

# What A Tangled Web We Weave!!

I wonder just how many stamp dealers reading this have an active, regularly updated internet website??

We are just about to enter the 21st Century, and sadly the answer to the above question would be "pitifully few".

Why not?? Even a dealer doing mostly fairs, or having a retail shop should expose their material, location, services and specialties to a national, indeed global audience.

There are VERY few dealers reading this who do not accept credit cards, and if you accept cards, you can VERY happily do good business on the internet. Oddly, the UK and many parts of Europe, are years behind North American and the Australasian stamp dealers in respect to on-line selling.

I run a one man business from home. No staff, no fairs, no retail shop. I would be broke today without e-mail and the Internet. Despite having no staff, I have the largest stamp dealing business in Sydney. This is because e-mail and a website truly make the WORLD a stamp dealer's market, not just a radius of 2 miles from a retail shop, which was previously the case!

Things move fast in the "real" world, but sadly the stamp dealers do not usually move apace with that real world. This has always been the case.

## FIRST FAX MACHINE

I remember clearly in the early 1980s I was the very first stamp dealer in Australia to install a fax machine. Now these days a fax is such a basic necessity of home or business we all take it for granted, but back some 20 years ago that was not the case. It was nearly space age leading edge technology back then! Rocket science stuff.

I had been working for a very large international record company before I ventured out into my own stamp business. The recording industry as it happened was a international pioneer in the use of fax communications. Sure, we had the telex girl in her little office, with 2 very busy machines, but in a few years she was redundant. Remember telexes??? Anyone remember those quaint things called "telegrams"? Those are all history now... you CANNOT send a telegram via Australia Post. Ancient history. But I can fax or email my local Post Office!

When I first got a fax machine most other dealers literally had to ask what it was and how it worked. I will not name names, but there are still a few old style dealers in Australasia, and overseas, that come this Millennium do not YET have a fax machine.

And there lies this story.

If you are a stamp dealer come the year 2000 and do not have an e-mail address you are missing the boat. That is the simple scenario. The real world is just passing you by. The same does not apply as much for COLLECTORS, but think about it - it is not much different. I have 1000's of collectors and dealers to whom I e-mail monthly specials - I'll gladly add you to the list if you drop me a note: [Stevo@AustralasianStamps.com](mailto:Stevo@AustralasianStamps.com)



Warwick Delamore is our NZ columnist. He e-mails all his copy and photos each month. His Auckland City Stamps color catalogue is fully on-line at [www.nzstamps.com](http://www.nzstamps.com)

And if a dealer does NOT have an internet website, he is not far behind. These things are NOT flashy yuppie gimmicks. They are business essentials in this, the dawn of this new Century. Auction houses are loading their entire sale catalogues on a website. Colour photos and all. Soon many will NOT post you a printed copy.

I now get about 40-50 e-mails a day. A year ago it was only 5 or 10. Most can be answered with a sentence or two, in seconds. You then have a permanent record. You can look in seconds for an e-mail sent or received 6 months ago by date or by name, and print it out or relay it. No more lost paper files or faxes. I can sit in a hotel or airline Business lounge overseas whilst travelling and access and answer all my email messages via [mymail.com.au](http://mymail.com.au).

I travel a lot. Without a laptop. There are now "cyber cafes" in virtually every city on earth where you can do the same. In the past 12 months for a dollar or so an hour in Hanoi Vietnam, Luang Prabang Laos, and Cuzco Peru this has been simple ... and these are "3rd World" regions. I will see in the Millennium aboard a Russian icebreaker within the



Antarctic circle. The daily email will still be accessible via satellite.

You can send and receive e-mail text in rainbow colours or in fancy fonts. I bought a Eudora "Pro 4" program to do this... cost was about \$40, or you can download it free on line! You can send and receive gifs and JPEG's and images of stamps and documents. All instantly, fast, and for PEANUTS. All at a tiny fraction of what a fax will cost.

I have had many feature stories on the front page of *Linns Stamp News* and *Stamp Wholesaler* etc, where the photo element has been scanned in this office on a \$200 scanner in full colour, or scanned by editor Jenni Gormley, and e-mailed to the USA in milli-seconds, and appeared in sharp colour a few days later in print. Wonderful technology, that costs only cents to use.

