**PHILATELY**

**DEFINITION**

Philately is the hobby of collecting and studying of postage stamps and other postal materials.

**INTRODUCTION**

Postage stamp is the most widely known postal symbol and the primary element of philately. It is considered a messenger conveying letters to all parts of the world.

By its feature or the image it bears, the stamp becomes an ambassador for the country it represents. It supplies information about the country’s culture, its history its products, famous personalities and events of national or international significance.

Over the years, the hobby of collecting stamps fascinates the young and the old from all walks of life. Today, the hobby has the largest following thus earning it the title "***King of Hobbies***" or “***Hobby of Kings***".

Although, ancient definition of philately focused on it as a hobby, but in recent time philately is a real business propelled by its various value added service. These services have expanded the scope and number of stakeholders in Nigeria ranging from designers (Artists) printers, album and philatelic tools manufacturers, stamp dealers, journalists (publishers) etc.

NIPOST has moved steadily in the business of philately aligning itself with regional  or continental Pan African Postal umbrella body the Universal Postal Union(UPU) a United Nations Specialized Agency. Every standard measure in form of resolutions and legislations resulting from conference/seminars and research by the UPU for postal market growth especially philately are adhered to by NIPOST.

**ORIGIN OF PHILATELY**

People started to collect postage stamps soon after the postage stamps were introduced. Postage stamp was invented by an Englishman Sir Roland Hills in 1840. It is generally believed that the idea of collecting stamps came from a Belgium School Master around 1854. He asked his pupils to adorn their atlases with stamps.

**PHILATELY IN NIGERIA**

In Nigeria, the history of postage stamp dates back to 1859 when Hand Struck Stamp with inscription "Paid in Lagos" was issued. However the first set of adhesive postage stamps was released in Lagos on 10th. June, 1874.

An Indian was commissioned to repackage Philately. He was in Nigeria for six months. Philately was run on a very small scale in Nigeria before 1969. The service was repackaged that year as an arm of International Operations Department;

1. To ensure that a large percentage of Nigerians are made aware of the hobby and business of stamp collection especially those hl the literate class and the youth.

2. To ensure that high quality stamps that rank among the best in the world are produced.

3. To cooperate with international philatelic agencies to promote philately.

4. To generate adequate revenue to the coffers of NIPOST.

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| **WHAT MAKES A STAMP VALUABLE** **DESIGN** Generally speaking, the maxim "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever" applies to stamps as to anything else, which has any pretension to being an art-form. For this reason, a great deal of time, trouble and money is expended by postal administrations in selecting competent artist who design postage stamps. **NUMBER ISSUED** Although exquisite designs are important in assessing a stamp's future prospects, undoubtedly, the chief factor to watch is the number issued. Here the age old law of supply and demand has to be taken into consideration. If Britain issued a commemorative stamp in an edition smaller than 1 Million it "would automatically be a sound investment since there are at least 16 Million collectors in the United Kingdom alone and a vast number abroad who collect British stamps. On the other hand 1 Million copies or a commemorative stamp from Nigeria or Libya are probably more than enough to supply all collectors of these Countries. Many countries publish the print order of their commemorative stamps in advance of their sold and in many cases quantity of stamps has to be destroyed after their period of validity. **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Stamps attain their greatest popularity in their own country but most depends on what percentage of the population are stamp collectors. Many countries have as yet little indigenous Philatelic activities. These include the undeveloped countries especially those in regions of high great temperature and humidity, conditions which militate against stamp collection. Most depends, also on the degree of literacy of the people, their living standards, income and the amount or free time available for hobbies. The most popular countries from a philatelic view point are the European States, especially West Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France and United Kingdom. Outside Europe the stamps of the United States and the Common - Wealth Countries such as Canada Australia and New Zealand are among the most popular. Nigerian can associate with these countries as an impetus to philatelic growth. **CONDITION**All things being equal, it is the stamps condition which determines its value, and yet this is probably the most difficult factor to assess. The terms most commonly used to describe a stamp are as follows:- (i) Unmounted Mint; It has not been affixed to an album page in any way so it's gum is impeccable. (ii) Mounted Mint: As above but very lightly hinged, bearing exceptionally minute traces of previous stamp mount. (iii) Unused; Part e.g this indicates a stamp which has been heavily mounted in an album either by hinges or by means of a portion of its gum, but still retains some semblance or original gum (hence the abbreviation: e.g. from original gum). (iv) Unused; Without gum; an unpostmarked specimen which has none the less been stuck down at sometime, and on being soaked off the album page has its gum wasted away. (v) Fine used; A stamp with the lightest possible postmark and otherwise intact. Categories I, ii, and v are the ideal standards to aim at. The top prices will always be paid for the finest materials and anything second rate will suffer accordingly. Apart from good gum, the back of a stamp should not be damaged or torn in anyway. **ERRORS** One of the peculiarities of philately is that so much attention and monetary importance should be lavished on errors and imperfections. Paintings, jewellery and antiques suffer considerably in value if their workmanship is faulty, but quite the reverse is the case with stamps. Examples of errors include:- Stamps with inverted overprint:- They are regarded highly by collectors. Missing colours are also a favourite form of errors. Flaws occasionally occur in printing stamps and where these are constant on one position in the print, they are usually worth a premium. Another type of error is imperfection where the stamps are normally issued in perforated conditions. Stamps may be found imperforated either horizontally or vertically or completely devoid of perforation. It is not sufficient to have a single copy. A pair showing no perforation between them is the minimum required to establish that the perforation have not mere been trimmed off with scissors. Watermarks are security marks that the stamps carry. Errors in watermarks are not so popular with collectors because they are not so obvious as imperforation or misplaced colours. In Nigeria like other postal administrations, production of stamps is initiated by the motives of issuing such stamps. This has brought about the theme or concept of stamp issues. Stamp issues are divided into two categories based on the concepts i.e. commemorative/social issues and definitive issues.    |

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| **HOW TO BE A STAMP COLLECTOR** You simply make up your mind to explore the fun in the hobby of stamp collecting and fix into one of the three categories or customers that patronize the Philatelic Bureau. (i) Deposit Account Customer (ii) Sundry Customer (iii) Freelance Customer (Counter Service) i. **Deposit Account Customer:** In this category, a prospective collector will obtain (free of charge) and complete the deposit account form indicating the number of sets of each issue that should be supplied to him/her when new stamps are released. A certain amount of deposit, which is deductable as supplies are being made, is required to be paid The current initial minimum amount as deposit is one thousand naira (N1,000.00) or Four Hundred Dollars ($400) Four hundred Pound Sterling (£400). The payment should be made with Nigerian Postal Order for people resident in Nigeria and international postal money order or British Postal Order for those outside Nigeria. On receipt of this amount with the completed form, an account is opened for the prospective collector and all subsequent stamp issues are supplied according to the standing order. The collector reimburses the accounts required when the balance in his/her account is inadequate to pay for a set of stamp. ii. **Sundry Customers:** These are customers who write to the bureau for the current stock-list. They then place order for their choice from the stock list with the appropriate fee in postal order, Bank draft or Certified cheque and the items are supplied to them by post. Of course the cost of postage and handling charge would be part of the amount charged for the transaction. Nigerian made a final in-road to the main stream of the world philately by its admission in 1996 as the 78th member nation of the Federation International de Philately (FIP). iii. **Freelance Customers/Counter Service:** This is off the shelf services; some collectors and other customer for conventional use patronize the counters. This service is available on philatelic counters at Post Offices in the Territories. |