

PERSONALISED STAMPS**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

This invention relates to personalised stamps and
5 relates particular but not exclusively to stamps which can
have a persons facial image provided thereon.

DESCRIPTION OF PRIOR ART

Hitherto, it has been known to provide postage
10 stamps in sheets. Typically, those sheets of stamps are
sold by a postal authority, postal carrier or establishment
authorised thereby. Users can remove the stamps from the
sheets and apply them to postal articles. Some stamps have
contained a tab which can contain information of a
15 particular nature. Thus, each stamp is divided into a
primary area which has the official printed stamp image
thereon, and a secondary area which can have personalised
information thereon. The production of stamps of this
nature requires a special run for printing at a printing
20 establishment authorised by the postal authority. In such
cases, the sheet of stamps is produced in its entirety at
the official stamp printing establishment as a single
printing even though the single printing may have separate
printing steps for each colour of a multi coloured stamp.
25 Because of the set-up costs associated with such printing,
and the set-up costs associated with producing batches of
stamps with tabs thereon in relatively low volumes, the
above process has been expensive and has not been accepted
generally.

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OBJECTS AND STATEMENT OF THE INVENTION

The present invention attempts to overcome one or more of
the aforementioned problems.

Therefore according to a first broad aspect of
35 the present invention there may be provided a method of
production of a sheet of postage stamps, said method having
at least the following steps:

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1. producing said sheet with a plurality of postage stamps thereon, each stamp being separable from said sheet for applying to a postal article, there being an official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation on each stamp over a primary area of each stamp, each stamp also having an associated secondary area where an image not needed for postal validation can be reproduced,

2. providing the sheet produced at step 1 to a printer machine,

3. capturing a personalising image to be applied as an image to said secondary area,

4. manipulating the personalising image to a size to fit on said secondary area,

5. reproducing the manipulated personalising image on the sheet on a secondary area by said printer machine to provide a personalised image postage stamp in said sheet of postage stamps.

Most preferably all the secondary areas are located at the same relative positions relative to the associated primary areas, and said manipulating of the personalising image is such that it is replicated at each secondary area during the reproduction.

Most preferably the secondary area is on a tab to each stamp.

Most preferably each tab is separable from each primary area.

Most preferably each stamp is surrounded by perforations whereby it can be torn from said sheet along said perforations.

Most preferably said tab has a line of connection with said primary area which is also perforated whereby said tab can be torn from said primary area along said line.

Most preferably, steps 2, 3, 4 and 5 are conducted by a postal authority or an establishment authorised by the postal authority whereby to provide

monitoring of the personalising image to ensure it meets guide-lines.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a sheet of stamps produced by
5 the above method.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a postage stamp having a primary area containing a reproduced official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation, said stamp also
10 having an associated secondary area where a personalising image not needed for postal validation is reproduced, said personalising image not needed for postal validation having been reproduced by a subsequent printing step to the printing of the stamp image recognisable for postal
15 validation and printed the same sheet to which the stamp is printed.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a sheet of postage stamps with a plurality of postage stamps thereon each stamp being
20 separable from said sheet for applying to a postal article, there being an official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation on each stamp over a primary area of each stamp, the sheet also having a respective associated secondary area for association with each primary area where
25 a personalising image not needed for postal validation can be applied.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of production of a sheet of postage stamps, said method having at least the
30 following steps:

1. producing said sheet with a plurality of postage stamps thereon, each stamp being separable from said sheet for applying to a postal article, there being an official printed stamp image recognisable for postal

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validation on each stamp over a primary area of each stamp, said sheet also having for each stamp a respective secondary area where an image not needed for postal validation can be reproduced,

5 2. providing the sheet produced at step 1 to a printer machine,

 3. capturing a personalising image to be applied as an image to said secondary area,

 4. manipulating the personalising image to a
10 size to fit on said secondary area,

 5. reproducing the manipulated personalising image on the sheet on a secondary area by said printer machine to provide a personalised image sheet of postage stamps.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order that the invention can be more clearly ascertained examples of preferred embodiments will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings
20 wherein:

 Figure 1 is a plan view of a sheet of stamps according to one example,

 Figure 2 is a plan view of a sheet of stamps of a second example,

25 Figure 3 is a perspective view of a sheet of stamps of a third example,

 Figure 4 is a perspective view of a sheet of stamps of a fourth example.

