

There's an APP for THAT?



New mobile applications, or apps, are aimed at making the coin-shopping experience at major shows easier for collectors.

Technology Is Changing the Way Dealers and Collectors Attend Shows

by Amy Drew Thompson

Indeed, there is an app for that, and technology *is* changing the way dealers and collectors buy and sell their cherished inventory. But will

handheld devices deliver a death knell to the numismatic treasure hunters of old, or just force an evolution?

Human beings are seekers. Poignant clichés and quotations about the thrill of the hunt, the journey as opposed to the destination, abound in our culture. It's a point we could argue, I suppose. We could just as easily find quotes from collectors for whom the completion of a given set inspired cathartic tears as we could those for whom filling each blank space in the album only fueled the desire to chase down the resident of the next empty slot.

Granted without the romance of the chase, we wouldn't have "Raiders of the Los Ark" or Indiana Jones, would we? We'd just have that warehouse full of anonymous crates at the end of the film. But would you turn down the Holy Grail simply because you already knew where it was?

The development of new apps—from industry leaders like NGC, PCGS and Collector's Universe—are set to enable dealers and collectors at almost any show to locate items on their "want" lists before even setting foot on the bourse floor. How is such technology transforming the hobby for better or worse? And will there be any grails left for numismatists for who believe such advents amount to GPS in place of the figurative faded treasure maps they cherish?

In the midst of creating Collectors Corner, Cassi East, president of the Certified Coin Exchange, began hearing the same requests over and over again: How can I see "X" coin? Who has it? Will they be at this upcoming show?

"It set off a light in my programmer's head," she acknowledges. "We started talking about doing some type of normal kiosk stands [at shows, where people could locate tables with the specific pieces they were looking for]. The app was simply something that came up by listening to what the public was asking us for."

The result is the newly debuted Collectors Corner CoinSearch, which recently beta tested at the Long Beach Coin, Stamp & Collectibles Expo. Using state-of-the-art mobile technology, the app enables dealers to showcase the specifics of their inventory while collectors can instantly locate the specific coins they're looking for. Using smart phones and tablets, collectors can check out the goodies—even before the show opens—and pinpoint the exact bourse floor locations of their quarry.

"This new app is a great step toward making the coin-shopping experience at coin shows easier for collectors," says PNG past-President Gary Adkins, founder of his eponymous, Edina, Minn.-based company, Gary Adkins Associates and the ANA's 2010 Coin Dealer of the Year. Adkins has 45 years' experience buying, selling and trading coins, currency and precious metals.

"Normally [collectors] get to a large show—200 to 300 dealers—and have limited time and a great deal to see." While some enjoy going from dealer to dealer, he notes, "most have a 'want' list they prefer to concentrate on. The Collectors Corner app allows them to input their wants and be directed to specific dealers with these items—showing photos and pricing and even the table." Laser-focused "want list" searching, says Adkins, saves time and energy. "It's also less wear and tear on the back and legs," he adds, "and creates a better experience for the collector."

Dealer competitiveness may well benefit collectors, as well. Van Simmons, president of David Hall Rare Coins, calls himself an "old-time dealer," one who deals almost exclusively in certain products he likes. To Simmons, a large coin show serves mainly as a place to buy inventory, even if he is running a table. "I go mainly to try and find fun things that I like and that I think my client base will like. So when I go, I don't bring run-of-the-mill things I know will sell out of my ads or my newsletter, I bring a wide variety of what I feel are great coins."

Why? These are the pieces that people spot as they're walking by. "Whoa!" a guy will say, "I didn't know you sold that kind of stuff. You know, I have one of those at home." Simmons recently bought a Pan Pacific \$50 gold piece at a show for \$100,000. "It was because a guy walked by and saw I had one in the case. A guy nobody knew about. He bought the thing 20 years ago. The fact that I had it there made him realize what the coin was worth and he wanted to sell it."

And when people can peruse dealer wares beforehand, whether from their house, hotel room or even the parking lot before heading inside, these "a-ha" moments are far more likely to happen. And, adds Simmons, could further benefit collectors in that dealers with the same pieces will have to become more competitive. "The app will allow dealers to 'display' things they might not necessarily have in the case." This means potential customers who otherwise might have walked past the booth are more likely to stop in and inquire.

As always, with new technology come the proponents and the naysayers.

"The older collectors of my era," says Adkins, "a mostly male audience in the 55- to 75-year-old category, have a tough time with the fast pace of technology." He admits he's old-school, no particular fan of texting, Facebook, Twitter or any form of social media. "I call it unsocial media," he says, "because to me it takes the personal touch away from communicating." Even so, he relents. "In today's world, these tools can bring worlds of information to your fingertips in a matter of seconds. Harnessing the power of these technologies can give you an edge over other collectors and/or dealers." Even, he notes, if coming to understand them can be frustrating.



With Collectors Corner CoinSearch, collectors can peruse the tables of dealers at a large coin show, like this one in Hong Kong, before they even arrive.

East, to her credit, is well aware of the learning curve and Collectors Corner is taking action to educate the masses. At the recent Long Beach show, a CoinSearch booth had demonstrators showcasing the app's use on smart phones and iPads—and even a basic computer for the less tech savvy attendees. "We assisted them in finding items they were looking for and gave them print-outs so they could walk the bourse floor."

