



# THE PHILATELIC COMMUNICATOR

Journal of American Philatelic Society Writers Unit #30

On the Web: [www.wu30.org](http://www.wu30.org)

Second Quarter 2007

## Creating Digital References and Studies

*The challenge to design philatelic literature rivaling or bettering printed resources.*

By Francis Adams

My philatelic bookshelf is never wide enough for the number of reference books I aspire to. Binders with magazine cuttings don't fit and it never fails that some articles end up in the recesses of a bottom drawer, never to be found when needed. The question becomes: "How can I maintain a single philatelic reference, with as much information as possible included, for a collecting interest?"

Over the past few years, I've been working with digital exhibits and, as an outgrowth of that, digitizing articles of interest seemed a logical thing to do in attempting to assemble an electronic reference for each interest area. Early efforts didn't work; a growing stable of electronic data became an organizational problem — not much different than the paper world. Thinking someone else must have solved the problem, I stumbled through the world of electronic philatelic references looking for guidance as to what a digital reference should be and how it could be assembled.

As a novice, I decided to review different methods including CDs and DVDs, Web sites, and online exhibits. My conclusion is: There is amazingly little information or consensus on what a digital reference should look like or how to assemble diverse information to make it reasonably useful, but mainly, conveniently available electronically. I've likely missed something and I'll know as soon as this is published and someone says, "Well, why didn't you read XYZ?"

The most directly associated guideline I've found on electronic formatted documents is the current Mega-Event Digital Philatelic Study (DPS) rules and entry form ([www.ASDAONLINE.COM/](http://www.ASDAONLINE.COM/)



Information should be clearly and logically presented.

INDEX.PHP?ID=65). A second source with some how-to information on using FlipAlbum software is *Self-Publishing on a Dime* by Peter Elias (*PHILATELIC COMMUNICATOR*, First Quarter 2005). A third source dealing with Web sites and other forms of onscreen presentations is *Let's Get Visual!* by Albert W. Starkweather (*PHILATELIC COMMUNICATOR*, Second Quarter 2006), and finally, albeit not specific to electronic formats, is the philatelic literature judging document ([www.STAMPS.ORG/DIRECTORIES/DIR\\_LITJUDGING.PDF](http://www.STAMPS.ORG/DIRECTORIES/DIR_LITJUDGING.PDF)) found on the APS Web site.

Let's start with definitions.

In my mind, a digital reference is something akin to an encyclopedia on a subject and a digital

study is a short work on a specific facet of a subject. The Mega-Event defines the term *Digital Philatelic Study* as: "A DPS is an electronic file or set of files that tells a philatelic story, such as the change from traditional to pictorial designs in British Caribbean Colonies, the Pony Express, or mail from the Crimean war. It combines elements of journal articles, exhibits, and PowerPoint presentations into a final electronic presentation form (i.e., PowerPoint file, PDF file, etc.). Like an article, the primary focus is on the story as it is told, but, like an exhibit or PowerPoint presentation, the emphasis is placed on the illustrations with the text as supplementary."

Although that definition reflects both references (the Pony Express) and studies (mail from the Crimean War) in my opinion, it's close enough to my end goal with two exceptions: (1) Illustrations and text should be balanced and (2) I want to include

Continued on Page 14

**Ballot for 2007 WU #30 Elections Enclosed**

## Digital Creation — Continued from Cover

background data, checklists, maps, etc. beyond what may typically be found in the DPS examples I've seen so far.

Some DPS examples resemble exhibits and others don't; it apparently is a matter of personal taste or final objective for format and content. Examples of previous DPS submissions to the Mega-Event can be found online at the ASDA Web site ([WWW.ASDAONLINE.COM/INDEX.PHP?ID=57](http://WWW.ASDAONLINE.COM/INDEX.PHP?ID=57)). Using the Mega-Event DPS rules, the overall structure, purpose and components for a digital philatelic reference/study are now better defined.

Keep in mind that per Mega-Event rules, a DPS doesn't have to be a one person show. The power of comprehensiveness lies in collaboration between collectors of the same area, each contributing to the whole work. Another interesting facet is the ability to include material you do

not own to demonstrate points you might not be able to demonstrate using only material from your personal collection. This option opens up a world of possibilities allowing research and knowledge to be presented without steep material acquisition costs.

