“Hey buddy can I share your hotspot?”
Evolution of Knife Collecting
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The old adage “The only thing in life that is constant is change” has never been more true and “things are a changing.” Knife collecting, as with many other hobbies, has experienced many changes over the years. Now there is another significant change on the horizon, like a wave rolling into the shore.

In some ways this change is similar to what happened when the passing of the 1968 Gun Control Act brought on the new wave of collector interest. However, this change is not an event per se like the one brought on by an act of Congress. This one, instead, is more of a transformation and is being brought on by technology.

The World Wide Web is beginning to transform when how and what information goes out throughout the world pertaining to knives, and knife collecting.

This transformation provides unprecedented exposure of our hobby, or knife business, which heretofore has been dictated by locale, e.g., trade days, flea markets, knife club meetings, and even knife shows. While it may not be a dramatic overnight transformation, the institution of knife collecting is definitely going to be affected.

The World Wide Web transmits information about knife collecting to everyone everywhere via laptops, desktops, and even fascinating little hand held devices (Personal Digital Assistants, or PDA’s). This dramatic increase in exposure is already having its effect.

There are several effects being brought on by this electronic transfer of information, namely having a “live and dynamic book” at your fingertips all the time. It is there when you want it or not. Individuals have access to manufacturers, dealers, prices (retail and wholesale), auction events and pricing, etc.

Another profound effect being brought about by this electronic transformation is a new type of collector is becoming exposed to this fantastic hobby of knife collecting. This new collector is one that has already entered into the other areas of high-end collectables, such as vintage automobiles, art, guns, antiques, and believe it or not, trophy real estate. This individual does not fit the stereotypical knife collector most people on the street associate with one who is into knives. He doesn’t carry or use knives, other than to eat with, is in the mid- to high-income bracket, is in his late 30’s to mid 50’s and is computer literate. I don’t mean to be presumptuous by my profiling; however, my profession involves profile marketing.

The most significant difference is that this new collector is learning about our hobby exclusively through the Internet. I personally know individuals who have become avid knife collectors who are this new collector. They got turned on to knives through their
computer. They have never attended a knife show, and have told me they don’t plan to in the foreseeable future, primarily due to time constraints. But before we turn them away, or view them as “second string collectors,” let us recognize their view of knife collectors is being formed from what they see (and don’t) when they turn on their computer, and start their favorite search engine to start looking for knives to purchase or researching information about specific knives they want to collect.

The timing couldn’t have been better. There are several factors at work now; the first two may not remain constant, while the third most definitely will. These are: the volatility of the stock market and the increasing number of individuals looking for a hedge against inflation, the increasing number of individuals interested in collecting “Americana,” artifacts from our Country’s past, and thirdly, the 24/7 exposure offered today of knife information through the web. Together these factors are resulting in an increase in the amount of people becoming interested in collecting knives.

Additionally, collectors will soon be able to get online anywhere anytime, with a laptop and a local “hotspot,” and no that is not a bar or dance club. Instead, a HotSpot is a high-speed Wi-Fi wireless Internet access. This wireless connection for a portable computer or PDA allows instant wireless access, making getting online much easier, and will measurably increase the amount of time people spend online. Hotspots are in major metro areas, airports, and even at your local Starbucks coffeehouse, but will eventually be everywhere people are. In fact the other day I was sitting on an airplane and my laptop registered a hotspot.

The web provides us now with a fantastic medium to “display our wares”— to display our individual collections, or our dealer stock, as the case may be, and to educate and inform on all the aspects we had to learn over the years about the knives that interest us the most. The fact that the web is becoming easier to access, and faster, means it is here to stay. It will be the primary communication tool for the 21st century.

Over the last few years, more dealers and knife companies have established an online presence with their websites, making e-commerce a fairly common occurrence; however, the individual collector has yet to come around at this point.

You may ask “Why does an individual collector need a website?” Allow me to begin by saying, no one needs a website, not like we need water to sustain our lives; however, developing a presence on the web provides a tremendous satisfaction as well as increased opportunities.

Do you remember the last time someone asked you genuinely interested questions about the knives in your collection and appreciated it for what it is? We have worked hard building our collection. We have spent considerable money and time selectively acquiring particular knives we needed to round out our collection.

To the individuals who are collectors: “When was the last time you packed up your collection, not the knives you have for sale, and carried it to a show and set it up for
others to enjoy?” Or if you haven’t taken it to a show, then: “When was the last time someone was able to enjoy your collection? Or are you like me and have it displayed in an area only the closest friends or family members are able to see it?” Do you carry one of your best knives around to show your co-workers, or family members at your family reunion? I didn’t think so.

Building a Collector Website-

An individual collector’s website tends to be more personal, and can simply be an answer to a few basic questions, like “Why do you collect knives?” “What do you collect?” “What got you started?”

Put up pictures of your collection, coupled with information you have learned about the knives new collectors would find interesting. For the more advanced collectors include some “nuggets” that you learned through years of experience and research. The web is about sharing information.

The site does not have to be real fancy with tons of pictures and images. Accurate information is far more important.

Believe me when I say there are people across the world who will be interested in you telling them your story, and allowing them to view your collection.

Visit www.elephanttoenails.com to get an idea of what can be done with a Collector’s site.

There are too many very valuable and extensive collections out there that are going unnoticed and unappreciated by people who would be genuinely interested. It may be a new collector, or a seasoned collector who recognizes the significance of your collection because he/she is working diligently to build one too.

Once I decided the direction I wanted to take with my collection, that being old Elephant Toenails, I had a very difficult time locating detailed information. You can bet I studied
the bibles of our industry, books written by John and Charlotte Goins, Bernard Levine, Jim Sargent, and others; however, I still was only able to find bits and pieces. As a newer collector I sought a compiled list of all the brands, handle materials, tang stamp and shield variations, lengths, etc., for old Toenails.

My quest for information about old Toenails, and the difficulties I encountered, provided the motivation for my website- www.elephanttoenails.com. I have dedicated the site to collectors who enjoy this pattern and want to learn more. I elected to include an extensive photo gallery of over 100 old toenails, a list of all known brands and variations, interviews with some of the industry’s “Old Timers,” history, and even historic pricing information. What may strike you as odd is the fact that my site is a non-commerce site. I do not intend to sell anything. However, if you choose to transact business on yours, it is perfectly acceptable.

Now more and more potential collectors have the ability to pull up information on knives, the companies (old and new), individual collections, dealer sites, associations, and clubs with ease and from the convenience of their wireless “hotspot” anywhere anytime.

The pattern has been clearly established and the Web has been the catalyst in this regard. I believe over the next few decades we will witness an increasingly growing trend of new collectors being attracted to this hobby, especially as more collectors and knife enthusiasts display their collections through the wonderful medium called the World Wide Web. This added exposure would without a doubt attract these new collectors, increase demand and further stimulate the knife market. Moreover, these new collectors will appreciate the significance and characteristics that make knives valuable, as they have with other high-end collectables.