



Editorial

Club Meetings...A *Different* Approach

Now, I'm just thinking out loud, so don't panic. As far as I know, no one has plans for this, but...

The current situation: Most clubs have been decrying the deplorable attendance rate at regular meetings, and have been doing so for a number of years. Today, we not only have to contend with the causal factors that were already responsible for this in prior years, but we now have soaring gasoline prices which are predicted to hit \$4 a gallon by the end of the year. That means, of course, more and more collectors are going to seriously question the feasibility of driving to meetings. For example, I used to routinely drive 100+miles to get to my Sierra-Diablo meetings. The cost factor never even entered my mind. Now, I wouldn't do it.

The future situation: There's absolutely no indication that it's going to get any better; quite the contrary. So, what's a club to do? Well, Sierra-Diablo solved their problem by simply giving up on meetings altogether. Fairly radical, but it's worked! But, at the very least, there has to be a trade-off to make such an approach feasible. In Sierra-Diablo's case, the absence of meetings is balanced by a great auction, an annual swapfest, and, dare I say, a great bulletin....plus a number of other offerings.

That may not work for most other clubs. But, what about this?...*Virtual club meetings!* Yes, I know it sounds 'space-agey' and techno-weenie, but it's surprisingly easy! Indeed, it's the same concept as having a conference call...but soooo much more interesting and engaging.

There might be other variations of setting such up, but here's one way it could be done. The club sets up a chat room (easy and free) on its web site. (If the club doesn't have a web site, it can easily use a member's site. That's one of the great things about the internet...location doesn't matter). An appropriate day and time is picked for the on-line meeting. Members log on...and voilá! A meeting is in progress!

And the advantages! *No driving! No travel time! No meeting location rental fees! No one* has to bring refreshments! *No one* gets lost! *Car problems* not a problem! *Inclement weather* not a problem! *Traffic* not a problem! *Gas prices* not a problem! Heck, you don't even have to get out of bed if you don't want to!...And that means members who are temporarily laid up, too old to drive, etc. can now 'attend' meetings, as well!

So, *without* members physically being in the same place, the club still takes care of business. Treasurer's report? *Done!* Membership report? *Done!* Need to discuss our display category at the next convention? *Done!* Need to take a vote on raising dues? *Done!* Want to recognize Jane Doe for her outstanding club work? *Done!*

And, the club could make such virtual meetings as simple or fancy as necessary or desired. Don't have auctions, for example, at your local meetings because not enough people show up to make it worthwhile? *Now*, you can have a meeting auction that literally reaches the ends of the earth! Pictures of lots could be posted with the auction, along with a catalog or index of lots. Bids could be taken

basically instantaneously. The possibilities are endless.

Want some Show and Tell or other presentations? *Done!*...With or without pictures and sound! Want an album drawing? *Done!* How about a raffle? *Done!* And more...

Moreover, on a more general level, I think there might even be something of a special sense of excitement or interest simply because of the uniqueness of such a format. That excitement might well dwindle with time, but I doubt that it would ever reach the 'drudgery' level with which some collectors approach physically attending a meeting.

A possible indirect advantage might also be that the annual conventions and swapfests become even more unique, themselves, and thus more attractive, simply by virtue of there being fewer local meetings.

And, finally [*and here's where I possibly get in trouble*] some collectors would also undoubtedly welcome a meeting format which wasn't heavily laced with non-collecting social activities...and the latter opens up a whole can of worms that is apparently developing into something of a wedge within the hobby, but we won't get into that right now.

Of course, there are disadvantages to this approach...but, then, there are disadvantages with every course of action. The most obvious negative here is that only on-line members could participate. That means non-internet users would be left out. But, members are already left out when there is a physical meeting to attend--the out-of-area members, the disabled members, the non-driving members, etc. The only other significant disadvantage that I can see would be that there couldn't be any physical exchange of covers, but, again, that could easily be done through the mail.

Perhaps a more palatable compromise might be to alternate between virtual and physical club meetings. That way, the same group of members wouldn't always be left out, or, viewing it in another way, a currently 'abandoned' group of members could now be active participants in club meetings.

It's wild! It's weird! But, it's workable!