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HOW TO DEAL

IN

Postage * Stamps.

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HOW TO DEAL IN Postage * Stamps.

I.

The queerest freaks of nature usually spring from European soil, a soil so rich with the accumulations of ages that almost any hybrid will flourish in it. But whenever a peculiar growth has firmly taken root and propagated its seed over the Old World, some chance wind is sure to blow it over to our own continent where it finds another soil quite as ready to receive it.

Not many years ago a traveller returning from France brought home with him a curious book. It was profusely illustrated with woodcuts of several hundred postage stamps and quoted the prices at which the real stamps could be bought in Paris.

The owner of the catalogue was amazed at the postage stamp business as it was then carried on in that great city. He said that the publisher of the catalogue occupied a large building devoted entirely to the stamp business. On the first floor was a large salesroom where busy clerks sold little bits of paper for as much as a thousand francs apiece. These were rare stamps which the upper classes in Paris had gone crazy over and were buying liberally. The school boys also visited the store to buy the cheaper stamps. These stamps were neatly pasted on sheets of ruled paper or into large stock books containing thousands of specimens. Up stairs were kept stacks of albums, catalogues, and other stamp publications, and wholesale lots of stamps just as they were received from correspondents abroad. It would be hard to guess the number of thousand stamps this one house handled in a year, but there were other large dealers in Paris besides. In Germany, also, the stamp business had grown to considerable importance, and some of the best albums were made there. England had just caught the fever and possessed at least one dealer who afterwards became famous.

At first the stamp interest in America centered

around New York. Few outside of the great metropolis knew what it was to collect stamps. But this European craze was not long in planting itself in every city and probably every town in the United States. We think we are correct in saying that now there is not a town from the Atlantic to the Pacific which does not contain at least one stamp collector.

To supply the demand made by these thousands of collectors, not a few have gone into the stamp business.

This queer business is now carried on almost entirely by mail, so that collectors in any part of the country have an equal advantage in buying any class of stamps they wish. Through the advertising columns in our weekly and monthly magazines these dealers introduce themselves to the stamp-collecting world, a world which is growing larger every day.

The New York stamp business first spread to Boston which has ever since been one of the largest stamp centres in the country. It next moved westward and now extends to California.

The first collectors got along very well without the aid of a dealer. They were people who spent much of their time in travel, and picked up their stamps as they went about. There were few stamps in circulation then, and a collection of one-hundred varieties was considered almost complete.

We refer to the eighteen-hundred and fifties, about ten years after postage stamps were first used on letters. To-day it would be impossible to collect stamps extensively without the aid of a dealer. The collector finds it less expensive, in most cases, to purchase stamps of him than to procure them in any other way. For example if he wishes to start a collection he can buy of him a hundred or more of the common stamps, good enough to begin collecting with, for a few cents. The dealer imports these stamps by the hundreds of thousands at a time and in this way can afford to sell them for a small price. It would take a collector, alone, many years to find a hundred or more foreign stamps. Perhaps the collector has a friend in some foreign country, and writes to him for a few foreign specimens. It costs ten cents or more to send a letter abroad and receive a reply, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the stamps that come back are foreign ones of the present issue, all of which could be bought of some local dealer for two cents. This has been the general experience of those who have tried to get a collection without paying for it. Collectors and dealers are becoming more friendly with one another every day, and now cooperate in carrying on this peculiar stamp business. At least two-thirds of the work a stamp dealer has to do is to keep his numerous agents supplied with stamps. These agents receive the stamps which have been pasted on "approval sheets," all ready to be sold, and are paid a commission for selling them to collectors. Agents are found in almost every school in the country, and usually collect stamps themselves.

They often embrace the opportunity to enlarge their own collections by taking out their commission in stamps. The stamp dealer, then, is a help, not a hindrance to those who want to make a good-sized collection without spending a large sum of money on it.

II.

It is the object of this article on How To Deal in Postage Stamps to reveal some of the mysteries of the stamp business to those who are interested: therefore let us commence on our theme without any further introduction.

It is not necessary, as some may suppose, to invest a large capital in stamps at the start. Two of the largest Western firms, for instance, began business with a mere pocket full of stamps, and from that built up trades worth to-day thousands of dollars.

In the next place, since the stamp business is done principally through the mails, it is not necessary to pay a big rent for business apartments. In fact a large closet, with plenty of shelves or drawers in it, will do as a starter. Yes, a thousand stamps can be kept assorted between the leaves of a good-sized book.

We are now to assume that the reader really wishes to deal in postage stamps, and that he is looking to us for a few hints on how to begin. After he has once fairly begun he will seldom look farther for hints, for the peculiar requirements of his own business will suggest new methods of carrying it on, — methods which possibly no one has ever tried before.

We also assume that you have been a stamp collector for some time and have on hand at least a few hundred duplicate stamps of the commoner kinds, and perhaps a few of the more valuable ones. These stamps must at once be assorted and then placed in books or boxes, whichever is the more convenient. If the stamps are all common you had better make them up into packages and sell them off in that form. Ten or twenty stamps, all different, sell well, especially among the younger collectors. When stamps are sold in this way they should be placed in boxes after they are sorted. If your customers prefer to buy the stamps singly, however, and your stock is small and without many duplicates, a blank book or several approval sheets will hold your stock nicely.

