Designing Pages for a Philatelic Exhibit

Create them by hand, use a computer, or mount you material in clear plastic stock pages. With Club Exhibiting, you get to choose what works best for your situation. Some of us are artistic and others have a foundation in computers. Those abilities are nice to have but should not limit others who desire to exhibit, but lack those tools. Remember, the story line is the primary mission. Everything else should be secondary.

If you would like exhibit pages created by a computer, speak to any of our club members who have offered to build them for you. Before contacting one of our computer gurus, consider the following ideas. Transitioning from analog to digital exhibit pages will become much easier for you and the person building your electronic pages.

Regardless how hard I try to construct pages without making changes, I find it an impossible task. My mind may see a graphic image that I think will tell a story, but when my eyes make contact with the paper, I know more work is necessary. I never met an exhibitor who said they made one set of exhibit pages, never made changes, never made mistakes, mounted their material correctly on the first attempt, and were good to go. The message here is simple. Don't wait to the last minute to get started. Your exhibit should be built in a series of progressive steps, allowing time to eliminate mistakes, and to change your mind without becoming frustrated.

I like to use four basic tools:
- a pencil (with a large eraser)
- a notebook
- several sheets of paper
- 2-pocket or 3-pocket Vario stock pages

The pencil draws lines to form boxes and words; the eraser changes them. A notebook is where you scribble notes to yourself, create new ideas, and keep a running record of what you need to do before your project is complete. Paper is where we transfer our ideas from a mental concept to a physical presence for positioning covers, stamps, and words. The Vario stock pages store the material we plan to exhibit. Use each pocket of the stock pages to represent a page in your exhibit, and put all the material for that page in the pocket. I like to index cards to create short notes reminding me what might be missing from specific pages; the index cards accompany the material.

Let's mention the first page of every exhibit. This is the last page should attempt to build. Forget the first title you thought of. By the time you finish this project, a new, and possibly better title will unfold. Most exhibits have a title, so this should appear on the Title Page. For Club Exhibiting, use this page to introduce your story, and tell the observer what they should learn from studying your exhibit. Say only enough to entice curiosity. You have nine pages to exhibit and most folks don't like to read long bulky paragraphs printed in small type. Use the K.I.S.S. (Keep it Simple, Stupid) approach. Say what is necessary and nothing more. If done well, those interested in your work will seek you out for more information.

Your Title Page could have a map, philatelic material or anything that gives your exhibit a boost. Many articles have been written on this subject. Organized exhibiting (the AAPE) is more stringent on what

you can and cannot do with the Title Page. You might want to ask club members, who are also WSP exhibitors what they believe should be included on a Title Page. But remember, Club Exhibiting allows you flexibility to be creative without taxing rules. When I read a little, see a little, and both the words and the visuals attract my curiosity, I want to know more.

Remove everything from your desk. Place the material you intend to exhibit into organized piles. Think of the piles as individual pages in your exhibit. Keep moving the material around until you are reasonably comfortable with the arrangement. This is your first connection with your story line, which becomes the visual others will see after the material is mounted. If you don't like it, chances are your audience won't either. Adjust the arrangement to match the story. If that is not possible, you just discovered a problem with your story and need to address it -- now. Leave the arrangement on the table for several hours (or days). This will help you critique the work. Well, if you leave the material roughly arranged on your desk, and return later, you might see where improvements need to be made before continuing to the next step.

