

Why Advertise?

By Richard Pederson

There are many good reasons to advertise and only a few why you would not or should not. Unfortunately, the one significant and, for many, compelling reason to not advertise is the required cost outlay. When asked, some dealers will simply say they cannot afford to advertise, but I maintain that is simply an excuse for not being creative and “thinking outside the box.” Certainly if you are a small part time dealer, you cannot afford a full page color spread in *Linn’s Stamp News* or the *American Philatelist* but there are other much more economical alternatives that can help get your business growing. In the remaining portion of this article I intend to explore how you as a dealer in stamps, covers, supplies, or philatelic literature can benefit from advertising. I will then discuss some of the many ways that advertising can be accomplished, even if you are on a limited budget.

First, let’s explore why you should advertise. Following is a list of reasons why you might want to advertise:

- Finding new customers to maintain and/or grow your business;
- Branding your business so that potential customers know what you have to sell;
- Locating new inventory;
- Offering items for sale;
- Letting people know how to get in contact with you;
- Setting yourself apart from others by projecting an image of success;
- Letting people know where you will be (e.g., buying trips, show schedule, office hours and location); and
- Announcing sales.

There are probably other reasons to advertise beyond those that I have listed and it’s likely that some of the reasons do not apply to your individual situation. Nevertheless, I would bet there are at least a couple of good reasons why you should be giving advertising some consideration. Think about each of the ideas I have listed and how it might apply to your situation, whether you are a stamp dealer or an individual having some duplicates to sell. Do you have a business that you want to grow or at least maintain at its present size? Do you have a finite number of items to sell or are you trying to liquidate a large inventory? Your specific objectives and needs will determine

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your advertising approach and budget. All businesses, no matter how well they treat their customers, are going to lose some of those customers due to loss of interest, financial difficulties, a change in collecting goals, or illness or death. At a very minimum, you need to advertise enough to keep your customer base from shrinking. If your goals are more aggressive, your advertising must also be more aggressive. Following are some of the ways you can advertise and some possible benefits and drawbacks of each.

On-line. There are many ways of drawing attention to your business on-line. You can create your own web site with links to the site from other locations (which you often have to pay for) such as the StampNewsNow site operated by *Mekeel's and Stamps* magazine or search engines such as Google™. You can also maintain an on-line store on sites such as BidStart™, eBay®, or ZillionsOfStamps™, the site maintained by Amos Press, the publishers of *Linn's Stamp News*. On-line is likely the least expensive way of advertising but it does require some knowledge of the on-line environment to be used in the most effective manner.

National Publications. Large businesses can take out advertisements in non-philatelic publications, such as the AARP magazine, that reach the desired target audience. This is one of the more expensive ways of advertising and is not an option for most philatelic businesses but for the few that can afford it, it offers the chance to reach many prospective customers that, otherwise, might never hear about your company or offerings.

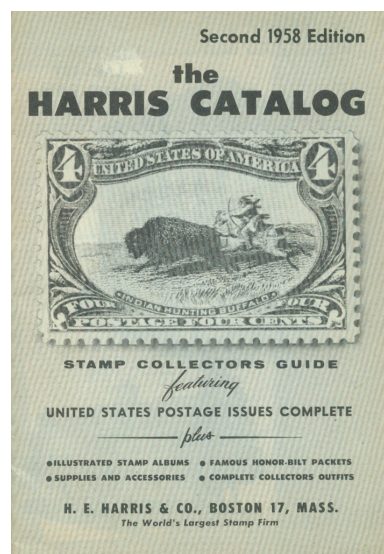
General Philatelic Publications. Although the number of regularly issued periodicals covering stamps and covers has suffered a significant decline over the last 20 years, there are several excellent publications still available, including *Linn's Stamp News*, *MeKeel's & Stamps*, *Global Stamp News*, *Scott Stamp Monthly*, and *U.S. Stamp News*. If your objective is to target existing collectors who are fully involved in the hobby, these publications are an excellent way of advertising. Advertising rates vary depending upon circulation, frequency of publication, size and placement of advertisements, and number of times you run your advertisement. Also, the target audience varies somewhat as *U.S.*

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Stamp News is targeted to the collector of U.S. issues, *Linn's Stamp News* and *MeKeel's & Stamps* have articles of interest to the collectors of both U.S. and worldwide issues, and *Scott Stamp Monthly* and *Global Stamp News* are primarily aimed at collectors of worldwide and topical issues. The covers of *Linn's Stamp News* and *MeKeel's & Stamps*, the two publications with the greatest frequency of publication, are shown below.



