11714, 516 938 BARB, bybarb@juno.com