

Miniatures Marketplace - December 2001

PROMOTING MINIATURES TO A NEW GENERATION

By Barbara Schuckman

Miniatures BY BARB

Is your customer base shrinking ? Some people in our industry answer yes. This seems to be the case in many craft based industries. Many indicate this trend is precipitated by the increased availability of computers. The compelling interest in computer games, e-mail and the internet has taken a large chunk of free time from our customers.

Bemoaning our diminished customer base serves no purpose. We need to cultivate new categories of customers and encourage fresh interest in collectable miniatures. There are several groups we can target and add to our present customer base. Pre-teens and teenagers can become new and future customers. Boys, in particular, are possible customers we can market to. Older adults and young adults with growing families are also potential new and continuing customers.

How can we attract these groups to our hobby? Start by targeting a small group of potential new customers. Since each group is vastly different, it is important to become acquainted with the interests of your targeted group. Become familiar with their music, books, magazines and lifestyle. This will give you the opportunity to offer them projects that are appealing to them and perceived as "cool".

Begin by consulting with other retailers and, or some representatives of your targeted group. I made phone calls to several retailers of miniatures and dollhouses. I asked each one of them if they had any suggestions for targeting teens or pre-teens as potential customers. Each retailer's immediate response was that they did not have any ideas. As our conversation progressed they came up with some excellent proposals which I will share with you.

Irene from Flight of Fancy brought Girl Scout troops into her shop to construct a project for their toy badge. She brought several troop leaders together to plan the project. She then had the troops in her shop on different days to complete it. The undertaking was a great success, and several scouts returned to the shop with their parents. Another suggestion from Irene was to organize parent-child classes or contests.

Angelia and Carolyn of ACD Miniatures also suggested encouraging projects with scout troops or boys and girls clubs.

Linda of Dollhouses, Trains and More is excited by the Miniature club town started by pre-teens, ages 9 through 11. They meet in their homes. At each meeting they save money for a project they are planning. Once a month one of their mothers brings them to the shop to make their purchases. It might be a good idea to encourage a teen group to meet in your shop. Have a parent or two attend each meeting to assist with the project.

Nancy of Favorite Things was very forthcoming with her exciting and interesting ideas. Nancy held a teen division in her room box contest for International Dollhouse and Miniatures Month

(IDMM). She had the contestants use Dee's Delights 1/4 round room box. When finished the room boxes were stacked on a coffee table in her tearoom for viewing. She charged each contestant the wholesale cost of the room box. Each contestant was given a gift certificate equal to the cost of the box when it was completed and entered in the contest. This was an encouragement for them to return to the shop and start another project. Nancy also holds classes for teens and their mothers. These classes are advertised in her shop Newsletter. Displays of miniatures were coordinated by Nancy for the local library and school. The Library display depicted a scene from "Harry Potter", the popular book series for adults and children. I have no doubt that it brought much attention. The School display coordinated with a school project about dinosaurs. Nancy has made her shop an integral part of her community.

Marketing to kids in a creative industry like ours can keep the stream of customers flowing. It is easiest to teach kids one on one, so keep classes small. Include parents, they are potential customers too. Keep projects simple. Have a kid's corner in your shop. Host children's parties. Visit your library, local book shop or check the 'web'. There are a variety of books on the subject of marketing to kids.

These are just a few suggestions to get you thinking. Remember, try something new.....or nothing new will happen.