



an interactive knowledge exchange for small business

A Tale of Two Requests

I'm a knitter. And while I frequent local yarn shops, they don't carry all the different yarns I'm interested in. I frequent a couple of online shops that focus specifically on yarn to make socks (and you non-knitters will be surprised there are probably more than 500 different sock yarns available for purchase right now).

On a cold Saturday morning a few weeks ago, I was enjoying a cup of coffee in front of our gas fireplace. While watching the flames, I thought to myself, "wouldn't those colors be pretty in a sock yarn?" I took a digital picture of the fireplace, and then emailed the picture off to two of the online yarn stores that carry a lot of sock yarn.

The owner of yarn store "A" replied with a link to a picture of the yarn that she thought was the closest match of all the yarn she had. It looked pretty good...not the exact colors, of course, and not quite the tones I was looking for, but close.

The owner of yarn store "B" replied with an apology that she didn't have any yarn on hand that matched. However, she had sent the picture to an independent yarn dyer that she worked with, to see if the independent dyer might be able to match the picture. Just last week, another email arrived with the picture of the finished yarn. It was a perfect match!

So which yarn did I buy? Well, truth be told, I bought yarn from both stores. I bought one skein of the pictured yarn from store "A". However, I bought two skeins of dyed-to-match yarn from store "B", along with two others skeins of yarn that I found while visiting her site.

Both store owners proved to me that they cared about me as a customer and were willing to provide a personal touch to the transaction. Both owners listened to my needs and did what they thought was best to solve my problem. I will shop at both these stores again. But my first choice will always be to try Store B. The effort to go that extra step to get me exactly what I want is enough to make me a very loyal customer, a member of Store B's Family. As a member of Store B's Family, I'll check with store B first whenever I'm shopping for yarn. With Store A, I will always be a Flirt. I'll check out the store often, but I won't feel as loyal as I do to store B. Read more about Family and Flirts in our book, *Building Buzz to Beat the Big Boys*.

I also have a blog, a knitting blog, and I participate in several online communities devoted to knitting. I plan to generate some positive word of mouth about both these stores when appropriate. If someone asks about Store A, I'll comment on the personal service that I received. However, you can be sure I'm going to tell the story of Store B whenever I have a chance...not just when someone asks me about the store. And I've already written about my great experience with store B on my blog. .

I'm happy with both these stores. I like both these stores. And both these stores had a specific strategy that they chose to use with me. I'd purchased a few things from store A and one thing from Store B before I made the request. Did that make a difference in both store's response? I'm not sure. I think the owner of store B just has it in her to go a little bit further to make me a happy customer. She took a risk. It worked out. That doesn't always happen, but this time it did.

What are you willing to do? We'd love to hear about it. And for more small business success building ideas visit:

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