As Executive Editor of this magazine, I can confirm most of the editorial for it is submitted by e-mail. Leading dealers do this like Michael Eastick, Gary Watson, Warwick Delamore in NZ, etc. A writer in the USA or the UK or NZ e-mails the copy so there are no "typos", and no mistakes unless the author makes them!! Many of the ads are e-mailed too. You can see the front cover of our next ASM magazine here in full colour at: [www.GlenStephens.com/asm.html](http://www.GlenStephens.com/asm.html)

## SHORT, SHARP AND SWEET

I have a BIG tip here for those of you who have not yet signed up for an e-mail address. Select a SHORT name, and an easy to remember one, and sign up with a MAJOR isp server in your country. Messing around to save a few bucks with some cheapjack cowboy outfit who will likely be broke next year is a DISASTER for you. People record your e-mail details like your phone number. Change it, and have emails "bounce" back and you LOSE business and credibility. Lots of it. You also look like a disorganised cheapskate as well, when that happens, in my humble opinion.

Big is best when it comes to servers. My advice to everyone thinking long term is to select either Telstra Bigpond or Ozemail for those of you in Australia. Complicated names like those horrid CompuServe 9 or 10 digit numbers are simply hopeless. Names like [GS50607@whatever](mailto:GS50607@whatever) are also USELESS in my view. Short, sharp and easy to remember is the

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*"All dealers, and many collectors should think of your e-mail and web address as like your phone number. It should be plastered on EVERY piece of stationary you have. Printed on your letterheads, on your business card, in your ads, including Yellow Pages."*

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key. The old KISS principle... Keep It Simple Stupid!

Remember an e-mail will ONLY go to EXACTLY to what is registered. If you are *Bob-Stamps@whatever* and someone types *Bob\_Stamps@whatever*, it simply will just not work. Likewise, typing *Bob.Stamps* will just NOT work for *BobStamps* or *Bob-Stamps*, etc. SHORT and simple. Avoid stops and hyphens and underbars in your e-mail address like the plague.

Likewise with websites – avoid at ALL costs those complicated \_ and / and ~ and \ elements. If it does not roll easily off the tongue, forget it. Try reading a web address to a client over the phone that looks like this: <http://www.ozemail.com.au/ozstamps/special.html> instead of exactly the SAME internet link which is exactly this: [www.GlenStephens.com/special.html](http://www.GlenStephens.com/special.html)

All dealers, and many collectors should think of your e-mail and web address as like your phone number. It should be plastered on EVERY piece of stationary you have. Printed on your letterheads, on your business card, in your ads, including Yellow Pages. In your Trade Association directories.

If you have a website, you can usually e-mail to that website and have that directed to your chosen e-mail server. Either *Sales@whatever.com* or *enquiries@whatever.com* or *complaints@whatever.com* etc. can all come through to the same e-mail address you have had for years.

Stanley Gibbons London missed out on registering *www.Gibbons.com* and *www.StanleyGibbons.com*. They instead got *www.StanGib.com*, which is fairly OK. They should sack their webmaster. He has not facilitated the obvious link. If you just e-mail: [sales@StanGib.com](mailto:sales@StanGib.com) it bounces back "unknown"! You need to use this impossible to type out mess: [sales@stangibblondon.demon.co.uk](mailto:sales@stangibblondon.demon.co.uk). Type that 3 times and see if YOU get it correct. A mad e-mail address to retain, whilst bouncing [sales@StanGib.com](mailto:sales@StanGib.com). They CAN have both. FREE! Even the biggest firms don't THINK logically at times.

Another tongue twister – Max Stern has a convoluted website listed as: <http://www.netSPACE.net.au/maxstern/> which hardly rolls off the tongue! His e-mail address is [enquiriesmaxstern@netSPACE.net.au](mailto:enquiriesmaxstern@netSPACE.net.au) – again hardly easy to remember. The website *www.MaxStern.com*

is not taken. Yet. Costs only \$US70 for 2 years. C'mon Max, rattle the piggy bank... you CAN do it I am sure! E-mail could then come direct to *enquiries@MaxStern.com*... far, far easier for all concerned I would have thought? (NOTE: all web and e-mail addresses are entirely case INSENSITIVE, i.e. *www.AOneStamps.com* works exactly the same as *www.aonestamps.com*, etc, same with email.)



