
Computer Cataloging Your Collection

by Mike Prero

[When you get to the Classified Ads, you'll see an ad by Mike Hubbard which inquires into the existence of a software program for cataloging covers. Typing that ad into the Bulletin got me started thinking about the topic. Actually, we've kicked this around a goodly number of years ago in the Sierra-Diablo Bulletin, but technology has progressed by leaps and bounds since then, so it's worth another look]

A computer is one of those things that, once you get into it, you wonder how on earth you ever functioned without it. Oh, to be sure, there are those times when you pull your hair out in frustration, but there's no question that it makes life s-o-o-o much easier *[especially if you're desktop publishing, maintaining a zillion and one lists, etc.]*. I've been using a computer since 1984 and have used it in a myriad of ways for my hobby work, but I've never used it to catalog my collection because I don't feel it would be practical for me.....but it might be for you.

Although there is no program available which is designed specifically for cataloging matchcovers, the general concept is certainly workable. There have been similar programs on the market for baseball cards, for example, for several years. Be that as it may, if you want to catalog your collection on your computer, you're on your own. The only realistic way to do it would be to use a database program (all the major word processing programs come with databases). I happen to use Microsoft Works, but any of the others should work just as well.

A database allows you to quickly input lots of pieces of info into one file. Once it's there, you can do all sorts of things with it. Besides alphabetizing, a nifty feature I like is that you can extract items that are similar to make smaller lists. For example, in the lists that I maintain, I code covers according to type (say, "G" for Girlie). So, I can punch up my Crown list, select all the "G" entries at the touch of a key, and, viola!, I have a list of all the Crown Girlies.

You can tailor any database to your specific needs. The program will start you off with a screen full of columns, etc. that you can make wider, smaller, fewer, larger, and label any way you wish...and it keeps going forever, so you don't have to worry about "filling up" the program, but if you have a 250,000-cover collection, you wouldn't want to just make one database with 250,000 entries. It would be too unwieldy. Make a database for each of your categories and try and use the same columns for each. That way you can directly transfer entries from one file to the other.

The main reason I've heard for cataloging collections via computer is so that you can quickly check if those covers you received in the mail today are dupes of what you already have. That would work nicely if you only save, say, one of each hotel cover. But if you're like me and save all variations, there's no way you could list enough info on each cover in your computer file to make manually checking cover against cover unnecessary.

Theoretically, you could scan all your covers (including the insides for those that weren't blank) and make a file of those, but graphics take up horrendous amounts of space on your hard disk...and we're talking *thousands* of images here...so that's not practical.

Do you use a computer to catalog your collection? What are your experiences?