

# Reducing Costs through Frame Count

Fran Adams

The Philatelic Exhibitor, Vol. 14, Nr. 2, April 2000

In the November-December issue of U.S. Stamp News, John F. Dunn's "Last Word" column titled "Exhibiting at the Crossroads" centered around the increasing costs associated with major philatelic shows. The reasoning is that floor space is expensive and sponsors are looking at ways to reduce costs by minimizing floor space. As exhibits use large amounts of floor space, eliminating exhibits may be one answer to reducing those costs. Mr. Dunn's point - "While it has been demonstrated that shows can exist without exhibitors, the exhibitors have not demonstrated that they can exist without dealers and/or postal administrations".

This possibility may be truer than we exhibitors wish to believe. Of course some 'smart' dealers will review exhibits for major pieces and information. Some 'smart' collectors show dealers what they're looking for in the frames. Reasons to keep exhibits at shows are abundant, but let's stick to the cost issue. The article brings several other points to the foreground, and ends with two suggestions specifically aimed at how exhibitors may share the cost burden to ensure exhibits survive at shows.

"Suggestion 1. Reduce by 20% the space allotted to exhibits."

"Suggestion 2. Groups that represent exhibitors get together and decide how best to live within that reduced space. (This might be by reducing the number of frames per exhibit; by using the space more efficiently - for example, by going up and down to fit more pages within the same frame width, or by other means.)"

These suggestions present real options with one exception - in my opinion. Most shows are standardizing on the Ameripex frame and changing that format would most likely prove more expensive, not helping our cause. Of course we could simply raise frame fees or only give paper awards, but before deciding these options are the ultimate answer, we should explore other alternatives to improve the cost situation.

One way to reduce floor space might be the use of wall mounted frames. I'm speaking of frames which mount against a wall, not secured to the wall. By using such frames, the outer rows of the exhibit do not require walking space which is regulated in width for fire escape requirements. At some shows, frames are mounted between the ends of each row, turning the rows into 'U' shaped avenues and adding frames that would otherwise have been lost.

Reducing space allotted to frames reduces floor space and therefore costs should be affected (smaller/cheaper rooms). How that might work is again hinted at in the second suggestion above, namely reducing the number of frames per exhibit. We're already aware of the single frame format which allows finite subjects to be explored and its effect on floor space. Single frames should be part of every nationally accredited show as they fulfill specific needs - specialized areas and 'getting your feet wet' exhibitors. The single frame class however does not solve multi-frame exhibiting problems.

We exhibitors should consider the idea of limited frames per exhibit. In my experience, most multi-frame exhibits require 5 frames to allow the subject to reach a degree of depth. Some larger exhibits have a few 'pad' pages and when they go to international, they're pared down to an intense 8 frames. Is that a bad thing? Probably not as the really great material is not removed for obvious reasons. And, in the case of truly extensive exhibits, 10 frames may be required to do justice to the area.

Taken to the next level, these observations introduce a range of exhibit sizes. With single frames,

there would now seem to be four divisions: A) Single frames, B) 3 to 5 frames, C) 6 to 8 frames and D) 9-10 frames. We could take it one step further and only allow 1, 5, 8 or 10 frame exhibits, but that would not be constructive as most exhibits would be penalized in one fashion or another for no reason other than frame limits.

Additionally, actual floor space is not affected if the same number of frames are used, it simply increases the number of entries required to fill the same number of frames. Entries have been difficult to find in some cases, so that may only aggravate present entry shortages. In short, the number of frames required must be reduced to lower the floor space requirement.

Mr. Dunn's second option suggests a reduced number of frames required to maintain national level accreditation. The current minimum of approximately 160 frames could be reduced to a minimum of 120 (25% fewer) and a maximum of 160. By reducing available frames, competition would increase in the acceptance procedure. That in itself might assist with the lack of entries and perhaps even the quality of exhibits.

At this point, I'd like to suggest the introduction of a two tiered multi-frame system. In this modified system, exhibits would compete according to size. 3 to 6 frames would form the standard class and 7 to 10 frames the advanced class. I realize this suggestion seemingly shadows some international standards. It is not my intent to suggest forcing exhibiting in the United States into any internationally based mold or system. There are also exhibits being prepared which are not shown in the growth stage but simply appear in a ten frame format upon their debut. Some accommodation should allow such exhibits to be accepted - any ideas here?

Implementing such a system also demands efforts to keep entries not only open, but reasonably balanced between divisions. A rough percentage of the total frames might be allocated between the divisions. Something like 10 - 40 - 50% might result (with some movement depending on the entries). As an example, in a 120 frame show (using 1 - 5 - 8 - 10 sizes strictly for ease of mathematics) roughly the following; 10 x 1 frame (10), 10 x 5 frames (50), 5 x 8 frames (40), and 2 x 10 frames (20) would result.

That's a total of 27 entries or 10 - 10 - 7 division-wise. That's still a reasonable number and in the reduced frame format, should provide some cost savings providing we've used the 'U' shape and wall mounted frames to minimize floor space. It also allows judges a bit more time with each exhibit - something that could benefit us as well.

So, what about awards? They are the incentives to exhibit for most of us. The current grand / reserve-grand award system should change to reflect winners in the different divisions. In other words, a grand for each of the three divisions or something similar to AmeristampExpo. A renewed interest and perhaps expansion of special awards should be addressed as everyone is always happy to receive acknowledgement of a job done well. The 'specials' should also be looked upon as a more important part of exhibiting as the word 'special' says it all. At some shows, they call the exhibitor's name to receive their standard level award and simply throw the 'specials' on top to save the few seconds it takes for a second walk to the podium. How 'special' is that?

I hope the APS and AAPE will consider as many avenues as can be reasonably explored to reduce exhibit costs. There are proponents and opponents to any change in the current exhibiting system and these thoughts are not a final solution but rather food for thought. Many additional points haven't even been addressed in this short note.

Looking at this situation from a completely and perfectly selfish viewpoint, I wish to continue exhibiting. If it takes cost reduction to keep frames at shows, any useful ideas I contribute may allow me to enjoy my chosen hobby for some time to come by helping show sponsors to better justify exhibit frames. How about you?