*Michael Eastick is another internet literate columnist. His stories and photos are emailed up every month. Michael's entire 24 page insert in next month's magazine is expected by e-mail direct to our printer. Pictured here with Ernest Weiner, (right) owner of Victoria Stamp Traders, and founding shareholder of this magazine, who we hope will have a 20 page insert in the December/January Magazine.*

## SIGN DOMAIN NAMES NOW

For all dealers, you must secure your personalised web address (domain name) NOW. Even if you do NOT plan to have a site up right away. I have got a sore tongue urging colleagues to register their trading name "dot com" site NOW. By all means register it as a .co.uk .com.au .com.nz or .com.ca or whatever but ALSO pay the measly \$US70 for 2 years and get it as simply .com as well.

Do it NOW or someone will beat you to it. ASDA (New York) was too late. APTA in Australia was also too late. Other bodies registered ASDA.com and APTA.com. so they forever have no access to those short catchy names. Same with PTS.

The PTS London should have had *www.PTS.com* registered years ago but obviously did not, as that name also is long taken – by a computer software company no less! The PTS is still

catching up... there is not even an e-mail listed in the current directory for them!

This in a nutshell neatly sums up the difference between the USA and the UK stamp trade. The USA and Canada are largely very e-mail and web literate in the stamp trade. The UK sadly is about 3 or 4 years behind. Australasia is about in the middle ground. Far more literate than UK dealers, but way behind the USA ones. Just look how many dealer websites and e-mail addresses appear in USA collector and trade magazines, compared to this one.

The ASDA (USA) has a website ([www.asdaonline.com](http://www.asdaonline.com)) admittedly a less than ideal one in my humble opinion which I pointed out to those concerned mid year, to zero response. It is however able to provide a pretty quick contact reference for any member.

## REGISTER YOUR "DOT.COM" SITE

"Dot.Com" sites are the ideal short addresses. You can "point it" to your existing web address. "First in, best dressed" for these sites. English dealers with a well established business name like Harry Allen or Rushstamps or John Curtin or Gustamps MUST register the domain name *www.HarryAllen.com* etc now, or they are very foolish in my opinion. If you want to LOOK like you run a serious business then you go and get *www.HarryAllen.com*. Nothing else is needed.

Names like *www.Benham.com* are gone forever. So is *www.Gibbons.com*. And worse, *www.StanleyGibbons.com*. So are domain names for major UK traders like *www.StevenScott.com* and *www.WesternAuctions.com* and *www.Whytes.com*. All these valuable names are legally owned by different persons overseas. Those UK dealers will regret that forever. Check out *www.GreaterUnion.com*... the theatre chain forgot to register it, and I hear the owner of that name wants \$100,000 to sell it! Each day that wait goes on, the price will increase. Sure they have *www.GreaterUnion.com.au* but they missed the essential "Dot.Com" name.

This kind of thing is not uncommon. The FIRST to register a "Dot.Com" site gets it for \$US70 for 2 years. Whether you own that trading name or business or not is irrelevant – it is 100% legal to do so, especially if you are USA based. If you think typing *www.WhiteHouse.com* or *www.TheWhiteHouse.com* gives you the opening hours and admission price for tours of the US President's home, think again!!!

Even the US President can get caught out. I read the US Federal Government offered \$250,000 to buy that site and it was refused – owners wanted \$500,000. The CIA and FBI tried to close it, but no luck. In the USA, first to register legally owns the site. (WARNING: Do NOT

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open that Whitehouse web site unless you are very broad minded or wish to be shocked. Suffice to say there is more silicon on that website than at Dow Corning!)

I understand someone sold Stephen Forbes the catchy "Forbes2000.com" website for \$US1 million, after Forbes forgot to register it. In 1994 stockbroker Eric Wade registered *www.WallStreet.com* for \$US70. He sold it this May for US\$1 million. The BEST web name of the lot for our business – *www.Stamps.com* was grabbed a long ago by the United States Postal Service.

### SET UP WEBSITE FOR \$100s

Any dealer and collector group can have a basic and useful website. Software programs like Microsoft FrontPage makes it cheap and easy. Even if you can't do it yourself, a small dealer need not spend more than \$1,000 or so on a useful site. You do NOT need to be as high tech as say *www.Sheraton.com* to sell stamps! NOTHING in our hobby needs to be of that mega dollar standard. I know absolutely nothing whatever of HTML or web wizardry, but still have undoubtedly the most visited stamp dealer site in the Southern Hemisphere at *www.GlenStephens.com*

That fairly new site has had about 75,000 "hits" so far. My site cost VERY little to erect yet contains many times the data of say the IFSDA site, which cost a small fortune to put into place by comparison, yet is useless today. My site is clearly not as whizz-bang as *www.Qantas.com* but nor does it need to be. Website is updated every few days by a bright young 16 year old lad in the USA, who is a keen collector. Copy is simply e-mailed to him, and he does the rest within hours, and charges me a nominal sum to do it all. Kids ENJOY this stuff!

