

Trading Expectations For Newer Collectors

OK, so you're a new collector. You're bubbling over with enthusiasm. You have a few covers and are eagerly looking forward to getting more...*lots* more!

Soooo, you decide to start trading. You've picked up some covers from the freebie tables at your local club meeting or that big swapfest, plus a few from a flea market. You grab your club roster, pick the first 20 names, and send out 20 requests to start trading. Then you sit back and wait for the responses and covers to roll in.Ain't going to work!

Shotgun approaches like this mostly result in no responses. Either those collectors aren't into trading (sadly); or their wants are micro-specific, and *no one* can steadily trade in their categories; or their wants and yours don't mesh. You should have 1) looked at only those collectors who have indicated that they are willing to trade, 2) checked their wants and made sure you have those categories to trade, and 3) asked if they have covers to trade in *your* categories.

And, if you *do* get someone who's willing to trade, you'll lose that trader when you send him or her that freebie table material or those beat up covers you found at the flea market. Also, don't send Nationals or struck covers. And, even if you're sending decent covers, never...*EVER*...send covers that aren't in your trader's want areas. One of the deadliest sentences in the hobby is, "I know these aren't in your categories, but you can always use them for trading material." Your trader isn't looking for covers to pass on to someone else; he wants covers for *his* collections.

It gets even more complicated. All collectors are not equal. Some have been collecting for decades, so when you're trading with a veteran it's a pretty safe assumption to make that he already has all the common covers in that category. ...But how are you to know which ones are the common ones? Well, being new at this, you don't. However, you have indications. If, for example, you have several of the same cover, or have already seen that cover several different times, don't send it to that veteran trader. Of course, if that trader announces he's starting a new category, then all bets are off. Send him everything! On the other hand, being a new collector is great because *you* can basically use everything that comes your way!

But how do you get good material to send in the first place? You have several options, depending on whether you can attend club meetings, swapfests, and/or conventions. But don't be surprised if you have to *buy* good covers, at least in the beginning. After all, every hobby requires a little starting capital.

And, if you're going to buy, you can do so right from the comfort of your home. You can wait for your club bulletin auctions to appear in the mail; you can bid in on-line auctions; you can buy whole collections that people are offering to sell in your bulletin's classified ads. In any given month, there are hundreds of thousands of covers up for grabs from various sources within the hobby.

Unless you're operating on an unlimited budget, I'd stay away from ebay if I were you. You're looking to build a trading base; the offerings on ebay are too specific and too highly priced. You'll always find much better bargains within the hobby...often simply for the price of postage.,

As the years roll by, and your collections mature, you'll find that what you can actually use from trades gradually decreases, since you'll already have more and more of the covers sent to you, but I've always found that there always treasures waiting for you...no matter how large your collections are.