

# FREEBIES

## Bane or Blessing?

*Free Designs.* Stitchers love them, thread manufacturers & designers make them, but how can you, as a shopowner turn them into a benefit for your shop?

Freebies, or free designs, are designs where the copyright owner has given you, the shopowner, the right to distribute the design without charging for it. Typically free designs come from thread and fabric manufacturers or designers.

Thread and fabric manufacturers provide free designs, often by well-known designers, as a way to showcase their products. While originally these designs were provided only in printed form, today they are often available on the Internet. Manufacturers also often provide free patterns with their shipments. Some manufacturers also sell patterns as well; freebies are always clearly marked and are often look different from their regular line.

Dena Lenham, Kreinik Creative Director, sees freebies as a way to showcase their threads. "We often use free designs as write-in offers in our print advertisements as a way to promote use of our threads." It allows them to tie in advertising with the designs and provides important market research to the company. Kreinik also embraces free designs on the Internet. They put out about four new free designs a month (covering many different kinds of needlework). Dena says, "We work with so many talented needlework designers, and for us, our web site is a way to get some of those top quality designs to stitchers and shop owners, who are always hungry for ideas."

Designers also often provide free designs, most often through their websites. Most common with cross stitch designers, these patterns give the stitcher a taste of the style of the designer. Sometimes designers create free patterns for special holidays, or create a series of freebies to encourage visits to the website. Tink Boord-Dill, a needlework designer, sees the benefit of freebies for designers in just this way. "Don't put out freebies that are in direct competition with your product," she says. "Use them as a marketing promotion to build interest in a coming product introduction."

Freebies are a case of "Let the buyer beware!" If you are making the copies, be sure that it is a freebie and that you may make copies. Any designs printed from a designer's or manufacturer's website will have copyright information on it. In this information is language which gives you the right to copy. Printed material coming directly from the manufacturer will have similar language.

Illegally copied material will not have this language. It may not even have a copyright notice. Be careful not to distribute illegally copied material.

Dena concurs, "Some of the designs [on their site] can be copied, and some of them cannot. So it's always good to check with us or read the copyright statement printed on each



chart." If you are interested in using a particular design you find on a website, contact the manufacturer or designer about getting clean copies for reproduction.

A great way to use freebies is to kit the free designs. In this case always provide the design with the materials specified. And do not charge for the design, only for the material. This is particularly good with designs which showcase new or unusual threads. A small kit with the design, the threads and the fabric is an outstanding "take along" project. Do the same thing with beginners designs, new techniques or children's designs. Having a selection of these kits on display makes for good impulse purchases.

Place them, along with a stitched model (maybe even still on stretcher bars), and some more packages of the thread next to the cash register or on the stitching table. Add a card which says "Have you tried this?" Tink Boord-Dill concurs with this idea. "Plan freebie display to push specific fabrics/product...have said product attractively packaged and ready to sell." Using free designs this way lowers the barriers for

stitchers to try new things. They do not need to buy a pattern, they can try something new without much risk.

Elaine Warner of Needle Necessities sees the class possibilities of freebies as a good idea for shops. Shops get a source of new designs for classes, stitchers are introduced to designers they may not have seen before and everyone benefits. Perhaps you can work with a local guild to have them come for a field trip to the shop. Add some freebies to the goodie bags or even offer a special class using a small freebie for the group.

Jody Valentine, of Jody's Designs has taken an innovative approach to freebies. She has gotten so many requests for finishing instructions for her ornaments, Jody now makes them available free. Why not make finishing Jody's Designs ornaments a fall class?

Tink also suggests freebie tie-ins with other aspects of a marketing plan. Why not offer a freebie to people who bring in an ad? If you have a club or punch program, make freebies a part of the program, perhaps offering several for a new membership/renewal or having a double-punch day with freebies included once a month.

With more stitchers buying over the phone, through the Internet and by mail order, don't forget them as well. Send a freebie in the package, include one in your newsletter, send one with a class confirmation. This extra bit of care makes your customer feel special -- it's like a little present.

Since many freebies come as a series, use them to create regular demand in your shop. They could be the basis of an Ornament of the Month Club or a series of short workshops or classes to introduce stitches to different fibers and stitches. Other occasions for giveaways include gifts for taking part in a shop exhibit or contest, a giveaway as part of an Anniversary Sale, Grand Opening or other special event.

I think Dena Lenham sums it up best when she says, "That's really what our freebies are about: inspiring and educating stitchers. It causes excitement, and that helps all of us."

Keep Stitching,  
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