Mailings. Mailings cover a broad range of direct mail advertisements sent from the dealer to a targeted list of current and/or prospective customers. Mailings can cover anything from price lists and sale advertisements, to announcements for appearances at a stamp show. Mailings can be fairly expensive, but are also effective when mailed to a carefully targeted audience, such as current customers or a list of known collectors having a particular collecting interest. Some of the most effective mailings ever, were done by one of the greatest stamp firms of the last century, H. E. Harris & Co., then located in Boston, Massachusetts. The *Harris Catalog*, a 1958 copy of which is shown at the right was, in fact, a price list of current offerings and was mailed directly to H. E. Harris & Co. customers.



Brochures/Flyers. Brochures and flyers can be distributed at shows and meetings, inserted in mailings to customers, or handed out with a purchase at a stamp show or bourse. These typically contain a list of offering categories, contact information, and summary information about the seller. This is certainly an inexpensive way of advertising but has limited reach and many of the people who get the brochures are

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already customers.

Radio and Television. These modes of advertising are usually outside of the budgets of most philatelic businesses. Although professionally produced advertisements can be too costly, it may be possible for certain businesses, such as stamp shows, to take advantage of these vehicles with a little creativity. For instance, it may be possible to get the local station to do a public service announcement telling about the show as a “weekend happening” or a public interest story about an activity occurring at the show.

Newspapers. At one point in time, advertisements in newspapers were a viable alternative for many philatelic businesses. In the days when most local newspapers had regular stamp columns, it made perfect sense to place advertisements in close proximity to the column. Now, with the disappearance of such columns from both daily and weekly local newspapers, the cost of placing such an advertisement versus the small chance that the proper audience will see it, make this an unattractive option for advertising. The one exception might be if you can get a public service announcement or public interest story published about a stamp-related event, such as a show or club meeting.

Journals/Newsletters. Society journals and club newsletters are a good and relatively inexpensive way of reaching existing mainstream collectors. Some of the specialty groups (e.g., □ United States Stamp Society, U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, American Topical Association) offer the advantage of reaching a target group with specific collecting interests. If the goal of your advertising is to find new collectors, journals and newsletters are probably not the best advertising vehicle as their audience is primarily made up of established collectors. The following figure shows examples of: the *American Philatelist*, the monthly journal of the American Philatelic Society (APS); *The Philatelic Communicator*, the newsletter of the APS Writers Unit #30; and *The United States Specialist*, the monthly journal of the United States Stamp Society (USSS).

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Catalogs. Stamp catalogs, such as those produced by Scott Publishing Co., Michel, and Stanley Gibbons, are usually produced at intervals of a year or more.

Advertisements in catalogs can be more costly than some other forms of advertising, but they offer the advantage of reaching a large audience of serious collectors, and they are looked at over and over again. Such advertisements keep your company and its offerings constantly in front of those using the catalog.

Word of Mouth. Word of mouth is certainly the least costly form of advertising. If you are successful in building a client base via other □ forms of advertising, there is nothing more effective than having your own customers refer their friends and acquaintances to you.

I do not pretend to have exhausted every benefit of advertising or way of doing so. My goal is to get you thinking about advertising and coming up with a plan for customizing an approach that will help you achieve your objectives as a dealer. If you are looking for an inexpensive way to get started, contact Gail Giordano about placing an advertisement in our newsletter. Our rates are some of the lowest around and you will be able to reach our over 200 members and many of their customers. Back issues of *NSDA News* will also be retained on-line at our web site so that anyone reviewing those back copies will also continue to see your advertisements. Stop making excuses and start advertising today so that your business will thrive in the future. [Note: This article was first published in the 2010 Third Quarter edition of *NSDA News*.]

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