What to Do When People Want Everything for Free

By Diane Hughes

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What to Do When People Want Everything for Free:
How to Politely Get Rid of Mooches

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It's a sticky situation. A prospect, a site visitor, or just a casual acquaintance asks for your help or advice on something. You gladly give it, thinking it's a one-time "favor." But instead of providing a little free advice, you've opened the door to an onslaught of mooching! Now, every time you check your email, you find question after question. What do you do?

This is a problem many online business owners face. You want to appear friendly and helpful, but the person on the receiving end of your favor is draining you dry. After all, these are services you charge for. This is how you make your living.

Like many folks, you don't want to appear rude or unprofessional. But the time you take to answer questions and provide help is taking away from your ability to earn an income. Let me tell you about one approach that seems to work wonderfully.

Minimal Information

When the repeat offender asks for help, offer a minimal response to the question. For the sake of illustration, let's say your area of expertise is in Web site design. If the person asks for information on making his/her site design more professional, you might consider saying that adding a top border to the site would create continuity. You might also mention that having black text on a white background makes for easier reading (as opposed to white text with a deep purple background). However, don't go into details.

This lets you give an answer to the question (instead of just ignoring them), but doesn't reveal any information you might charge for.

Honesty Is the Best Policy

Next, be honest. Explain that designing Web sites is what you do for a living. It's how you earn your income. Let the person know that you would be more than happy to offer consulting services or full-fledge design and maintenance services, but these would come at a cost. Outline your pricing structure for people so they'll know exactly what each service costs.

This action gets you "off the hook" (so to speak) and frees you from having to answer any future questions.

Provide Alternative Resources

Go one final step further and find some alternative, free resources the person might check into for additional information. By offering a list of design forums, free ebooks, or information -packed sites, you're getting yourself out of the picture in a kind and professional way.

Nine times out of ten, "moochers" either don't have the money to pay, or they are unwilling to pay for products and services. In either case, you're unlikely to make a paying client out of such people. By using the steps above, you gain your freedom, and at the same time provide helpful resources where the moocher can get free information.

Diane Hughes is an accomplished Internet entrepreneur and editor of the popular ProBizTips Newsletter. Subscribe to her newsletter for more tips, tricks, and secrets of the trade -- plus get HUNDREDS of eBooks, software and tools just for subscribing! http://www.ProBizTips.com

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