

Directing Customers to the Cheapest Store

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Question: I like helping people; one way I try to help is by finding them the best deals. If I hear someone is in the market for a new car, may I tell him where the best price is available? Should I be concerned that this may harm businesses that do not offer the cheapest deals? Would I be allowed to make a website informing people where the best deals can be found?

Answer: The Gemara in Bava Metziah discusses a story of a landowner seeking workers to work in his field. He sends an agent to hire workers and tells him that he's willing to pay each worker \$4. The agent finds some potential workers, and tells them that the job pays \$3, and they agree to work for that price. The Gemara rules that since they agreed to work for \$3, they are not entitled to any more than that; however, they can have *ta'arumos*, complaints, against the agent for causing them a loss. The Gemara quotes a verse in Mishlei that says, "*Al timnah tov m'baalov*", do not withhold benefits from a person. The agent transgressed this dictum by denying the workers of benefit they could have had.

The Ritvah asks why the agent is considered to have done something wrong. True, he did withhold benefit from the workers, but by doing so he saved money for the landowner. Why are we more concerned for the welfare of the worker than that of the landowner?

The Ritvah answers that the landowner clearly stated that he was willing to pay \$4 and has no problem doing so. Therefore, the agent does not have to look for ways to save him money and is not permitted to take away any benefit that the workers stand to gain.

In the situation we are discussing, by advising a potential customer to go to the cheapest store, you might be depriving a more expensive store of a customer, but you are benefitting the customer. Since there is no reason to favor one side over the other and neither side takes precedence, you are allowed to offer a benefit to the customer-even if it may be to the detriment of a store.

Opening a website to help people find the cheapest prices is even more straightforward, and there is no halachic issue with this. A user goes to the website to view its contents on his own accord, which basically means that the user is coming to you and asking for your advice. When one initiates and approaches you, you are supposed to answer them; you certainly do not have to withhold valuable advice out of concern that this may be to the detriment of someone else.