



Hobby Begins Moving

Most collectors could see it coming, and most knew it was inevitable, but even I was taken aback when I read the rather casual announcement in Southeastern MC's May/June bulletin that that club was shifting to e-mailed bulletins for its on-line members. I'd been discussing the option in various editorials and articles for the last few years, but hats off to Southeastern! They jumped right in and did it!

As soon as I heard about this, I started canvassing other regional clubs to see what their plans, if any were. Again, I was surprised!

- Connecticut MC is moving to e-bulletins early next year.
- Empire MC is seriously considering posting both its bulletin and roster on its new web site.
- Trans Canada MC has its bulletin on its web site and members can voluntarily make the switch.
- MARVA already sends out its roster via e-mail.
- New Moon already sends out its roster via e-mail.
- Sierra-Diablo MC already has its roster, auctions, and bulletins posted on its web site and has already switched 75% of its members over to the web site.
- Lone Star MC has set up a new web site, posted its roster and bulletin there, and shifted its on-line members there.

Why is this happening?

Survival! For most clubs, the dues simply can't, and haven't, kept pace with the ever-soaring production and postal costs involved in making and sending out bulletins and rosters. Financially, bulletins and rosters, as necessary and wonderful as they are, have been a losing proposition for quite awhile, and most clubs have relied on supplementary income (auctions, raffles, etc) to make up the difference. A recent example: The current Girlie Club newsletter devoted a page and a half to discussing its declining income and rising costs. That club just raised its dues from \$12 to \$15 last year and is considering another increase from \$15 to \$20 for next year. That will be a 66.6% increase from 2007 dues. The club's in a no-win position...and so are most other clubs. There's only so much dues-raising and cutting back on bulletin pages and issues that you can do..

Clubs have been able to tenuously 'hold the line' for the last several years, but it's just become more and more untenable. The Post Office now raises its rates every 12-18 months, and the incredible increases in oil-based products have literally resulted in price increases in just about every other facet of the economy.

Clubs simply can't raise dues as necessary, especially in times such as these, when members are already feeling financial pinches everywhere they look. Every time a club raises its dues, no matter how justified, it's guaranteed that the club is going to lose members. No club wants that.

What are the advantages?

- The clubs will be able to cut their bulletin and roster costs by 30%-40%-50%+, at least, depending on how many of their members are on-line and how they handle the transition.
- The on-line collector, who is usually used to seeing his or her bulletins in black & white, is now

To Electronic Bulletins

going to be reading those bulletins in blazing color!...And, as an editor of many of those bulletins, myself, let me add how disheartening it often is to know that I've produced crisp, clean, clear masters only to have the printer or copy people reproduce those masters as too dark or too light. With electronic bulletins, you see the bulletin *exactly* as the editor produced it....maybe even *better!*

- On-line collectors all get their bulletins at the same time! They're either all e-mailed out at the same time or they're posted on web sites where the members can see them at the same time. Contrast that to the system we currently have; I can use myself as an example. I produce the *RMS Bulletin* here in California, but the masters are then mailed to Ohio, then printed and mailed from Ohio, and, because of the mysterious processes involved in postal bulk mailing, I, ironically, am often one of the last people in the country to receive my bulletin. None of that happens with electronic bulletins.

- No more "Hey, I never received my bulletin!" and the secretary or editor has to bundle up a second copy, pay *more* postage, and send you another one. You're either just e-mailed another one or go back to the web site! No additional production or postal costs to the club; no additional days of waiting on your part.

- No more ever-growing stacks of old bulletins in a closet or on a shelf, which, surveys have shown, most collectors eventually throw out anyway. [*ouch!*]

- With electronic bulletins, you can easily archive your bulletins on a storage disk, if you wish to keep the information...and for RMS, Sierra-Diablo, and Lone Star members, those collectors can use the article indices maintained on the RMS, Sierra-Diablo, Lone Star, or my own site, respectively, for easy research and reference.

What does all this mean?

Well, first, ***DON'T PANIC!*** If you're not on-line, you're *probably* still going to continue getting your hard copy bulletins, just as you always have. Again, clubs do not want to lose members, so they're certainly not going to *immediately* jettison collectors because they don't have internet access. But, you *know* that such clubs are going to be, quite logically, hoping to eventually go 100% electronic by eventually seeing those off-line collectors disappear through simple attrition.

Also, there are two ways to handle electronic bulletins. They can be e-mailed to individual club members (as 'e-bulletins'), or the bulletins can simply be posted to the club web site (as 'on-line bulletins'), which members can then access at their leisure. From the club's perspective, the latter would be the far easier option, but the club has to be careful not to make the whole process impersonal, or it risks losing member interest.

Additionally, and this is pure supposition on my part (although I've already heard it being discussed here and there), I would imagine that as electronic bulletins are put in place, some clubs, at least, will be adjusting their dues structures. That's up to the individual club, of course, but, why, for example, would the foreign collector now be charged higher dues when his electronic bulletin costs the club nothing in postage? Some clubs might even consider *lowering* dues with the resulting savings on electronic bulletins...or *raising* dues for members who still receive hard copy bulletins and rosters!

I can remember when computers and desk top publishing revolutionized the hobby...Now this! It's stunning to *our* generation...but it's already old hat to the younger generation.