PC COLLECTIONS

by
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No, not 'politically correct' collections…'computerized' collections…collections that are aided, enhanced, organized, etc. through the use of a computer. If you have a computer (and, certainly, not everyone does), it can be an invaluable tool for your hobby. However, I should say right at the outset, anyone without a computer would be able to do everything that's going to be discussed here, but the time and effort to do so would be, I would think, impractical in most cases. And, whether you feel the need to even *do* these things, I suppose, depends on how much your personality craves organization. On the other hand, though, if any hobby demands organization, it's ours! Anytime a collector is dealing with items in the hundreds, thousands, and tens of thousands…and they're *all* different…there is a need for organization.

And, although it's certainly not the only advantage that the computer has to offer the collector, organization is probably the biggest! It's just a matter of how far you want to take it. At the extreme end, there are those collectors who use the computer to catalog each and every cover in their collections. I don't see how they could possibly have the time to do that, myself, but some do. It would certainly be possible if only smaller collections were being dealt with, but, as the RMS Insta-poll showed in Jul/Aug 2007, the average overall collection numbers 66,823. Those are a lot of covers to input into your list, database, etc. Imagine, on top of that, scanning a cover image to go along with each entry. It's possible. There *are* computer programs specifically for cataloging collectibles. At least one such is listed on the LINKS page of the RMS web site.

Not to venture off into fantasyland, but, *if* you *did* manage to catalog your entire collection, with scans, there would be few reasons to actually go into your albums anymore! That might be a blessing to some and a curse to others. But, let's get back to more probable likelihoods.

A computer allows you to…

Organization:

-Easily generate general lists of covers, specific want lists, update said listings…all without throwing out the old lists and starting over again…which one would have to do if it were being done by hand, including by typewriter.

-Keep track of trades--how long has it been since you've heard from that trader, how many covers did you send, what kind, what did you receive in return?

-Keep track of correspondence--special needs/requests from a trader, what's due, and what's overdue, etc.

-Keep track of covers. Here's a rather unique example: the late Warren Marshall, CA, had over 100,000 restaurants, and he kept them all in albums…and they weren't organized at all. He simply put them into the next available spaces as he acquired them. But, he had each and every one computer cataloged along *with* its location (I.e., 'album 26, p.12'). Thus, he could easily find where each of those covers was.

-Set up reminders on your PC calendar of important dates so that your computer acts as a helpful (or nagging) secretary. For example, in mid-March, a reminder suddenly pops up on your screen that your $7.50 dues to Lone Star are due by April 1st. Boy, wouldn't membership secretaries around the country be in favor of *that*!

-Integrate information from multiple files. Someone recently sent me an e-mail, for example, asking about the Rex Match Co. I merely had to open the appropriate file, copy the info, and paste into my reply. I also attached a scan of a Rex cover, which I already had. All of this took app. 30 seconds.

-Archive correspondence, bulletin articles, cover scans, convention pictures, etc…and *still* have it all easily accessible--literally at your fingertips. I archive all the articles I write, for instance, going all the way back to the early 1990s. *[and a note here about space: In earlier days, when '1 meg' was a staggeringly large amount, we used to worry about where we would have room on our computers to do all these things. Today, memory and storage space are no longer items for concern. With drives of 40-80-100 gigs or larger, and with all the portable, plug-in drives…no problem, even if you actually <u>were</u> going to scan every one of your covers!]*

Communication:
   Could anyone have predicted that in such a few short years, such a communication revolution would take place? There are some people I wouldn't even recognize now if they didn't have their hands cocked up to their ears! All my students are walking versions of Radio Shack--cell phones, i-pods, Blackberries… And, of course, there's e-mail and the internet.

- e-mail: What a time-saver! What a money-saver! Someone e-mails me something for the bulletin--might not have arrived in time by postal mail. I have a question about it, though. I can e-mail the sender and possibly have my question answered within 1-2 minutes…and no long-distance charges!

- You can fax; you can scan; heck! You can send entire files, hundreds of pages of information, in less time than it takes to dial a phone! Incredible! It's all certainly changed bulletin-production forever, for example. Graphics are now effortless. No more photocopying, cutting, and pasting by hand. One club has already started offering its bulletin by e-mail, as an option. All the club bulletins now look much more professional (some of them actually *are* professional!) And, for the non-editors, such technology means that you can swap scans for more precise trades, share your discoveries with your peers…in living and instant color, and on and on…