

How to ask for a favor from someone you only know on the Internet

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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We're making up the rules of Internet engagement as different platforms evolve. So I figure it's always good to check in with some experts to find out how things are developing. Conventions usually come about when irritations arise, so I asked a few friends what vexes them. I have assembled an expert etiquette panel: [Meredith Gould](#), [Mihee Kim-Kort](#), [Christian Piatt](#), [Bruce Reyes-Chow](#), and [Landon Whitsitt](#). We talked about [criticism](#) yesterday. Today, we're focusing on something else that can get under a person's skin when it's not done well: asking for favors.

Part Two: Favors

Since all of the people on our panel have a large platform (which is a term for followers, readers, friends, and audience), a lot of irritations had to do with how people ask for favors.

Establish a relationship. This came up most often. Meredith Gould, a Digital Communications Consultant, who works in religious and medical realms, is the author of [The Social Media Gospel](#). She reminds us that it is proper decorum to remember the *social* in social media. She wrote that it's irksome when people "don't/won't respond to direct public engagement and yet ask me to RT their self-promotion SPAM. Get into relationship, people! Build community."

Christian Piatt said much the same thing when he wrote that one of his irritations is "getting asked to help promote someone's (fill in the blank) when they've done nothing to create a friendship first."

Don't ask for free stuff. It will annoy Christian (among others) if you do. On a related note, did you know that authors have to pay for their own books? I'm not sure everybody understands that.

Understand social bartering. If you've never heard of the term "social bartering" used in this context, that's because I just made it up. The reason social media is

such a fantastic tool is because you have a way to promote your friends. But, then sometimes it becomes difficult.

Imagine a complete stranger coming up to you on the street and saying, "Sell my product for me! Tell all your friends about it! Tell them they should buy it!" The person might be connected to you in an important way, but you don't know that.

That would be awkward, but it's precisely what people do.

You see, people who work as social media networkers are unlike reporters or journalists who get a regular salary for writing. While a reporter might be looking for a cold Press Release, we usually aren't. We work on social capital. It's a barter system. You simply have to build up some before you ask a stranger to spend it. I'm not saying it's all that difficult. I mean, it's usually a matter of saying, "I read your work. I appreciate that you do X."

Don't make unreasonable demands based on solidarity. I think Mihee Kim-Kort is the one person on this panel who can still be considered a bona-fide "young adult" in the under-40 sense. And she's written [Making Paper Cranes](#), a wonderful book on Asian-American feminist theology. As an amazingly gifted person who stands in the intersection of youth and diversity, she finds it annoying when people "contact me with assumptions based on what's on my profile and then make huge requests/demands on my time because of 'solidarity,' etc."

Be clear in what you need from a person. Once you have established a relationship, and you want to ask a favor from them, be direct.

Landon Whitsitt, the author of [Open Source Church](#), wrote, "I hate not knowing what a person wants from me. It sounds crappy to say it, but I'm a busy guy and unless you're already my friend, I don't have time to decipher a long message for an action item. If I can help, I want to, but make it easy for me."

[Bruce Reyes-Chow](#), the author of [The Definitive-ish Guide for Using Social Media in the Church](#), said, "I am more apt to help someone out with a retweet, share, or blog post if he/she is honest about all aspects of the ask: the project, the intent, self."

Right-size your request. Bruce also wrote, "One of my biggest social media peeves is when folks exude delusions of grandeur and assumptions of my time. If someone comes to me with an air of 'Don't you know how important I am?'—big turn off and I probably won't make the time to share." He said, "Basically, if you come

across as a jerk, I probably won't help. But if you can find that sweet spot between humility and confidence, you're golden, so ask away."