Stamp boxes are easily made by anyone, and

when duplicates are many are indispensable. All the large dealers use them, placing them in rows in shallow drawers. These drawers fit into cabinets specially constructed for the stamp dealer, and made to take up the least possible room.

Let us look at the stamp boxes first, however, before passing to the cabinet. The larger boxes are made of pasteboard, but the smaller ones can just as well be made of stiff paper. Stiff, brown wrapping paper, if not wrinkled, is as good for this as writing paper, and the latter is rather expensive. The bottom of the box should be about one inch and a quarter square. In height it should be about three-quarters of an inch. It takes a square piece of paper to make the box, but when its sides are folded up into shape there will be too much paper in the corners. A square piece may therefore be cut out of each corner to make the box fold true, after which a strip of paper can be pasted over the corners to keep them in place. A still easier way is not to cut out the entire square at each corner, but only half of it, that the remaining piece of paper may lap over the box when folded into shape and take the place of the extra strip of paper which is pasted over

the corners. In order to make all the boxes of the same size it is necessary to cut out a paste-board pattern. This is to be placed over half a dozen sheets of paper that the outline of the pattern may be marked off on the top sheet, and then all six boxes cut out at once. Thick flour paste or dextrine and water are good enough for sticking down corners.

If you have a friend in the dry or fancy-good business you will have no trouble in getting your cabinet free, for you have but to speak for the next empty spool case he may have. Larger cabinets have to be made to order, but if you have any insight into carpentry, you will have no difficulty in planning your cabinet and making the drawers just large enough to fit the boxes. The whole, except the board at the bottom used for a support to the cabinet, can be made of half-inch white-wood stock, and all cut out at once on a circular saw by your lumber dealer. You then have but to nail the cabinet together and get the credit of having done the whole work yourself.

A cheaper way is to buy an old packing box and enough strips of half-inch stock (say two inches wide) to make the sides of the drawers

white are to fit into your cabinet. The bottom
the drawers can be made of pieces of orange boxes
or even of pasteboard. When all is complete a coat
of cherry stain will add wonderfully to its appear-
ance. No dealer can get along without a cabinet,
but as you now see some kind of a cabinet is with-
in the reach of everybody.



III.

In previous chapters we have given beginners directions for starting a stamp enterprise, telling them how to construct the cabinet for holding their stock, and describing an easy method of making paper boxes to fit the cabinet, and hold all the assorted specimens of stamps. We also gave some hints on how to arrange the stamps on sheets, and put them up in packets ready for sale. We will now try to give some further hints on how to dispose of the stamps thus made ready for the market.

The more numerous your agents the more extensive will be your business. You must at once make an effort to secure as many as possible, offering them 25, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, or even 50 per cent. commission for selling stamps for you. The stamps you send them to sell should be hinged to sheets of paper. Ruled approval sheets, as they are called, can be made with pen and ink, or bought already printed of some dealer. Hinges may also be bought, or made at home. The best way to buy the gummed paper is in sheets and cut it up into hinges yourself. You can then make them any size you like, and get more for your money than by buying them by the thousand already prepared. Here is a novel way to cut and bend a number of hinges at once:—

Fold a piece of paper into eight pieces, and

with a knife or paper cutter separate the small sheets thus made. Then lay them all on top of one another with the gummed side down.

With scissors you now cut off of all eight sheets a strip of paper running the whole length of the sheet, and about three-quarters of an inch wide, and then bend all the strips through the middle so that the crease will run parallel with the strips forming, as it were, a miniature trough, or gutter. From this chop off the hinges with your scissors, making eight at once and about one-hundred from each gutter. These hinges will be bent ready for use and save you much time in not having to bend each hinge separately.

Some prefer to make their own hinge paper. Unless the material is bought in large quantities, however, it is no cheaper than to buy the machine-made gum paper of some dealer. Gum arabic makes the best paper and merely needs to be dissolved in water before being spread on the sheet with a brush. Sugar, glue, and dextrine, dissolved in water and brought to a boil makes a cheaper gum, but as it hardens soon after it is taken from the fire, has to be spread rapidly.

Packets of stamps are made with less trouble than approval sheets. These may be sold through agents. If there are any fruit, stationery, or drug stores in your place you must make an attempt to introduce your packets into these stores. Offer twenty-five or a larger per cent. to the store

keeper on all the packets he may sell for you and he will seldom hesitate to put your packets in his window.

For packet envelopes use something small that will not take up too much room. Small envelopes are kept on sale by some stamp dealers, and cost but a trifle. On the outside of the packet should be pasted a stamp or two to attract the attention, and underneath, the value of the packet and a brief description of its contents. A dozen or more packets should be mounted on a card. The cover of a shoe box makes about the right-sized card for the window. A drop of mucilage will glue each packet to the card, and if a string is run through the top of a card the latter can be hung in the window where every passer-by will surely see it.

A boy who attends a large school containing a number of stamp collectors has a better chance to start a stamp enterprise than one who does not; but as we have just explained there is more than one way of selling your stock of stamps.



