

May a Store-Owner Exaggerate the Features of His Product?

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Question: Someone walks into an electronics store looking to buy a good MP3 player, but the store has only one type of MP3 player in stock at the time. Is the owner permitted to tell the potential customer that he is selling one with great features and a good price, if he knows that the competing electronics store down the block sells a better quality MP3 player at a better price?

Answer: The prohibition of *geneivas da'as* applies only when one deceives another. Therefore, if the owner in this case explains truthfully exactly what features the item contains and offers a fair price, then he may respond in the manner suggested in the question. In fact, the *sefer Titein Emes L'yaakov* says that since a buyer knows that a seller tends to exaggerate slightly, the seller is even permitted to exaggerate slightly, assuming the information is true, without violating *geneivas da'as*.

However, it must be noted that one who tells a buyer about the disadvantages of products from another store has violated a serious *issur* even if the information is true.

Thus, in the scenario under discussion it is forbidden for the owner to say that the MP3 player sold down the block has certain deficiencies, such as a very short battery life. Moreover, it is even forbidden for the owner to state that the MP3 player he is selling is the best MP3 player on the market, since that claim is not true. Rather, he must confine himself to offering accurate information such as that his MP3 player has a good battery life, lots of memory capability, and many other recording features.