



Dear Borders: I hate you

2009

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Themes: Technology

Dear Borders (and Starbucks subsidiary Seattle's Best Coffee), You have a lovely book store. Quite lovely

This essay captures the frustration of the early connected generation—developers who saw internet access as essential infrastructure, not a luxury service. Kenneth's café preferences foreshadowed the remote work culture that would dominate tech.

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I love the books you sell. I love the music you play. I love the coffee you serve. I love the Moleskine Notebooks you sell. Everything about your store tailors itself perfectly to people like me. You strive to make a person feel intellectual and important, and that is marketed almost flawlessly.

You seem to have forgotten one key demographic, however.

If a tech-savvy web developer wants to go and play with his newly-developed web design skills he obtained from books out of your technology section, he is free to bring his laptop into your lovely café. Awesome. You even offer power outlets. All the sweeter.

So, he decides to bring his laptop in one day to play with his newly purchased python web development book

Kenneth's specific mention of Python web development books in 2009 places him at the forefront of Python's web renaissance—Django was gaining momentum, and the language was transitioning from academic curiosity to web development powerhouse.

. He connects to your aptly named "Borders" network, and types "<http://google.com>" into his address bar, excited to be connected to his world in such a convenient location.

His face of joy then abruptly changes, however, when he realizes that he has to fork out SEVEN DOLLARS to use the network.

Seven Dollars.

You could feed a starving child in Africa for a WEEK with \$7.

There is no justification. There is no excuse. This is downright stupid on your part.

Do you have any idea how much business you are turning down by doing this? If your stores offered free wifi, chances are, I'd be there three to four times every week, buying coffee every time, and most likely a book every other time. That is a LOT of business. And there are many more people like me. Many more. People like me love your stores. We love the atmosphere. We love the books. We love the knowledge. We love the Moleskines.

And we also love the internet. Apparently, more than you know.

I understand that you have an agreement with AT&T, and i'm sure they have wonderful salesman that assure that you are offering a service to your employees. They are wrong. Very wrong.

I know for a fact that I'd be a customer time and time again if you offered this service for free. And I'm sure your café and book sales would go up at least 15%. From what I understand, your profits are decreasing heavily at the moment. I believe your stock is currently worth \$3.34 a share. Impressive

Kenneth's economic analysis proved prescient—Borders filed for bankruptcy in 2011, partly due to their failure to adapt to digital trends. Their WiFi pricing policy exemplified the disconnect between traditional retail and the emerging digital economy.

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So what do you have to lose?

In the meantime, I'll be taking my daily \$7 coffee excursions to Panera, where wifi is free.

Kindest Regards,

Kenneth Reitz

Border's Response

Dear Kenneth,

Thank you for contacting Borders Customer Care regarding Wifi service. We welcome your comments, as we rely on feedback from customers to improve on the services and products we provide.

Borders stores will be offering free Wifi service and all of the stores will have it by mid October. We appreciate your positive comments about Borders stores. We are always glad to hear from customers, but it is especially nice when a happy customer takes the time to let us know that they're enjoying the rewards and services we offer.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Kathy > Borders Rewards Customer Care

My Reaction Well, I didn't see that coming

This rapid corporate response demonstrates the power of early blog culture and social media pressure. Kenneth's public criticism created immediate accountability, showing how individual developers could influence corporate policy through authentic, well-reasoned critique.

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