



Editorial

Maybe It's Time To Step Back And Regroup

Many collectors have noted and have been discussing the surprisingly low attendance at the last RMS Convention, 118. If my records are correct, that's the lowest attendance since 1969! Obviously, the *Build it, and they will come* approach no longer works. However, if it's any consolation to RMS, it was bound to happen sooner or later, given that RMS membership (and the hobby at large) has been in steady decline for the last 24 years. It was fortunate that there was no hosting regional club this time, or they would have probably had to eat the financial losses, and a regional club could ill afford that.

Maybe it's time to step back and reevaluate our expectations for the convention. Membership has certainly been scaled back, but have our convention strategies and expectations adjusted accordingly? Let me just toss out some thoughts here to hopefully get a dialogue started over the coming months.

For the collector, there are several factors in determining attendance at a convention: health issues, location, etc. But the two main factors, it seems to me, are time and cost. Most of our membership are retirees, so I'm assuming that time is not an issue for most. That leaves cost.

Cost, especially in these times, is perhaps the overriding factor for most collectors who don't attend conventions. The cost of attending the convention, for example, for a collector from the West Coast (I checked with a California collector) was over \$1,000. Just because most collectors are retired, it doesn't follow that most are wealthy enough to fly over multiple states and stay at the hotel for several days, incurring food and other expenses along the way, just to attend a hobby convention.

And, just as the Inflation article in this issue shows, those costs are rising all the time. In fact, the announced room rate for the 2016 convention is \$109+tax and all the other charges that hotels now tack on to your bill. That will be the first time in the history of the RMS Convention that the room rate has been over \$100. That's not the fault of the planners; it's just the way things are. But how many collectors are on a fixed income that continues to be eroded by inflation?

Location is always a problem. Wherever the convention is held, it's going to be convenient for some and inconvenient for others. Blaming collectors in the West for not attending in larger numbers is, I think, somewhat unfair. Eastern collectors almost uniformly have the convention in their own backyard, the East, while collectors in the West are literally thousands of miles away (and the vast majority of Western collectors are in California, at the farthest edge of the country). The recent convention happened to be in St. Louis, but that's hardly anywhere near the West either (it's 1,670 miles from my location), and, not that it makes any difference, but St. Louis is *not* in the middle of the country. Lebanon, KS, is, and that's some 500 miles to the west.

So, what can be done? It seems to me that cost needs to be addressed first and foremost. So, keeping in mind that I've never had anything to do with setting up a convention or swapfest, the argument for big (more expensive) hotels is that they're the only ones that have the large meeting rooms that the convention needs...plus, they offer more amenities. But do we still need all those large rooms? It may have been necessary in the mid-1980s, when convention attendance was over 300, but we're down to the low 100's now.

Personally, if I were able to attend RMS conventions, they could be held in an empty warehouse as far as I'm concerned. And there *are* a number of venues that offer at least one or more large rooms...the local Elks lodge, the Grange Hall, Church complexes (there's at least one church here in my little town of Auburn, CA, that has a beautiful auditorium that's three times bigger than my school's gym!..and they rent it out.)

Then the convention planners could work out much better room rates with a smaller, nearby hotel or motel. And perhaps, then, the conventions wouldn't have to always be located in large metropolitan areas, where prices are higher to begin with. But, then you would run into secondary problems. Since the room and actual convention sites wouldn't be the same, some collectors might have transportation problems back and forth. Also, a smaller hotel/motel wouldn't offer the amenities that a larger hotel would, and that might be important to some collectors.

Of course, to me, none of the above would make any difference. When I go to a convention or swapfest, it's not because the Eiffel Tower is within walking distance, or because there are 3 great restaurants next door, or because I can get room service. I go for the covers and knowledge I can pick up. But, that's just me. Not all collectors are like me. In fact, *most* probably aren't.

In the current *RMS Insta-Poll* seen on p. 26, Cost was identified as the main factor by the biggest number of respondents, although if you were to combine "Work Schedule" and "Schedule Conflicts" into just "Conflicts", the latter would be a close 2nd....and all those types of conflicts = "Time". So, we're back to time and cost.

A number of poll respondents said that the length of the convention was much too long and pointed to resulting problems such as too much down time, too much wasted time, etc. Thus, there's another discussion point. Do we really need a 6-day convention? The various swapfests are only half that length. And, if the length of the convention was pared down, that would correspondingly bring the costs involved down, as well. Hence, two complaints could be dealt with here at the same time.

So, what are *your* thoughts about how convention logistics might be changed, or do you even think any changes are necessary? Perhaps the solution to the attendance problem lies in a completely different direction. Either way, please send in your responses quickly so I can include them in the next bulletin. Hopefully, we'll have more to go on by then, as more ideas filter in.