
How To...Keep Track of Trades

Over the decades, I've gone through several different systems to keep track of trades, specific covers for specific traders, and trader wants. None have been full-proof when it came down to preventing the occasional dupe from being sent, but they all worked otherwise.

There was a time, in the 1980s, when I traded with 175 collectors, so some method of keeping track was imperative. Obviously, there was no chance of remembering who wanted what on my own, and, gradually, I found myself earmarking certain covers for certain collectors with little memos to myself as to what went where. It also became quite apparent that I had to organize my dupes, so I could find various categories instantly, as I didn't have time to sort through random stacks and boxes every time a trade came in.

So, what I ended up with was a fairly simple system, once it was all set up, which *did* take some time. First, I used a data base on my computer to keep all the records of my traders, their wants, and the dates of trades. Then I set up a manila envelope with each trader's name and wants, and, each time I happened to be sorting covers anyway, I diverted the appropriate categories to the appropriate envelopes. Actually, I suppose I could have just kept all the records on the envelopes, but having such in the computer was faster and more efficient. In any event, when a trade came in I could just go right to that collector's envelope, remove the number of covers needed, write a quick note, and send the return trade right out...often the very next day. It worked quite well, but I eventually switched to the system I use now.

After 1987, when Universal went belly up, the number of my traders started to drastically dwindle--150, 120, 90, 60 (I'm down to about 25 now!). That, coupled with the fact that I never really liked how all those envelopes looked (messy), moved me to go onto the system I use now.

I still use the computer data base for all the record keeping. Can't beat that...although, with all the electronic gadgetry these days (pocket organizers, cell-phones, I-whatever, a gazillion and one apps, etc.), I suppose you could even carry your records around with you if you chose to. I *did* get rid of all the envelopes, though. Instead, using several cardboard soda trays, I simply have my dupes sorted out into categories, each behind an appropriate index card that indicates what the category is. Now, when I get a trade, I get the covers I need out of the particular category in the tray. Works just fine, and I traded all those unsightly envelopes for six trays.

Whatever system you end up with, it must necessarily meet your own particular needs...which may not be the same as my exact needs or those of any other collector. The main points, here, though, are:

1. You need to be organized. Even if you only have a handful of sporadic traders, you always need to know what you're doing, the status of current trades, each trader's address and wants, etc. That means you have to keep records.
2. You don't *have* to have your dupes pre-sorted, but it's a courtesy to get your return trade in the mail as soon as possible, and trades don't always arrive on convenient days. If you have your covers sorted and ready to go, it will literally only take you a couple of minutes to have that return trade put together, packaged, stamped, and waiting to go out in the next day's mail. *[At least, that's the ideal. Still being a working stiff, I have to admit that I usually only answer trades on the weekends, but, come on, that's still pretty good!]*