

“The Sky is Falling.”

– Chicken Little

Yes, that’s right; Chicken Little invaded the inner sanctum of philately this past year. I’ve heard from knowledgeable professional philatelists, long time serious collectors bemoaning the same mantra. “The hobby dealer base is shrinking.” “The base of collectors is rapidly aging.” “Where are the next generations going to come from to fill the ranks?”

One thing is certainly true, the hobby is changing. However, the mantra has always been the same for we have a hobby that’s always been identified by an older population. Go back and look at the photographs taken at the American Philatelic Society annual conventions for the past 129 years. The pictures are mainly comprised of older collectors. The reason is simple as these are the people whose children have grown, they are free to travel, they have disposable income and have the time to work on and develop serious collections. They are the **moving core** of philately primarily between the ages of 50 and 70 years of age.

There are those who believe that the source of replacements for the “moving core” is shrinking because of the lack of children taking up the hobby today. While this may be true in part they are missing the fact that there is a substantial base of core replacements now coming up through the Internet.

There is a solution to this problem and it can be found every month in *The American Philatelist*. Thanks to some great data analysis presented in an email to me by one of my clients. I would like to share with you his findings and add a little insight of my own as well. I will not give up my source, but he was the head of a Fortune 500 company in his prior life.

I quote: *“This morning I started reading my current issue of The American Philatelist. In the regular APS Membership Report I decided to do a quick count of the 202 names listed as new members.*

“Of those who listed their age ...

“22 were under age 60

“180 were age 60 or over (a few did not list their age)

“202 Total New APS Members

“Of the 22 who were under 60, 15 were between age 40 and 60.

“In summary—only seven new members were under age 40.

“Although this is merely a snapshot of data, the facts very clearly validate that the place to go fishing for new members is in the mature population for all of the reasons that we’ve discussed.”

I concur that this is only a snapshot however when you go back and review past issues of *The AP* you find similar data results.

While it is important to continue to develop an interest in stamp collecting in our youth we must do even more to expand the “moving core.” This is the target market for the APS and dealers alike. Development money needs to be spent in areas where you will find the 50 to 70 age group. Media would include the monthly *AARP* magazine and similar publications that focus on this group. This would also apply to websites frequented by them as well. A combination of articles and advertising placed in the appropriate print and digital media should be our focus. The APS needs to develop a strategy and long term publicity campaign to accomplish this mission. They need to retain an effective public relations firm to carry out and implement a strategy developed by both the board and the PR firm.

This is one of those times when the solution is staring us right in the face. Today you read the “sizzle”—in the next issue you’ll read about the “beef.” I would like to hear what you think.

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