

Starting Beginners with One-Frame Exhibits

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In a recent e-mail exchange, I was asked how experienced exhibitors might assist beginning exhibitors. The single frame format was of course the first thing that came to mind, but the 'how' remained a question and that's the subject of this note.

There's more to making this 'how' happen than just defining the vehicle (single frame format). Most of us have had more experienced exhibitors tell us what our first steps should be and of course they've provided criticism. This is natural as it should be during the learning phase, so long as the sensitive new exhibitor doesn't get 'turned off' if the criticism is too harsh. What else can we do to encourage new exhibitors?

I personally love workshops. A group of exhibitors, both new and old, get together. We each show some stuff, describe our problems as we see them, get multiple opinions and usually even agree as to what we might help make the exhibit better. It's this interaction that provides the fuel for the fire, the feeling that others share your problem, your pain and helps you to achieve the most important changes to improve the exhibit.

Having said that, I'd like to take this a step further. Example: a couple of interested new exhibitors are located in the same area or belong to the same club. The opportunity for face-to-face interchange of ideas is immediate and also key, especially when dealing with inexperienced exhibitors. These novices can relate directly to a hands-on demonstration and discussion. The workshop is also a social learning experience for all.

So, a couple of points in making this work: #1 - single frame exhibiting for new exhibitors is the best way to go since it's not overwhelming. Requirement #2 is a couple of experienced exhibitors as critics (typically the easiest of our needs). #3 is guidance in the form of a neutral arbiter. This is a guide to help summarize the many opinions and define a path for the novice

to follow in building their exhibit pages. They'll make their own judgments later on, but need a definite path to get over that first frame hump.

We might even take this a little further using a modified approach - working in a group where each participant shares - a communal effort if you will. We define an area that everyone feels is interesting and desires to take part in as everyone is going to build an exhibit on the same subject. I'd like to suggest a thematic here as they're very flexible from the execution point of view, but any subject of mutual agreement will work. The participants end up with somewhat similar exhibits, but that's not bad - it's the experience we're after. The entire exhibit building process is easier when sharing the theme and research efforts.

A couple of ground rules are of course necessary. Money. There should be an agreed upon limit of how much anyone can spend per item (and/or in total if this helps). That makes the whole thing less taxing as they work together and can't spend a fortune even if they wanted to. A time limit is also a good idea. Whatever the local show timetable is might be used so the frames can be shown together there. One last meeting should be scheduled a month before the local show to ensure everyone is on schedule and help those who aren't.

Everyone also starts with a checklist of the stamps for the area chosen. Including other philatelic elements is a good thing, but the unavailability of ready-made lists or catalogs can be a drawback for these items. For research, a first assignment might be going to the local library or bookstore and finding a couple children's books on the subject to share with the other participants. It's amazing how the index to a child's book resembles the outline of a thematic exhibit. Everyone must also share information on any out of the ordinary material found (like revenues) so everyone has information input.

Once our new exhibitors complete these assignments, the final difference in the exhibits depends on how each person looks at the subject and how the material is organized. If all the basic points are covered in each exhibit, that's good and sharing information will promote that. It will be in the flow

and detail (opinions and outlooks differ) where each participant learns to differentiate him or herself from the others.

If it's part of a club effort, the club can even sponsor a couple of 'special' awards if a small budget is available. Go for a local show first (as preparation) and then a national show in the vicinity. That allows the exhibitor to attend in person, get jury feedback and a walk to the podium to receive the award - a great motivator.

A joint exhibit owned by everyone in the group is not a good idea as someone is bound to end up with the short end of the stick when the effort is finished, having little or nothing material-wise to show for their effort. The idea is to give everyone an opportunity to create and have that creation available as a physical memory of the experience.

I hope the concept of this exercise will stimulate a small group of new exhibitors to new levels of unforeseen success.