With the *what* being addressed to some degree, let's look at the *how*. The nuts and bolts of *how-to* is variable depending on your goal. The items you'll need are: (1) Hardware — your computer and access to a scanner or digital camera; (2) Software — either word processing software (MS Word), or Presentation software (MS PowerPoint), or Page Layout software (Adobe InDesign); (3) Time (each of us has some); (4) Philatelic material — your collection and other scans; (5) Information and knowledge of the subject area; and (6) Supplies — ink, labels, CDs, and DVDs). All but one of these items is straightforward; most people have misgivings about No. 2. You believe you need to be an expert user of PowerPoint or whatever software you have, right?

Doing a Google search for "free PowerPoint tutorial," I found a large number of quick lessons that were graphical and *free*. I've used free online graphic tutorials and they do help. Other resources are the local adult education classes, or, if you're really having trouble and need an in-house expert, ask the grandkids! (EDITOR'S NOTE: Most high-end programs come with online tutorials. The *Dummies* series (Wiley Publishing, Inc.; [WWW.DUMMIES.COM](http://WWW.DUMMIES.COM)) and *Visual Quickstart Guides* (Peachpit Press; [WWW.PEACHPIT.COM](http://WWW.PEACHPIT.COM)) books are also excellent resources.) Another consideration is publication production costs. If you burn a CD for distribution and add a plastic case with a printed label, a single finished CD is less than \$3 for materials, including label, printer ink, and electricity.

I'd like to encourage all exhibitors and collectors to share their knowledge by building electronic exhibits, digital philatelic studies, and/or reference documents using whichever method with which they are most comfortable. Each method has its own benefits and

practicalities, familiarity with the software used being a main one.

For my goal of developing a digital philatelic reference, I personally decided to learn and use XHTML (eXtensible HyperText Markup Language) as my goals include (1) making the reference universal across Windows and Macintosh computers, (2) readable using any Web browser software (MS Internet Explorer, Firefox, etc.), and (3) readily shared via the Internet. You can use most any software to produce your document. If you save your shiny new document in PDF (portable document format), it will be readable across computer platforms with the free Adobe PDF reader software most every computer user has. (EDITOR'S NOTE: In addition to working seamlessly on Windows and Macintosh computers, Acrobat is also available for Palm Pilot, Pocket PC, and Nokia Symbian for its Communicator 9500 series and 9210/9290 devices. The handheld devices are ideal for accessing data at shows or other

places where a traditional computer is unavailable. Adobe is promising to release a Linux version in the near future.)

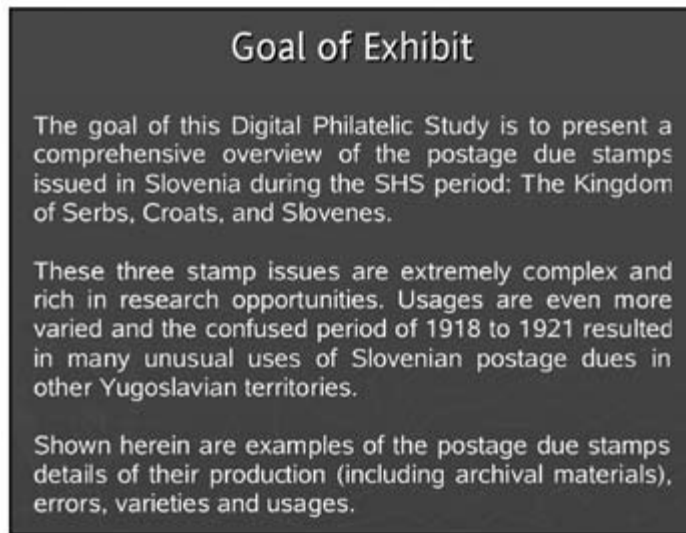
The following list is not a step-by-step procedure, but rather some points I've come to recognize as being helpful in my efforts. Bear in mind that this *tip list* is not specifically Mega-Event criteria, nor is every factor included; but, it may be helpful to those starting out with their own digital efforts.

### 1. The Three Keys

- The viewer is king: Understanding viewers' desires to learn leads to a useful digital reference tool or DPS.
- Clearly define the document's title, purpose and objectives on the entry page.
- Don't make me think — show me.

