Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2019)
Heft: 137

Artikel: Pulling your hair out! : Steve Buck describes the frustration of a membership manager at renewal time

Autor: Buck, Steve

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853803

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would have it the three stamps used did not include any of the railway scenes depicted on other values in the series. These were the viaducts at Sitter, near St Gallen (5c); a train on the Rochers de Naye railway (10c); the Melide causeway across Lake Lugano (25c), and the Landwasser Viaduct (60c) on the RhB near Filisur – with an approximation of a Rhätische Bahn Crocodile Ge 6/61. Additionally the 50c stamp bears a dramatic design showing the Säntis cable car.

Given that a member of the Agency staff could probably have delivered the letter by hand, and be back in the office in some 30 minutes, it speaks volumes of the efficiency of the Swiss Postal System at the time that the envelope was sent by this method.

Bob Medland, the Librarian of the Helvetia Philatelic Society of Great Britain, thanks Bryan Stone and Malcolm Bulpitt for their input to this article.

Swiss stamps mostly showing railway themes of the time. Other value stamps can seen on the envelope opposite.

Pulling your hair out!

Steve Buck describes the frustrations of a Membership Manager at renewal time

For our members the arrival of December's *Swiss Express* is the reminder that subscription renewal is due, but for me the process starts two weeks earlier when I create a new spreadsheet from the list of members who renewed the previous year. The first job is to deal with those who previously paid for two years. They get a new membership card with their new password for the Members' Area, which is sent out with a note asking them to take care not to renew again. (It happens that, despite this, some do). For those who need to renew I prepare two sets of labels, one for the membership cards and one for the envelopes in which the cards are posted.

The week after the December *Swiss Express* is posted, the deluge starts. By the 7th December I had processed over 270 renewals. To process that many, quickly, means working to a system. I must ensure that the amount on the cheque corresponds with the amount (ticked or otherwise) on the form, that the cheque is signed and that the account details are correct. Then after making the necessary spreadsheet entries, labels are fixed to cards and a final check is made when fixing the labels to the envelopes. Check, check and check again to avoid any mistakes. When a suitable gap appears, out comes the franking machine to process the postage. (It costs the Society 39p to send each envelope franked, rather than 58p if we put stamps on). Then it's off to the Post Office as franked mail must be handed in, not put in a post box. Another deluge comes in early February after I have sent reminders to those who have provided email addresses, but who haven't yet renewed, that they will need to do so if they wish to receive their March magazine.

You may say this is a straightforward process, so why does he pull his hair out? Well, I did say I had to work to a system and matters are not helped when folk do not do what they are asked to do. That is why we ask members when renewing to help by observing a few simple instructions:

PLEASE DO NOT: send a stamped addressed envelope for return of the card.

You may think that you are helping by sending an envelope, but you are not. Renewal forms with an enclosed envelope have to be separated from the others to ensure the envelope is not mislaid. As part of the checking process, my mailing label has to be used. If my mailing label does not cover what you have written on your envelope, then I have to return your envelope unused. Some might just throw these envelopes away - but I am kinder than that.

PLEASE DO NOT: staple cheques to the renewal form.

Removing stapled cheques does take time and may break my nails.

PLEASE DO NOT: fail to send the complete renewal form – without the Society Diary.

I only need the renewal form. Keep the diary and support one of our branches.

As you can imagine this is a busy period. So messages asking if a member needs to renew; has changed address, or 'what is my membership number?' are not needed at this time. Please leave them to later in the month. I mentioned earlier that despite sending out cards to members who have already paid for two years, some members attempt to renew again. This does cause special difficulties. If I receive a cheque I have to generate a letter and label to return it. If payment comes from PayPal then an email to the treasurer is necessary to return it. The worst is electronic payment. As the treasurer does not have the account details on the incoming payment, we have to wait for the member to supply those details to return the payment. It slows the job. Another time waster I encounter is the use of pseudonyms rather than names on PayPal, or not using your membership number (shown above your name on the renewal form). The membership number has either one letter followed by numbers(s) or two letters (the first of which will be Z unless you live outside the UK when it is 0). As an aside the six number reference in the format xxx/yyy on the renewal form is a printing reference and not your membership number.

Despite all the above problems, I get a lot of pleasure from serving members, being intrigued by names, addresses and numbers which I find interesting. I hope to continue this role for a few years yet, and at the same time to hang on to what hair I have left. Please do your bit to help me by spending a few moments checking what you have done, and that you have done what you are asked to do.