30 DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to Figure 1 it can be seen that there is provided a sheet 1 of postage stamps 3. In the example, there are twelve stamps 3 provided on the sheet 1, however, the sheet may contain other numbers of stamps - twelve
35 being merely a typically good number which is viewed as being consumer acceptable. Each of the stamps 3 is

separable from the sheet 1 by tearing along lines of perforations 5 and mutually perpendicular lines of perforations 7.

The stamp sheet 1 is produced from a paper that contains no phosphor and preferably no optical brighteners in the paper coating. The rear of the paper is gum coated so it can permit adhering to a postal article. Each of the stamps 3 contains a primary area 9 and a secondary area 11. The primary area 9 is then provided with an official printed stamp image which can be for a particular stamp issue. This official image is the image used for postal validation by the postal authority or postal carrier. Thus, each of the primary areas 9 will be printed with an official stamp image and preferably this stamp image will be identical on each of the areas 9. The secondary areas 11 will be left blank or alternatively may have a peripheral boarder.

Figure 1 clearly shows further lines of perforation 13 which separate each primary area 9 from each secondary area 11. The purpose of this will be explained in due course. During the printing of the stamp sheet 1 each of the official stamp images may be phosphor tagged according to the techniques disclosed in Australian patent number 664740 in the name Australian Postal Corporation and SNP Cambec Pty Ltd. Only the primary area 9 is phosphor tagged and the secondary area 11 is not phosphor tagged but this does not exclude the possibility of tagging the secondary area 11.

It should be appreciated that the sheet 1 of stamps 3 is printed with the stamp images in the primary areas 9 and with blank areas in the secondary areas 11, and after printing the sheet 1 is then processed to provide the perforation lines 5, 7 and 13.

As shown in Figure 1, the sheet 1 has a perimeter 15 which is generally blank without printing.

It can be seen therefore that the sheet 1 has a plurality of stamp images thereon in the primary areas 9,

and a plurality of associated secondary areas 11 where an image not needed for postal validation can subsequently appear. All the secondary areas 11 are located at the same relative positions relative to the associated primary areas 3.

The sheets 1, without any personalised image in the secondary areas 11 are held at a suitable retail outlet such as a postal authority or postal carrier or an establishment authorised thereby. Customers can then approach that authority carrier or establishment for stamps to be personalised. Typically, the personalising can be by way of bringing in photos or art work required to be placed in the secondary areas 11. In one situation the image to be provided in the secondary area 11 may be a photograph of the persons facial image or whole body or the like taken by the authority or establishment of that person. In another situation it may be a corporate logo. Other possibilities exist and the personalising image is an image chosen by a person requiring to purchase the stamps. The authority, carrier or establishment then digitises that personalising image so that it can be applied as a stamp image to each secondary area 11. Once the personalising image is digitised it can be manipulated to a size to fit on the secondary area 11. The manipulation may also arrange for replication of the image so that it will be reproduced at each of the secondary areas 11 on the stamps 3 on the sheet 1 during printing of the personalising image. Typically, computer aided software is utilised for the image capturing and manipulation. The computer output can be to any suitable digital image reproducing machine which may be monochrome or colour. A suitable digital image reproducing machine can comprise:

1. A laser printer.
2. An ink jet printer.
3. A dot matrix printer.
4. Any other suitable printer.
5. A photocopier reproducing apparatus which

can receive digital input signals and provide a required image output.

Typically the digitising of images supplied by customers such as from photos or the like can be achieved by the authority, carrier or the establishment by either a digital camera or a digital scanner. Alternatively the personalising image may be provided to the authority, carrier or establishment in a digital file so that digitalising is then not necessary. The image reproducing machine will then print onto the pre-printed, pre-perforated stamp sheets 1 as base stock and will provide the personalising image onto the secondary areas 11.