### 2. Viewer-Centric

- The document should be free of needless distractions. Keep the viewer's interest in a positive way.
- A document's simplicity lets viewers concentrate on content.
- Uncluttered layout, which is pleasing to the eye, promotes comprehension.
- Include a table of contents with a brief description of each main section.
- An index is very useful in larger documents as it allows viewers to easily find pages of interest. Linking directly to each main section is helpful.
- A *help* page is great for explaining navigation methods and other features within a document.
- Inclusion of advertising and commercial notices should not overpower content.
- If such technology as Adobe Flash is used for an entry page, allow visitors to *skip* to the main content.



Clear goals help both the creator and user.

### 3. Ease of Use

- Organize and present your knowledge in a way that supports the learning process. As this is a new medium, experimental approaches are expected.
- No portion of a document should be password protected: the goal is unhindered access.
- Allow access to content without making the viewer go through a number of steps or registration.
- Do not include multiple entry pages or a long path to content — one or two clicks is best.
- A viewer should be able to go directly to any main section from the index or table of contents.
- Include a function to return to the table of contents or index from every page in the document.
- Long pages should have a *top of page* function at the bottom, or at regular intervals, on very long pages.

### 4. Hardware Compatibility and Software Coding

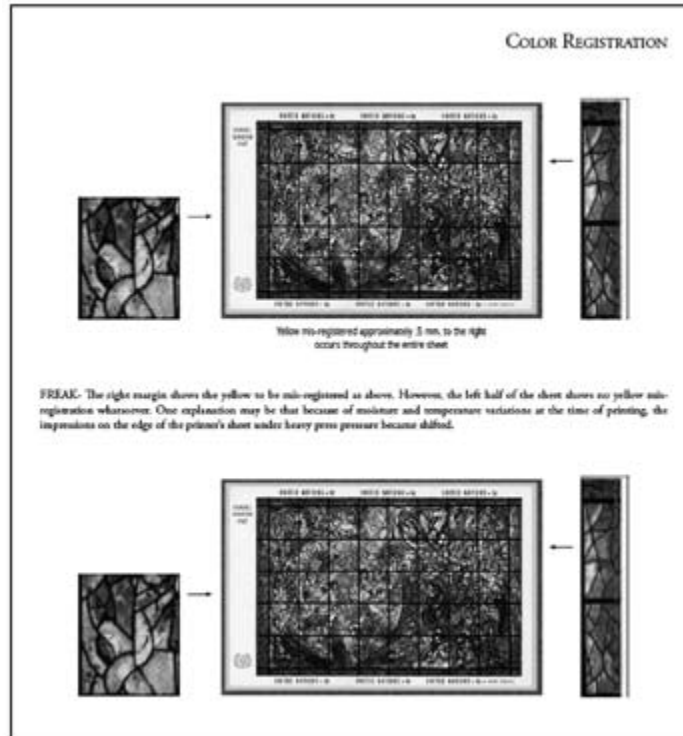
- The document should not freeze or crash viewers' computers.
- Documents should maintain reasonable presentation, regardless of hardware type or software version.
- Coding and scripts (HTML, Javascript, etc.) must work as intended and no code fragments should be visible.
- Do not use cursor trailers, comet cursors, or any uncommonly used software plug-ins.
- There should be no forced software downloads. Use standard software such as Flash Player.
- If using Flash, balance the speed, text-images, brightness-level, color contrast, and sound-volume.
- Functions only available with the latest hardware or software are OK. Include links so users can download newer versions of such software as Acrobat, if necessary. Functions should degrade gracefully, not affecting a document's usability on older systems.

### 5. Navigation

- Have a clearly visible navigation system, standardized throughout the document.
- The navigation system should be flawless, with no broken links.
- Color encoded sections markers are fine; maintain consistency.
- Links should be named, or have tool tips, so it's clearly understood where the link is going.
- When using alternate navigation methods to enhance navigation, remain consistent.

### 6. Layout

- Ensure the viewers know where they are in the document by including header and footer information.



Generous spacing makes complex material appear less dense.

- All pages should be laid out in a consistent manner, unless the subject demands specific treatment.
- Subject or section schemes should match throughout the document and not change from page to page.
- Maintain the same color or graphic background on all pages within sections.
- Harmony between text, graphics, and page colors is a good thing.
- Avoid too much information on one page.
- Allow for ample margins and white space around text and graphics.
- Horizontal scrolling to view content not in the window is undesirable. Vertical scrolling is fine.