Pick up each pile of stamps and place them into individual stock page pockets. I try to keep them in the same order they will appear in the exhibit. So, the first pocket holds material for the Title Page, the second pocket is assigned to the next page, and so on. You might number the pockets to make it easier when it is time to grab the material for mounting. For single stamps, I place them neatly into 5-3/8 x 3-1/4 inch manila stock cards, and slide the cards into glassine envelopes. Manila stock cards allow you to make notes about the stamps (like the catalogue numbers, or types) to help you remember why they are necessary to the exhibit. Covers can slip into clear plastic sleeves. Expanded notes can be written on index cards and tucked away with covers. Whatever it takes to protect your material while stored in the stock pages, do that.
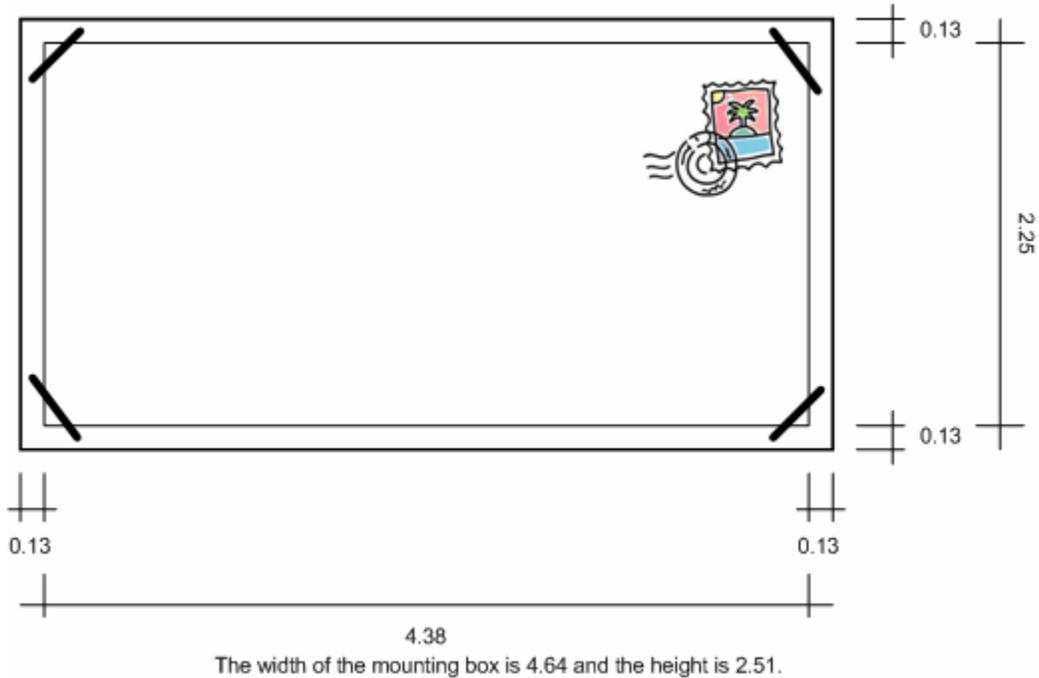
You have come a long way and accomplished more than you may realize. You are also nicely organized and read to continue. I begin with the second page. Place a piece of paper in front of you, remove the material from the proper stock page pocket, and grab your pencil. Again, arrange the material to best tell your story. Draw boxes on the paper to correspond with the stamps and covers arranged on your desk. The hand-drawn boxes do not need to be perfect, just approximate to the size of each stamp and cover you intend to mount.

Now, here is where you want to pay particular attention to detail. To obtain finished boxes that comfortably fit around the material you intend to display, carefully measure, and record the width and height of each item. You then pencil-in those measurements at the top and side of the hand-drawn boxes, but before you do, remember to include these:

- Convert you measurements into decimals. For example, 2-1/4 inches should be written as: 2.25 (computers won't accept fractions)
  Note: When using a calculator, do this to convert a fraction… for 1/4-inch, the result of .25 would be 1 divided by 4 equals (0.25).
- There must be "some" white space between the inside edge of your boxed lines and the outer edges of the material being mounted. Add 1/8-inch (0.13) to the width and height of your initial measurements. If you don't like 1/8-inch, select a different amount. Be consistent. Applying different amounts can be distracting to your audience.
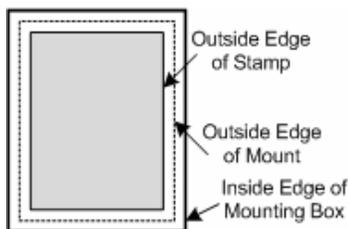
Always check the measurements twice to prevent repeating this task. Here is where your notebook becomes important. Make a note saying that your "standard" amount of white space between ruled

borders and stamps or covers is 1/8-inch (0.13). If you don't think this step is important, wait until you forget the amount you determined for a cover on the second page and are forced to repeat the task, because you are now mounting a cover on the ninth page and can't remember your original measurement.

