

A Roadmap for Rebuilding Specialty Societies

By Michael Bloom

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As president of a specialty society, I've had the opportunity to focus on my own society, the International Society of Guatemala Collectors, in an effort to restore its vitality. What follows is a roadmap that worked for us. Since its implementation, the ISGC has grown by 30% in membership, has a renewed sense of purpose and created a buzz in the general philatelic community. While using examples from our society, what follows is a roadmap that can be followed by anyone.

The Initial Commitment

As a society board member, I attended a number of annual meetings. The meetings followed a predictable pattern and there was always an opportunity to consider fresh ideas, of which there were many. But, from year to year, nothing of

consequence seemed to happen. The membership report always showed a decrease. The Society organized in 1948 and had a healthy history of publications and research, a great newsletter and



highly motivated leadership – but no strategic plan. Still, for a society representing collectors of stamps of a small Central American country it had “good bones.”

A small group of the most active board members got together and realized that the organization needed to grow and formed a committee called “The Guatemala Project 2020 Committee” and appointed a committee chair.

This committee formation step is key to accomplishing everything that follows in this article. With the board's consent the Project 2020 group committed to:

- 1) Meeting monthly, via video conferencing.
- 2) Having a detailed agenda.
- 3) Taking direct action, subject to board approval.
- 4) Spending money to achieve its goals.
- 5) Analyzing the results of our efforts.

The committee looked at every aspect of the society. Each issue of the quarterly newsletter includes reports on the committee's efforts.

Branding

We clearly saw a need to market two distinct concepts: 1) collect Guatemalan stamps; and 2) join the society. Like any marketing campaign, we realized we needed a consistent image, a “brand.” The brand would need a key phrase and key image.

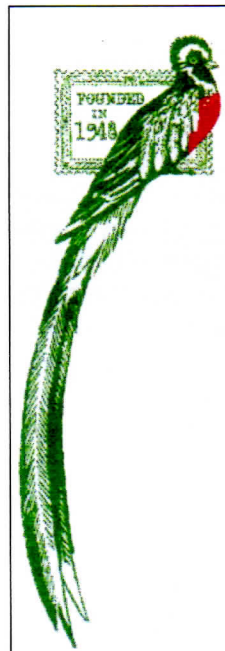
Our key phrase became “got Guatemala?” This phrase needed to appear on our correspondence, articles and advertisements. It eventually appeared on the front cover of the March 2019 issue of *The American Philatelist*. Our key image is our logo. The original logo, from 1948, is an elongated vertical mainly monochromatic (green) quetzal bird. The logo was very hard to use in print, banners and the website. The new logo would be square and multicolored.

It's not enough to have a consistent brand; some form of marketing outreach is necessary. This boils down to media advertising, editorial contributions, such as articles, printed collateral materials and website development. Each of these will be considered separately.

Advertising

While the society has a treasury, the funds were somewhat

limited. A budget was established that would, knowingly, decrease the treasury, but through increased membership, would become sustainable over time.



Left: Old logo.

Above: New logo.

Below: Specially branded and focused advertising for the philatelic press.

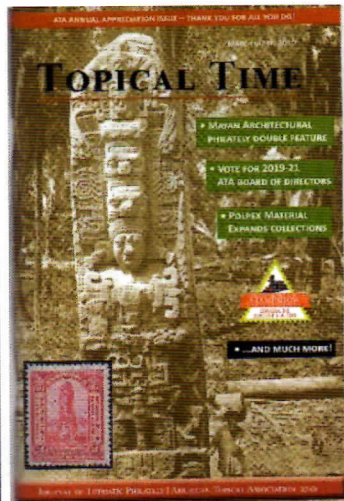
got guatemala?

- Start collecting Guatemala now!
- Inexpensive. Even rarities are affordable.
- “El Quetzal” sent quarterly

Join I.S.G.C.

www.GuatemalaStamps.com

- Terrific English-language specialized catalogs
- Meet other Guatemala collectors
- Try something new



Multi-Media Online Offerings

What started out as a PowerPoint I was creating on collecting Guatemala, took a very different course. It became a YouTube video called, naturally, *got Guatemala?* and runs about 18 minutes in length. Fully narrated, the video can be used as a stand-alone stamp club program. Just search for *got Guatemala?* on YouTube, or go to www.GuatemalaStamps.org and click on the link on the home page. The APS then took the video, re-narrated it and added it to its online on-demand course offerings.



Shown above is an image taken from the video.

Recently, the Rocky Mountain Stamp Show (formerly known as Rompex) conducted a day-long seminar on the stamps of Central and South America and produced a number of high-quality videos based on the seminars. One of our society members had written a series of articles on the forgeries of Guatemala, and the RMSS produced a video of his seminar about those forgeries.

