
Why not Mail by Bank?



"You can bank by mail, why not mail by bank?" So went a USPS representatives' quote at the launch of a new format of stamp back in 1990.

On 18 May that year, SeaFirst Bank of Seattle became the first of many subsequent US banks to offer its customers the opportunity of acquiring stamps while making a cash withdrawal from an ATM (Automated Teller Machine).

The story really began back in the early 1960s when Walsall Lithographic (now Walsall Security Printers) produced the world's first self-adhesive stamps for Sierra Leone and Tonga. They were of such unusual shapes for a postage stamp (bananas, coins and maps being some subjects), that the fact they were on a self-adhesive substrate was almost missed by collectors.

It was not until 1974 that the USPS became involved in pressure-sensitive stamp production. For their Christmas issue, they produced a pre-cancelled stamp with straight die-cut edges and radiused corners and a + shaped die-cut at the centre to prevent re-use. They were not a success and were actually regularly re-used due to the lack of postmark applied. With time, the stamps also self-destructed, becoming seriously damaged by ugly brown stains on the paper surface as the glue slowly perished. In the following years, adhesive quality improved and in 1988 Avery Dennison was awarded a research contract to produce a sheetlet with the same size and characteristics of a dollar bill.

The May 1990 ATM stamp sheetlet was the result. Environmentalists complained that the stamp, which was made of plastic, was not bio-degradable and so with the third issue onwards a paper version of the stamp was produced. The format continues to this day. Other countries became interested in the product and Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, France and Canada have each issued ATM stamp sheetlets. However, the love affair with this format did not last long in Australia or Canada, where they were fairly quickly removed from service.

As far back as 1996, rumours abounded that Great Britain was set to issue stamps via cash machines and I understand that trial sheets were produced by at least one of Royal Mail's preferred security print suppliers. (Perhaps our Editor can update us on this matter?)

This is an interesting area of collecting with the collector having the opportunity of acquiring supporting items, such as ATM receipts (showing stamp purchases), plastic transactional cards, ephemera (such as promotional advertising materials), etc. Around 100 trial sheets from Australia exist with the kangaroo facing in the wrong direction to the issued sheetlet and various stamp printers have produced their own publicity sheetlets for distribution to potential clients, or for ATM testing reasons.

It is a growing field with enough new material to maintain ones interest, but without too much to make you feel that it is unmanageable or exploitative.

I record below a simple checklist of ATM sheets produced by each of the postal administrations.

USA

18 May 1990 25c US Flag

June 1991 Liberty Torch type 1 backing sheet

Sometime in 1992 Liberty Torch type 2 backing sheet

28 October 1992 Christmas Train

October 1993 Christmas Snowman

October 1994 Christmas Cardinal

January 1995 Old Glory G stamp

March 1995 Flag Over Field

October 1995 Christmas Sledding

October 1996 Christmas Skaters

November 1998 Uncle Sam's Hat H stamp

March 1999 Classroom Flag

SINGAPORE

24 November 1993 Palm Tree - EMS Speedpost Service backing paper

20 January 1995 Palm Tree - Singapore 95 Stamp Show backing paper

Date unannounced Palm Tree - Postpac Cartons backing paper

Date unannounced Palm Tree - Philatelic Bureau SODA Account backing paper

Date unannounced Palm Tree - Local Urgent Mail Service backing paper

3 June 1996 Palm Tree - Security Envelopes backing paper

22 April 1998 Dinosaurs

Still in use??? Unsure!

AUSTRALIA

November 1994 Triangular Kangaroo - Quickstamp backing paper

11 April 1996 Triangular Kangaroo - Postpac backing paper

This country no longer uses ATM sheetlets to sell postage.

TAIWAN

5 May 1995 Peonies

Still in use??? Unsure!

FRANCE

11 July 1996 Marianne(?) design

1997 Liberte, egalite, fraternite design - simplifiez-vous la vie! yellow backing paper

1997 Liberte, egalite, fraternite design - Le Timbre, un plaisir qui se communique yellow backing paper

Date unannounced (2004?) white backing paper to sheet

CANADA

14 April 1998 45 cent version

12 December 1998 46 cent version

This country no longer uses ATM sheetlets to sell postage.

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