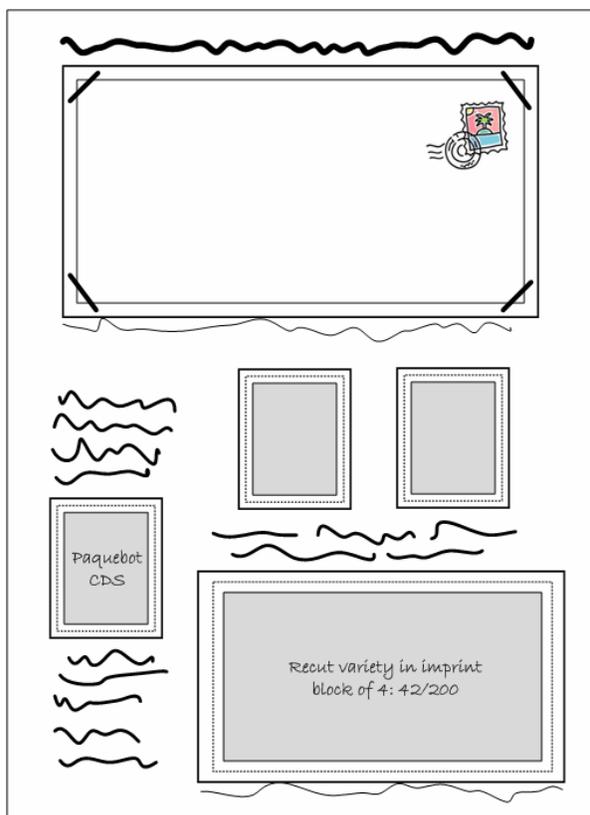The width of the mounting box is 4.64 and the height is 2.51.

   I learned that all covers need to be measured, even if they appear to be the same size. Usually they are not because they do not always have corners at ninety degree angles. Similarly, individual stamps that look to be the same size might not be. Pick the largest stamp from a series and find a mount that it fits into without stress. Provide equal space around the stamp while it is inside the mount, then cut the mount. An X-acto knife and straight-edge or guillotine style mount cutter does the job nicely. Cut enough mounts for each stamp of that same size in your exhibit.

   Here is where you determine the finished box size for stamps (inside mounts). Go back to the "white space" measurement we discussed earlier and apply it to your box size, but the measurement should be from the space between the inside edge of your boxed lines to the outer edges of the mount.

   Some guidelines from APS/AAPE exhibiting seem applicable to Club Exhibiting. For example, a cover rests better on a page if it is mounted at the top of the page with stamps and text under it. Unused stamps should precede used stamps. Pages should be balanced when possible. But you, the exhibitor, must decide what is best for your story.

   Here is where you switch gears, pick up a pencil, and imagine where text might be placed. You do not need to write the actual text, just imagine where it will go. Scribble some lines on the page to represent text placement. Remember the page title is larger than the body text, which is larger than caption text. Always add a caption under covers in a smaller point size than the body text.

Paquebot
CDS

Recut variety in imprint
block of 4: 42/200

There is much more to discuss about the aesthetics associated with page design, but that is for another WorkShop.

As you can see from the example, our page is taking shape and we can sense its purpose. Repeat the previous steps until all pages are in this stage of development. Remember to return material to the correct page protector pockets when you have finished working with them. And, remember to return every item to the pocket.

Those of us using computer graphic software, scanners, and page composition software get a real sense of satisfaction at this level of development because we bypass the box drawing and scribbling. Everything I mentioned previously can be created electronically. Using a computer's mouse as a pencil, scanning stamps and images, then placing them on a page is fun. Text is added separately.

Moving text and images is fast and simple, so changing you mind is not an issue. Because you are using scanned images of covers and stamps, you quickly see the "would be" finished design on your computer screen. I like to print mine and arrange them (using rubber cement (mucilage)) on a piece of craft board the same size as our exhibit frames (30 x 36). Make three rows with three pages across. Now you get a visual for the entire exhibit before you glue anything down on finished exhibit pages. Study the exhibit. Move things around to refine balance – now you're cooking!

Earlier, I mentioned you should build sample pages of your exhibit before asking the computer dudes or dudettes to help you. Now you see how easy it would be for them to build boxes to the exact sizes you want, and add text.

Those using computers discover they can delete the scanned images from their working set of pages, keep the boxes and text, then do a "Save As" to quickly create a new file containing a set of master pages. They use the master pages to mount the material.

Everything mentioned in this article can be accomplished with or without a computer. Some of the most beautiful exhibits I have seen were created by hand. If you use a computer, remember to manage you philatelic material, not replace it with scanned images. The actual philatelic material is paramount in all forms of exhibiting. Electronic exhibiting is for a future discussion.