

Customers are friends --with a difference

By Cathy Goodwin

Customers are friends --with a difference

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Customer friendship is real -- but different

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Like many net junkies, I tend to sign up in haste and unsubscribe at leisure. Most sites make it easy...except for an ezine I'll call "Hal's Place."

Unsubscribing from Hal required waiting through two long downloads and evoking memories of long-forgotten passwords. When I complained, the webmaster replied, "You're the one who chose to subscribe. Please don't be hard on me."

Huh? Hal doesn't get it. Who's the customer here? Is this site doing me a favor by allowing me to subscribe? And why shouldn't I be hard on him? He's not protecting his customers.

Customer friendship is different. When we dine with personal friends, we don't send food back or complain about slow service. They forgot to defrost the main course? An extra hour? No big deal. After all, friends don't charge us for our meal or put us on mailing lists.

"Gwen" ran a free one-hour teleclass, like this disorganized dinner host. Gwen spent the first ten minutes taking attendance, then twenty minutes asking us to describe our greatest barriers to success.

We were gaining momentum, if not wisdom, when Gwen interrupted to ask if anyone had joined the call late. Finally we got down to the promised benefit of the class: a new way to market our businesses.

It turned out that we would not learn an actual marketing technique. We would learn the preliminary exercise, which involved some kind of introspection about our goals and beliefs. That lasted fifteen minutes. Gwen used the last ten minutes to market her four-hundred-dollar program.

When I e-mailed my annoyance, Gwen wrote back: "I am very sensitive to the way people give me feedback. Were you trying to help me or just vent?"

Gwen doesn't get it either.

As e-preneurs, we are not offering ezines and free classes because we want to make new friends. Our visitors are potential customers who know we have something to sell.

Complainers help us out. For every visitor who lets us know (tactfully or otherwise) that we've made a mistake, fifty people will disappear silently or, worse, share their negative opinion with others.

I treasure the visitor who angrily pointed out a contradiction in one of my offers. I absolutely love the reader who wrote me a nasty email when one of my email addresses died: I had inadvertently killed an alias when changing a pop mail setting. Who knows how many people just left my site in disgust?

I thanked these complainers and offered them any ebook they wanted, free.

When you're an e-preneur, these people are your real customer friends. They deserve a virtual hug -- or at least a free ebook.

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