### 7. Interactivity

- If software allows embedding active text and graphic links in documents, take advantage of that option.
- Use tool-tip windows to convey supplemental information such as explanations of abbreviations, etc.
- Make hyperlink buttons large enough to be used easily.
- Include an option to turn music or sound off and make the option obvious, easy, and quick to select.
- Do not rely on sound to convey information. Sound is an optional feature to enhance the document.

### 8. Text in an On-Screen Environment

- Choose a common font for Windows and Macintosh as special fonts can affect your presentation. Some optimized fonts for computer screens include Arial, Georgia, Verdana and Times. (EDITOR'S NOTE: The newer OpenType format, developed jointly by Adobe and Microsoft, allows fonts to be embedded in Adobe and other programs that are universally readable on different platforms.)
- Text must be easily readable and not too large, not too small. Colored backgrounds should be selected with text legibility in mind. Graphic backdrops are generally undesirable.
- Do not use *CoOl WrItiNg*, blinking text, or text on animated backgrounds. Scrolling text (marquees) are also passé.
- Text should not be in multiple colors unless for a specific use such as headers.
- Text should have good contrast with the screen background for visually impaired viewers. (EDITOR'S NOTE: Designers should be aware of color deficient (colorblind) users. One site

Continued on Page 16



## Digital Creation — Continued from Page 15

offering a convenient way to test your output is [WWW.COLORLAB.WICKLINE.ORG/COLORBLIND/COLORLAB](http://WWW.COLORLAB.WICKLINE.ORG/COLORBLIND/COLORLAB).)

- Use bold type only to emphasize a word or a few words.
- Use italics sparingly as they sometimes display with difficulty on computer screens.
- If hyperlinks are underlined, do not use underlines as text decoration. Underlines are passé for emphasizing text; bold or italics work better.
- Do not use lazy abbreviations such as *U* instead of *you*.

### 9. Textual Content

- Use your spell check to minimize spelling errors.
- If available, the automatic grammar checker can assist with correcting mistakes.
- Don't use unfamiliar words; if you do, include a definitions page.
- Translations of foreign language markings, etc. are encouraged.
- Do the research to ensure accuracy.
- If it is new information, say so.
- If you have open questions or need information, include a page with that need.

### 10. Graphic Images

- The document should not consist of only graphic images. Textual descriptions are absolutely necessary.
- Images should include original size information if various sized items exist with identical designs.
- Constructed or composite images should be described as such.
- All images must load properly.
- Images should not be blurry or too small to illustrate the point.
- Color images are great, but optimize images to ensure minimal loading time.
- Images should be relevant to the theme and have a purpose.
- Do not include cute graphics only because you like them.
- Ensure icon images are large enough to communicate the idea behind their purpose.
- Include animations, but use them carefully.
- Limit movie clips due to file size.

### 11. File Formats

- Use Portable Document Format (PDF) files when possible.
  - a. PDF files may be generated directly within Adobe Creative Suite and Microsoft Office applications.
  - b. Adobe Acrobat Reader is a free download.
  - c. PDF documents display correctly on Windows and Macintosh, as well as hand-held devices.
  - d. PDF documents allow a document to include embedded special fonts.

- Microsoft Word and PowerPoint have third party viewers.
- Documents built with XHTML are universal on all hardware using any Web browser software.
- Illustrations are best viewed as GIFs (graphic image format) and photographs as JPGs.



Tool-tip provides translation of German text.

## 12. Electronic Files

- The electronic document's file name should be simple.
- Electronic files should include the date the document was last updated or revised.
- Version numbers are helpful when discussing changes.
- A list of newly added information or features is often useful for long-time readers.
- Files contain invisible data (metadata) for search purposes, incorporate such data when possible.
- CDs and DVDs should be enclosed in a protective case with a label.

- CDs and DVDs should be clearly identifiable when removed from their protective case.
- Consider file size carefully. Is it only available on CD or DVD, on the Internet, or also via e-mail?

## 13. Printed Materials

- If also available in printed format, ensure the typeface is appropriate for printed materials.
- Consider the printed pagination before designing the electronic document.
- Some documents may be made available in two formats, one for screen and one for printing.
- Instructions on using the electronic media are useful.
- Include instructions on the CD label or the inside the case cover.
- CD labels should be clearly legible.

