

Miniatures Marketplace - May 2002

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

By Barbara Schuckman

Handcrafted Miniatures BY BARB

I have said it before and I will say it again. Don't get complacent! Does your shop look the same as it did ten years ago? Does it look the same as it did last week? I do not mean that your shop shouldn't have a style of it's own. Every Miniature shop I have seen has it's own character. The style of the owner or manager shows in the displays and manner in which items are organized. My question is have you looked at your shop with the eyes of a twenty first century customer?

Is your shop clean? No one wants to buy dusty merchandise and wonder how long it has been on your shelf. Every item should look spotlessly clean. It should look like you just took it out of the box. What your customers want are brand new, current products. Even if he is looking for an antique miniature item it would have more value if it were scrupulously clean.

Is your shop easy to navigate Are aisles clear? Are items organized in a manner which the customer can understand? The method of organization is up to you. But, the customer should be able to find what he needs. Can the customer easily find the item he is looking for and compare it with others? Can he easily compare style and color? Are other items which are commonly purchased with this item near by and easily accessible? Do your displays offer a variety of options depicting how to use items?

Are your sales people well trained in the manner in which you would like your customers to be treated? Are customers thanked for coming into your shop? Are they greeted in a polite and friendly manner? "Can I help you?" is usually answered by "Just looking" Have your sales people been trained in how to start an open ended conversation? Customers feel more comfortable and less threatened by friendly, knowledgeable salespeople,

Are you aware of what your competitors are doing? Are you doing more than they are for your customers? Keep in mind that your competitors are not the only other vendors of miniatures. Sellers of crafts and hobbies are also vying for your customers time and money. Are you supplying more "fun" than they are? Customers that are looking at scrapbook supplies in the hobby store may be able to find more satisfaction building a memory with miniatures rather than just paper and pens. Are you offering them that opportunity? What about home decor? Do you have samples in your shop to tempt your customers to incorporate miniatures into their home decorating? Do you have some samples in your shop window? And speaking of shop window displays, how often do you change yours? Does it look fresh, clean and interesting? Does it spark interest in someone walking by? Be sure to change the feel of your window display. If last month's display was a Victorian vignette how about a contemporary one this month. Different styles attract attention from different people. A new feeling might draw a new customer. Be sure your displays are consistent with what you sell. I have seen window displays in shops which are lovely to look at but do not let the potential customer know what the shop has available

Are you treating you customers like a million dollars? That customer that made the \$9.95

purchase may shop in your store for the next twenty years. She may have a large family, many friends or a job that puts her in contact with numerous people who she may tell of the wonderful experience she had in your shop. Find something that will add that little extra which says "Thank you for shopping here".

Are you creating education opportunities? Some shops do not have space to hold regular classes. Community education about our hobby is a must in order to spread the word. Plan a demonstration at the local library. Teach a class at a retail miniatures show. Plan a class for a girl scout troop or a senior citizen group. Make the class interesting. Show different ways to incorporate miniatures other than in a dollhouse. Make sure the participants have a miniature to take home with them and information about your shop. Don't forget to get address and e-mail data so that you can follow up with further information.

Talking about following up. After a substantial purchase does a customer receive a phone call, card or e-mail to see if they are happy with their purchase. This lets the customer know that you really care about them. If something has gone wrong you have the chance to correct it. Wouldn't you rather be able to correct a problem than have an unhappy customer? You might even be able to add to the purchase through your helpful conversation.

We may be doing business in the twenty first century but customer service, attention to detail, and keeping things fresh are always in style. Every day, or at least once a month take a look at your shop. Try to see it through your customers eyes. Try to see it through the eyes of someone who has never entered your shop. What might make them walk in?

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