

The Misery of Modern MLM

“Hi Emma! How are you? It’s been years!!”

I received this message from a woman who added me on Facebook. The years, by my count, were at least 20. And our contact was pretty limited even back then. My parents were friends with her parents during my childhood. She was several years older than me so we barely interacted during visits.

When I clicked on her profile, I quickly began to doubt the sincerity of her enthusiasm over reconnecting with me. She was a salesperson for a vitamin supplement company. Yes, this was an example of multi-level marketing (MLM).

Is there anybody left in America who hasn’t been approached for MLM purposes in the manner I’ve just described?

Investopedia.com defines MLM as, “a strategy some direct [sales](#) companies use to encourage existing distributors to recruit new distributors who are paid a percentage of their recruits’ sales. The recruits are the distributor’s ‘downline.’ Distributors also make money through direct sales of products to customers.”

Ask the average American how they define MLM and they will probably use words like “persecution,” “nightmare,” and “heinous.”

Pretty much any product you can think of has someone selling it via MLM. My list of Facebook friends encompasses salespeople for [Pruvit](#) and [Plexus](#) (vitamin supplements), [doTERRA](#) (essential oils), [Rodan + Fields](#) and [LimeLife](#) (skin care). Those are just the ones I’ve spotted.

MLM is done mainly by women who are targeting other women. This can quickly blur the line between friendship and business. It also preys on isolated housewives. After I’d moved to a new city, I connected with a fellow mom who came over for a playdate with her kid. I knew almost no one at that

point so I was thrilled to have a real-life human being coming to visit. A week later, she messaged me that she was in the business of selling underwear. Was I interested in buying some? I figured there was no harm in it. But, unfortunately, none of the options she brought over fit me. As much as I wanted to make a new friend, I wasn't going to buy non-fitting underwear. She was visibly disappointed when I told her and she never came by my house again.

At least she had been honest when she set up our second meeting, that she wanted to sell me stuff. Plenty of women have shown up for what they believed was a coffee date and discovered it was really a sales pitch. This element of subterfuge is a big part of why many people find modern MLM so infuriating.

MLM has been around for ages. As a child, I remember my mom groaning when she received invitations to Tupperware or Pampered Chef parties. Other venerable MLM brands include Amway, Avon, and Mary Kay. But the sales pitch back then was quite explicit. If you went to a Pampered Chef party, you knew what you were signing up for. With MLM today, it's not nearly as clear.

Moreover, a lot of MLM is conducted via social media. I've been on Facebook for over ten years and I've observed that people have gradually stopped sharing as much about their personal lives. Americans as a whole have become more conscious of protecting their privacy. Not so the MLM salespeople. They are constantly writing lengthy posts about their various personal crises, health issues, and dark nights of the soul. All these problems were cured by – you guessed it – whatever product it is they sell. They accompany their posts with photos of themselves, frequently posing with their cute kids to attract additional “likes.”

As annoying as MLM can be, I get why so many women are attracted to it. It's tough to find gainful employment that you can combine with looking after your children. I'm a stay-

at-home mother myself so I fully understand the challenges. MLM seems like a solution. You work where you want, when you want.

Also, I'm friends with several MLM salespeople in real life (not just on Facebook). I've observed that they actually use the products they sell in their homes and genuinely believe in them. It's not merely a sales pitch.

Some reputable [studies](#) show that the vast majority of MLM salespeople don't make any money at all or actually lose it. Some MLMs are scams, but my impression is that, as long as you avoid those, you can make some money. Though probably not a lot. And is it worth feeling the constant pressure to sell to every single person you encounter? For me, the answer is a resounding no.

But MLM isn't going away. If only the salespeople would tone down their social media posts and be more honest about when they're selling and when they're just hanging out. Then I think we can all co-exist.

—

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!

Image Credit:

Pexels