

TO WEB OR NOT TO WEB

by Barbara Schuckman

Miniatures BY BARB

My previous article dealt with the importance of marketing your business. I briefly discussed using the internet as a form of marketing. At the CIMTA Trade Show in Washington D.C. I lead a seminar entitled, Things We should Know and Have Forgotten About Running Our Businesses. At the end of the seminar I opened the floor for a discussion on topics of interest to the group. Most of our discussion focused on the internet. After this seminar discussion I decided it was time for me to try this new form of marketing. My Web Site is now under construction.

I am purposefully writing this article now before my web site is up and ready. I want the information I pass along to come from a novice who still remembers how confusing this new form of communication can be.

For the uninitiated, the internet or World Wide Web is a collection of information, and you can be part of it. The Web is an excellent way to market your business. This can be done even if you do not have a computer.

Both MIAA and CIMTA have web sites. I will equate a web site to a display ad in the yellow pages only the ad can be many pages long. If you are a member of these organizations you are entitled to a free listing on their web site. Just fill out the form. You can list your shop name, address and phone number. For a small fee you can list directions to your shop, your shop hours, and your shop's specialities. When a potential customer is planning a trip they can turn to these sites and find your shop listed by state or specialities. Imagine how many new customers you might reach. MIAA will even make you a web page for a nominal fee where you can put all of your information, your logo and even a photo or two. You still do not need a computer to benefit from these opportunities. Your customer can visit your shop or contact you by phone or fax.

If you do have a computer you can expand your marketing capabilities. First you will need to be able to receive e-mail (electronic mail). This is quite simple. Even I am able to do this. You will need a server who will receive your mail and pass it along. AOL is a very popular server and is available for a very nominal fee as are many others. I use a free service called JUNO. You can contact them at 800 654 JUNO. Once you have an e-mail server you will need to pick an address. E-mail addresses usually consist of your name plus your servers name. My e-mail address is [bybarb@juno.com](mailto:bybarb@juno.com). When your address is established print it on your business card and all marketing materials. It is another way for your customer to reach you. Make sure your e-mail address is in your free listing with MIAA and CIMTA. Now that you have e-mail you can contact anyone with an e-mail address and they can contact you. Don't be afraid to use it. Remember when using a fax machine was a mystery?

The next step is to develop a web site (a collection of pages of information about your shop or business). There are companies that will make up a web site for you for a fee. There are also

computer programs that will help you to plan and set up your web site yourself. I am having mine made up for free by a school that teaches students to make up web sites. I am not comfortable recommending them yet. When my web site is finished and if I am satisfied I will pass along the information. You will need an address for you web site. My address is bybarb.com. The address must be gotten through a government clearing house. Most companies who make up web sights will obtain an address for you. If you want to reserve your name so that no one else can use it you can do it yourself by contacting Internic at 703 743 4777 or at internic .net.

Once you have a web site of your own you will want to link up with other web sites. This means that when someone who is your potential customer visits another web site that you are linked with they can click on your name and go to your site. Both MIAA and CIMTA will let you link with their site if you are a member.

The possibilities are numerous. A shop who has a web site can link with a manufacturer or handcrafter who has a web site. For example when a customer visits your shop website looking for handcrafted dinnerware or Judaic miniatures and you are linked to my site they can click on my name from your site. When they get to my site they will see pictures of many of my items and a full list of the items that I handcraft. They can then click back to your site and order the items they wish to purchase. You sell the items to the customer. If you do not have the item in stock you can place a order with me. Since I do not sell retail any customer that expresses an interest in my items via the internet would be referred to your web site. Another suggestion, especially for the customer without access to a computer, is to have a computer right in your shop. If a customer has a request you can help them browse the appropriate sites and assist them in their choice, and then make the sale.

I hope that I have given you a glimpse into a new way of marketing your business. I believe this venue has not begun to reach it's potential. Add this new way of marketing to your marketing plan it can expand your horizons.