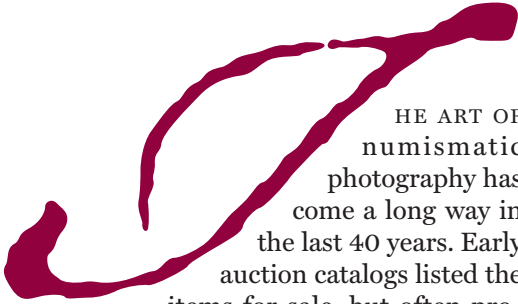


Taking the Shot, Selling the Sale

Successful coin auctions depend on comprehensive, well-illustrated catalogs and thoughtful marketing.



THE ART OF numismatic photography has come a long way in the last 40 years. Early auction catalogs listed the

items for sale, but often provided no descriptions or pictures. When illustrations were available, they frequently were simple line drawings or inferior black-and-white photographs.

Over the decades, catalog quality improved steadily as technology advanced. In the late 1970s, the undisputed king of coin photography was Gerald Hoberman. Like many collectors, he believes coins are miniature works of art and deserve to be photographed as such. I highly recommend his 1981 book, *The Art of Coins and Their Photography* (ANA Library Catalog No. AA97.H55), to any numismatic shutterbugs.

Good photography captures these metal masterpieces in all their artistic glory, showing every, minute detail for collectors to appreciate. Since the invention of the digital camera, there really is no excuse for any professional auctioneer who takes pride in his work not to illustrate his catalogs with fantastic color photographs (including enlargements) of the better coins for sale.

To make the most of his color photographs, the auctioneer should print his 200- to 400-page, softcover auction catalog on bright-white, coated paper. Spelled out in his neat, copyrighted product should be the location, date and time of the sale; the names of the sellers (if they wish to be identified); the lot-viewing procedure; and terms and conditions of the sale.

Now all the auctioneer needs to do is bring in the buyers—not a small task. Advertising plays a big part. Some large companies have their own in-house advertising and graphics departments that can produce promotional material at a moment's notice. Obviously, numismatic publications—with their informed, interested audiences—are ideal vehicles for auction advertising.

A good public-relations director or department is just as valuable, stirring up hobby and media interest in the auction and the consignors' coins. Coin buyers are smart, and they know the difference between advertising, which is paid for, and publicity, which reads more like a news story and creates credibility with potential buyers.

Although such publicity provides free exposure, neither the auctioneer nor the sellers have any control over how the media presents the information or if it gives the sale any press at

all. To get (and keep) the media's attention, the auctioneer must offer a unique item or angle, like a fresh collection, a newsworthy owner or an unusual story or circumstances, or some other interesting story.

Meanwhile, the auctioneer must work to broaden his knowledge of his bidders, consignors, competitors and the market. His ultimate goal is to create relationships with his buyers, encouraging their repeat business and ensuring a stable customer base for his consignors. For the auction professional, good, long-term customers are more valuable than any one auction lot or sale. He knows that a satisfied customer can become a future seller. Plus, it takes significantly less ☺

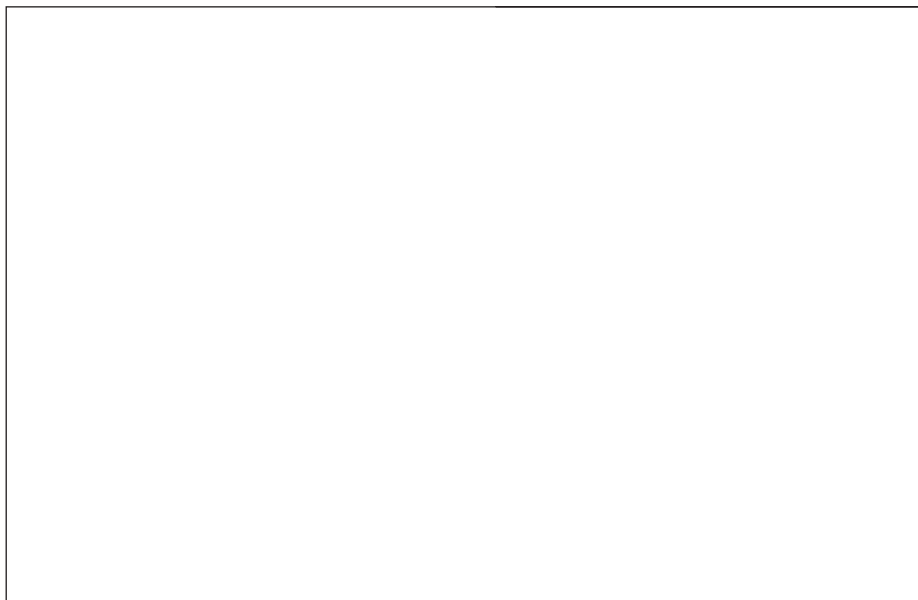


ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCKPHOTO/NARVIKK/B. GREGORY



▲ News items about upcoming sales generate excitement in the numismatic community and increase the auctioneer's credibility among customers.

effort and money to convince current clients to purchase or consign more than it does to find new customers. Thus, service becomes the successful coin auctioneer's mantra.

However, not all customers are considered equal. While professional coin dealers and investors are large, steady sources of items for auction, they also take up large amounts of the auctioneer's time and resources, contributing less revenue to his bottom line than one would think. Some dealers and investors drive hard bargains involving large quantities of coins, leaving the auctioneer little room for profit and no room for error. They may buy large numbers of coins and spend considerable money, but they often expect special terms and handling.

So, today's coin auctioneer spends a good deal of time serving the collector—the backbone of the numismatic industry—and the collector's friend, the investor. Collectors not only

buy the coins the auctioneer wants to sell, but also bring fellow numismatists to the table. Collectors are the best source of "fresh material" for auctions, coins that have been off the market for years or, in some cases, generations. Coin investors, on the other hand, hold large quantities of coins for periods of time, effectively removing them from the marketplace, but keeping prices strong and consistent.

Through the miracle of the Internet, the coin auctioneer can reach thousands or even tens of thousands of collectors. This vast audience might have been interested in buying his consignors' lots, but perhaps not have enough to actually travel to an auction or show. Now, the Internet brings the sales to their living rooms or offices.

Next month, I'll offer some tips for selecting an auction house to sell your numismatic material.

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