Added to my "normal" business from established customers, and my regular 2 page ads here in "Australasian STAMPS" magazine, those web sales are a VERY nice bonus.

I have a firm policy of NOT loading my website with other dealer "Links". Today the only other link up there is: <http://www.pip.com.au/monib> which is a dog-for-adoption type site, that I partly sponsor. I just paid out to register their dot.com domain website actually as *www.DoggieRescue.com* which is a lot easier to remember than the one typed a few lines up, I am sure you'll agree!

You would think stamp dealer bodies would have terrific websites. The International body IFSDA, is the "IOC" of stamp bodies. *www.IFSDA.com* does not appear to have been touched for years. I recall it cost us dealers about

\$40,000 to set up that pathetic excuse for a site. The "Mary Celeste" of Websites!

This is very contrary to the IFSDA President's editorial in the current IFSDA handbook. The front page has a bunch of flashing faces without names – a bit like police mug shots from "America's Most Wanted". One must presume this photo gallery represented the executive some years back? One can only presume this, as nowhere on the site is the present executive listed or named!!



The Australasian Philatelic Traders' Association (APTA) does not have a website – according to the IFSDA site. They do as it happens own an excellent one (*www.apta.com.au*) created at a very modest cost. VERY modest. And it is updated very regularly. This I gather is mainly due to the efforts of 2 keen committee members John Macdonald and Graeme Fudge. APTA do have an e-mail address listed on the IFSDA site, which just happens to be that of Derek Lamb, the Secretary of the NZSDA – hours across the ocean!! APTA are smart – their site is advertised widely [see page 98. Editor], and that is the secret. Their members then all benefit.

The secret for dealers seems to be: change your site often, and make it INTERESTING to visit. The young 16 year old chap in the USA who does my site has added currency converters, news headlines, world time clocks, leaping kangaroos, jumping dogs and animated gifs. Not all dealers would do those things, but they do WORK... for me. I also have regular on-line competitions and giveaways etc. A boring, static, inert

site like the IFSDA one is never going to be "bookmarked" in most cases.

Find a youngster among your circle of friends or relatives, and give them a few \$100 cash to set you up. Sure you can find a firm in your Yellow Pages who will quote you \$5,000 or \$10,000 to do the same thing if you want to be ripped off. I am lazy re scanning lessons, and very few stamp photos are up there on my site. My fault, and that will all change. Stamps are a VISUAL hobby, and scans SELL stamps. (Witness the mighty eBay Auctions etc).

### ADVERTISE YOUR SITE

There is one way, and only one way to ENSURE dealers get a lot of traffic to your website. ADVERTISE it. This is the cardinal error of 95% of stamp websites. Someone spends money putting up a nice site, then sits back and expects 10,000 hits a month. Not so, unless you add a few pages of barely clothed nubile ladies on there as well as the stamp photos! "Search engines" are largely irrelevant today for general use as there are now way over 100,000 matches for "Stamps" coming up.

The world's finest stamp website will STAY unvisited unless you advertise it in a journal like THIS. And also on your business cards, your letterheads, and "traditional" press and magazine ads. This is ESSENTIAL. We pioneered the full page in *Australasian STAMPS* each month where e-mail and web addresses along with "snail mail" details are featured each issue for dealers. Cost is only \$A12.50 a month and this works fine for many dealers. EVERYONE can afford a few dollars. Clubs and societies can of course list their websites here too.

As about 75 dealers are listed together in the one place it gives the keen web surfer a lot of addresses to visit easily, and hence if your site is listed it will get many visitors, at a very minimal cost. People buy our magazine to access this page. All readers who have not accessed that page are urged to do so ... there are some really excellent sites up there ... I "surfed" it this morning!

Not all collectors of course are web literate, or even have computers, or want them. But a large percentage ARE, and that percentage is growing. Very FAST. Ignore that market, and your business will shrink. Auctions like eBay have at ANY given time some 100,000 stamp lots for sale on the USA site alone. On September 9th alone, there were over 4,000,000 lots up for sale, nearly all with colour scans. eBay software is many times bigger than any Australian bank, as an example.

Selling stamps in cyberspace is HERE whether you want to believe it or not. Dealers MUST register their domain name NOW, whether you plan to use it immediately or not. Ignore this advice at your considerable peril. **ASST**