Website Development

Today, most potential new members will learn about your society on the World Wide Web. All APS affiliates should have a website and put effort into the content of the website. This article is too limited in scope to go into detail on this topic, but there are some essentials worth noting. First, there must be someone – not necessarily a stamp collec-

tor – who can manage and update the website. The URL, or address of the website should indicate what the society does. Our URL was www.GuatemalaStamps.com. We've added www.GuatemalaStamps.org to indicate its non-profit status. There should be just enough information for non-members to whet their appetites for more, but there should also be a members-only section with rich content. This content should contain rare material not available anywhere else. The website should make joining, membership renewal and payments easy.

Even the best websites are of little use if they are not found while searching via Google and other search engines. Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, is a process of using key words in the text and embedded tabs to help search engines find your website. Some effort should be made to assure that the website ranks well in organic searches on Google, Edge and Bing. The APS has a service where websites of affiliates can be reviewed at no cost.

Help from the APS

When a collector joins APS, the information on the application includes the collecting interests of the applicant. The APS membership department can provide a mailing list and labels to affiliates sorted by interest area. When the Guatemala society asked for labels, we received labels for APS members expressing interest in 1) Guatemala, 2) Central America, and 3) Latin America. Note that for privacy reasons email addresses are not provided. Plan on sending your brochure and a cover letter.

Stamp Shows and Exhibiting

Exhibits at stamp shows draw attention to the specialty material offered by APS affiliates. The society leadership can encourage members to exhibit by offering to transport exhibits to shows the exhibitor might not attend and to publish exhibits on the society's website.

Societies are welcomed to set up tables at World Series of Philately stamp shows. Table rates are highly discounted compared to dealer booths. Just be sure to have enough volunteer coverage of the tables so that they are not left vacant. Most societies have annual meetings, and this is a great opportunity to be a convening society at one of the WSP shows. Consider inviting other closely related societies to convene at the same



show. As a convening society you can offer special awards to exhibitors in the society's area of specialty.

Stamp shows sometimes have literature competitions. You can submit your journal without the expense of attending the shows. Our society will participate at competitions in China, Argentina, Italy and the United Kingdom.

We now have clear steps in our roadmap for promoting the society's philatelic focus and for promoting the society itself. Now we need to consider the sustainability of the society over time. Here we focus on two areas of sustainability: 1) sustainability of leadership and 2) financial sustainability.

Sustainability and Leadership

Continuity and sustainability of leadership is rarely discussed and can be a sensitive topic. We've all seen organizations disintegrate when the leadership core crumbles. This can be due to age, infirmity or unwillingness to continue serving in leadership roles. The current leadership should always be on the lookout for new talent and energy. The kinds of outreach described in this roadmap are likely to put current leaders in contact with potential leaders. As new meaningful tasks present themselves, don't automatically assign them to the current leadership core. Assign them to new leaders. In the online and in-person meetings, courtesy and respect are key. Keep the meetings to an hour or less. Plan social activities at the annual meetings to help the leadership core bond.

**Advertise Where You
Get the Most Visibility**

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with the ASDA**

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& Collector Magazine*

- ASDA Website
- An ASDA eBlast
- Facebook Post [®]

• **ASDA Stamp Show Program**

To schedule your ads and for more information,
contact Cathy at cathy@americanstampdealer.com

Our design team is ready to help you promote your business.

We ARE the Hobby Builders!
Advertising that works!

Financial Sustainability

We need to find balance between spending our limited society's funds for the sake of growth and saving for a rainy day. Our society committed to spending down some of the treasury in the short term for the sake of long-term growth. Still, there is a fiduciary responsibility to assure funding for the future. Each society will need some sort of fundraising effort. One way to do this is through auctions. Some specialty material is donated to the society with 100% of proceeds going to the society. In other cases, the society receives only a commission based on consigned materials.



The biggest mistake societies make is in not asking for donations. Society board members should be expected to donate according to their ability to do so. Some board members might be willing to provide matching grants. Some society publications can be sold.

Outreach Beyond our Shores

Many APS affiliates have only a smattering of members outside the United States and a specialty country. The Guatemala society knew that many Guatemala collectors live in Germany, but there are few German members. An effort is now underway to change that through publication of articles in the German philatelic press. A society member in Germany suggested which publications to approach and has contact with editors of these publications. One of our prolific authors wrote an English-language article with emphasis on ties between Guatemala and Germany. We funded a translator to translate the article and then sent the translated article to a German member for a "philatelic edit." At present, the article has been submitted for publication.

Bylaws – Bring Them Up to Date

Discussions and decision-making are done in real time during monthly video conferences. Most bylaws are antiquated in that they do not allow votes to be taken except by in-person meetings and mail. While executing this roadmap consider revising outdated bylaws.

Not all elements of this road map can be – or should be – adopted by each society. The key is to have a strategic vision for the society, a custom road map and to be committed to its implementation. 