## 14. Internet

- The document should not be dependent on a connection to the Internet to function.
- Live hyperlinks to Web sites on the Internet may be included on a CD. Note that the computer must be connected to the Internet for them to function properly.
- Live hyperlinks to Web sites on the Internet are treated as strictly supplemental information.
- Hyperlinks to Web sites should open in new windows indicating a change to a different source.
- Hyperlinks to Web sites should complement the document subject and content.

## 15. Credits and Administrative Info

- A clear statement declaring copyright notices and/or attributions is required. Protect your work; [HTTP://WHATISCOPYRIGHT.ORG](http://WHATISCOPYRIGHT.ORG), [HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG](http://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG).

- Use of graphics not produced by the author is acceptable provided permission and credits are included.
- Identify if a graphic or text is in the public domain.
- Including a bibliography of sources of your information is useful to viewers.
- Make your document freely available in at least a minimal format. This is not saying that you should not charge for the full version.
- Consider adding your document to a Web site as that helps with distribution.
- Reading about the author is interesting, but screen personal information before publication.
- Make it easy to contact you, by including your e-mail address or Web site.

## 16. Beta Testing

- Before releasing your masterpiece to the public, have friends check it for embarrassing errors, broken links, and poor performance on both Windows and Macintosh platforms.
  - Both expert and novice computer users should check the document's ease of use.
  - Accept feedback and suggestions for improvement gracefully.
- I'm not sure my digital reference will ever be *completely* finished, but that's inherent in the process of information gathering. There's satisfaction in knowing I can continue the journey at my own pace and skill level, plus it's a great outlet for my creative side. I share my digital reference on the Internet and once in a while, I get an e-mail with information on a new stamp release or some other facet of the area. Other collectors are sharing with me as well.

## The Future

The future of digital philatelic exhibiting should be bright, although it is fraught with fears of Photoshop fakes, concerns of ownership, verification, or just plain reluctance to include this exhibiting method in the hobby's future. Digital philatelic studies, simply put, are electronic literature. This new breed of literature has far fewer *issues*. DPS rules bypass the fears in digital philatelic

exhibiting, while literature is inherently a collection of information from all sources, regardless of ownership. As the DPS is a completely new development, it owes little to established philatelic competitions and can develop on its own terms, changing its rules as appropriate to accommodate the future.

More and more collectors are becoming familiar with computers and more proficient with various software programs.

Our ability to share information is faster and easier with higher speed connections to the Internet. The avalanche of digital exhibits and title or synopsis pages being posted to the Web today is a good indication that this medium is here to stay and becoming very popular, very quickly.

With the hobby seemingly diminishing, maybe this is another way to help ensure its future among younger generations. Perhaps digital materials for simple studies might also be offered free through our societies and the participants encouraged

to craft them, in their own fashion, into new and exciting formats. Youngsters love computers and being creative. With a little luck, it'll be fun and they will continue with more serious projects, building on the experience and methods of others until we finally have intelligent digital philatelic reference tools that talk to us and search through libraries, etc. on our behalf.

The dream is there for the grasping. So, when can we look forward to seeing your digital effort? 

---

*Francis Adams (FRAN@FRANADAMS.COM), a WU #30 member since 2005, is mainly a collector and exhibitor of thematic subjects. His current efforts are aimed at learning how to combine the hobby of philately and computer technology to produce digital exhibits and literature references for his collecting interest areas (WWW.BONEANDSTONE.COM). He is a member of many national philatelic societies and especially enjoys working with the San Diego Exhibitor's Workshop. Adams is also Web site administrator for the Old World Archaeological Study Unit (WWW.OWASU.ORG).*

---

## Expert Help for Writers, Editors


Two notable members of Writers Unit #30 are offering expert help for writers and editors.

Barth Healey, a senior staff editor at the *New York Times*, will review society journals and other publications, providing constructive comments.

Send two or three recent issues to him at 220 Montauk Hwy., Apt. 16, P. O. Box 277, Speonk NY 11972-0277. Please supply return postage.

Past president Charles J. Peterson offers free critiques for periodicals and books / manuscripts. Submit the four most recent issues. Include postage equivalent to four times the first class mailing fee. Any unused amount will be returned. Critiques can be expected in about 30 days.

Inquire before sending books and manuscripts, providing a brief description. Return time will vary, depending on length and other commitments. Include a SASE.

Send your materials to Peterson at P. O. Box 5559, Laurel, MD 20226. His phone is 301-776-9822; e-mail CJP7777@AOL.COM. 



Graphic enlargements should indicate the original size.