The kiosks serve not only as information booths, but an introduction to the process of being able to do the work themselves. "If they're looking for Morgan dollars, they can look at the bourse floor online, find the dealer or dealers who specialize in that, tag each one and concentrate their search. It's especially helpful for those who either can't or don't want to walk the entire show."

Collectors Corner CoinSearch. The First Mobile App Designed for Collectibles Shows.

Most collectors do not look forward to the prospect of having to go to every dealer table at a collectibles show to find a particular item. There must be an easier way. . . Wouldn't it be a lot better if you knew even before the show which dealers are carrying that special collectible you're looking for?

CoinSearch™ removes all the guesswork and tedious searching from the equation. CoinSearch combines the listing power of Collectors Corner™ with today's mobile technology to allow show attendees to pinpoint the exact booth in which the specific item they're looking for can be found. It's great for the collector and great for the dealer. . . And it's so easy even somebody who's technologically challenged can use it!



Watch video and see how easy it is to use CoinSearch to locate coins.



Launch Now

Using coins as our example, here's all you have to do:

1. Bring up the app by scanning the QR code above or typing m.collectorscorner.com into your mobile device web browser.

2. Click on Bourse Floors to load the coins being listed at the show you are about to attend.



Numismatic Guaranty Corporation (NGC) has a different kind of app. Coin Details allows you to easily view the details of an NGC-certified coin, including when and where it will next appear at auction.

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Regardless of its advantages, these apps showcase an evolution in numismatics over which traditionalists are less than enthused.

“There are a few high level personalities who still insist that numismatics is a hobby for the community of collectors,” says John Dirnbauer, whose Thomaston, Maine-based John Dirnbauer Rare Coins specializes in early American coppers and numismatic literature. “It’s a noble view, and not completely obsolete, but times have changed a great deal.” As a collector for more than half a century and dealer for five years, Dirnbauer says he’s had a front-row seat as the evolution has taken place.

“It seems that almost every adult collector, whether new or seasoned, is looking on numismatics as a way to make money.” Dirnbauer, along with other small- and medium-sized dealers, “tries to stress the pure enjoyment and historical aspects of coin collecting, yet at almost all regional and national shows, collectors with the Graysheet in hand expect to buy coins at wholesale prices and sell at retail.”

And now, apps seem to further the process. Is that good or bad? “Like much in life, it depends on which side of the bourse table you stand,” he notes. “Collectors and investors benefit from more

apps and techno-toys to play with and the two major grading services seem to launch new ‘collector resources’ quite frequently.” One-upmanship, he observes, is the new norm, largely benefiting the largest coin-dealing companies while “the littlest continue to do the best they can.”

Dirnbauer says the increase in coin shows have events bumping into one another almost every week from coast to coast. “The thrill of the hunt is being replaced with this, ‘get in, get ‘er done, get out’ attitude,” he laments. “The coin auction business is changing and the days of the beautiful printed catalogs are numbered.”

“There is a shrinking place for the old guys who are not connected to the Internet—the technological dissidents.” The camaraderie of a coin show, he says, is simply being overrun by life.

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Technology may well be leaving some longtime collectors disenfranchised in its wake, but, say many others, it is also the only way seasoned, lifelong collectors can secure a future for their beloved pastime.

“Young people, the ones we need to carry on this wonderful hobby, will only be enticed through technology,” says Adkins. “Providing great learning experiences through educational webinars or blogs, for example, can have a great impact in

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creating new generations of collectors.” The ANA, he says, understands that technology is the future and a major part of their strategic plan to bring new blood into the fray.

Evolution happens, says Simmons. And apps are just another way of creating educated consumers. “The best customer you can have is someone who becomes really well informed,” he notes, citing his interest in California art. “I don’t know more than the dealers,” he says, “but I’ve been a real quick student for two years now. When you can find websites, apps and other ways to better educate yourself, it makes collecting much more fun and gives you a better sense of security in your purchases.”

It also helps avoid the intimidation factor so many new collectors experience at big shows. “The gold craze has brought a whole bunch of newbies into our industry,” notes East. “They have no clue where to begin.” New apps like CoinSearch put dealers in contact with people who might never go to their tables, bringing them face-to-face with new clients. “Walking up to a booth can be quite intimidating for some. Just looking into the display cases can be overwhelming. And sometimes dealers aren’t at their tables.”

Ultimately, she thinks there’s a place for all the different personalities at the coin shows, whether they embrace the new technology or not. “Although for some, these apps may eliminate the need to come to an event in person, there is nothing like being there, like watching an excited numismatist moving through the show.” East always tries to stop by every table.

New technology shapes the way we do almost everything these days, and in many ways, practices and pastimes such as numismatics are living, breathing things. There will always be new ways of doing things for us to embrace or avoid. Some argue that social media has made it easier for us to stay in touch. Others say it’s destroying traditional communication, that we’re increasingly a society of eyes on screens, people who “friend” one another instead of shaking hands and becoming friends.

There is validity in both theories. “We just need to know when our senses are on overload,” says Adkins. “Turning off the technology and just enjoying the friendships, the history, the joy and beauty we can share from this great hobby makes it all worthwhile.” ☺



The CoinSearch app also helps avoid the intimidation factor so many collectors experience at big shows. Knowing where to start and who to talk to may be beneficial when entering a busy bourse floor.