
Technology Changing the Face of the Hobby: Part I: What's Here

With the advent of the computer, E-mail, and the Internet, the world is changing at an incredibly rapid rate. Did you know, for example, that 95% of everything that has ever been invented has appeared in the last 50 years?! Not surprisingly then, the face of our hobby is changing rapidly, as well.

The club bulletins were the first to show the impact of technology on the hobby. From typewritten, and sometimes even handwritten, pages, bulletins began appearing that were better looking, neater, and more professional—no more misaligned letters, strike-overs, etc. Then came affordable scanners, and that allowed club editors to abandon the old cut-and-paste methods of including bulletin graphics. And, those graphics now became much more sophisticated now that the editor was no longer hampered by simplistic clip art.

Then, thanks to computer data basing programs, came the beginnings of a veritable flood of hobby information—generated lists of covers never before available, compiled data bases allowing for new research resulting in new collecting instruments such as the Manumark Dating Guide, automatic cross-referencing, etc. New cataloging programs allow collectors to manage their collections more efficiently. Knowledge is power...and more knowledgeable collectors are more successful collectors.

In the meantime, E-mail arrived. Now collectors could quickly, easily, and cheaply correspond with other collectors, iron out occasional membership problems with their clubs, send lists and scans and assorted files...and all of this, mind you, on a global scale. With E-mail, a collector now thinks nothing of contacting a Neil Abbott in Australia, or a Simon Blackman in England, or a Pongsit Chittawong in Thailand—without the two-week waiting period for a postal response or a long-distance charge for a phone call.

The capstone of all this revolutionary technology (so far, at least) is undoubtedly the World Wide Web, which is only a small part of the Internet. Already, the current impact of the Web is nothing short of amazing. Not only has it created an entirely new industry, but traditional “store-based” businesses are increasingly moving to the Web. Egghead, for example, a large chain of software outlets, has closed all of its stores and now operates exclusively from the Web. Most major newspapers are now on the Web, as are all the major news services; radio stations broadcast over the Web; and literally tens of millions of web sites are up—sites representing businesses, clubs, and individuals.

The inception of RMS's own web site in 1996 has resulted in an influx of new members, a strengthening of RMS's position as *the* philliconic organization in North America, an opportunity to present itself to collectors around the world, and a variety of new services to its members. And, RMS isn't the only such club on the Web. England's British Matchbox Label and Booklet Society has a site set up, as does Washington's Pacific Northwest Matchcover Collectors Club and California's Sierra-Diablo Matchcover Club. [*We'll be reviewing hobby web sites in our May/June issue, by the way*].

Such hobby-related web sites have also brought another innovation to the hobby—on-line auctions. Here, collectors now have the opportunity of seeing clear, full-color photos of what they're bidding on, the bidding is instantaneous, and the bidder can easily contact the auctioneer with questions/concerns

All this may be just the tip of the technological iceberg—next issue...Part II: What's Coming.