It is desirable that the personalising image be provided on the sheet 1 by a postal authority, carrier or authorised establishment rather than by an end user directly, as this will enable monitoring of the personalising image to ensure that it meets the necessary postal authority carrier or authorised establishment guidelines and public morality standards. Further, the customer could be required to execute Application Forms declaring ownership to copyright in any works which are to be reproduced. In this way, copyright infringement liability to the postal authority, carrier or authorised establishment can be waived.

When the personalised stamps 3 are produced and handed to a customer, the customer can then separate the individual stamps 3 from the sheet 1 by tearing along a line of separation defined by perforation lines 5 and 7 as needed. If required, the customer may elect to tear along a perforation line 13 whereby to provide just the stamp image in the primary area 9 without the secondary area 11.

If the customer requires the whole stamp 3 comprising the primary area 9 and the secondary area 11, it can be separated from the sheet 1 and applied to a postal article. It can then be detected by the postal authority or postal carrier stamp detection process by noting for the phosphor tagging. After use as a postal article, the stamp

3 can be retrieved from the postal article and if desired a philatelist may elect to either retain the stamp 3 in its entirety with the primary area 9 and the secondary area 11 or alternatively separate the primary area 9 from the secondary area 11 by tearing along the line of separation defined by the perforation line 13.

It can therefore be seen that the secondary area 11 can be likened to a tab attached to a stamp image produced on the primary area 9.

Whilst the sheet 1 of stamps 3 has been described in relation to a gum stamp paper the concept can be applied to other stamp types such as peel and stick stamps which are produced in sheets or in strips or in wallets and the term "sheet" is to be considered broadly to embrace this and other variations where the stamps are produced on a web. Further, whilst the preferred example shows the secondary stamp image 11 on a tab, it may be an integral part of the primary area 9. For example, an area may be provided within the official stamp image to enable personalising.

Referring now to Figure 2 there is shown a second example of a sheet of stamps according to the present invention. In this example, the sheet of stamps 1 is similar to the sheet of stamps disclosed in international patent application PCT/CA95/00017 (International Publication No. WO/95/20807) in the name Canada Post Corporation. In that patent specification there is disclosed a sheet of stamps which can be personalised by the user. The difference between the disclosure in that patent application and in the present example is that in the patent application the personalising images are produced concurrently with the official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation. The personalising images are predetermined by the postal authority carrier or authorised establishment beforehand and are not truly personalised images according to the users desires. In the patent application the particular personalising images are

shown to be all different. A user can select which one of the personalising images is to be applied in association with the official printed stamp image. In the present example, however, the personalising image is produced as a
5 second printing run to the official printed stamp image. Thus, in the present invention, the personalising image can be a truly personalising image decided by the customer or user of the stamps. In the patent application, these personalising images are predetermined by the postal
10 authority carrier or authorised establishment as recited earlier.

Accordingly, in this example, the sheet 1 may be similar to that disclosed in relation to the first embodiment. However, it is particularly preferred that it
15 form part of a peel and stick stamp sheet. In such a construction, there can be a glazine backing sheet (not shown) and the sheet 1 is applied over the top of the backing sheet and adhered thereto by a pressure-sensitive adhesive material. In this way, the backing sheet is
20 temporarily and releasably attached to the backing sheet. In use, each of the stamps 3 is appropriately cut with a line of separation to define the perimeter of the stamps 3. Thus, by breaking a corner of the stamp 3 from the backing
25 applied to a postal article. The cutting of the stamp 3 in the sheet 1 is such that the cutting does not cut into the backing. A particular system for cutting is disclosed in our international patent application no. PCT91/00200 publication no. WO91/18378. This patent application is
30 directed to providing simulated perforations on peel and stick stamps.

By observing Figure 2 it can be seen that each stamp 3 has a primary area 9 in which an official printed stamp image is reproduced. It also shows that respective
35 secondary areas 11 are printed separate from the official images of the stamps 3. It also shows that each stamp 3 has an area 17 which defines a position in which to apply a

secondary area 11. In the examples shown, the area 17 is contained wholly within the primary area 9. In a variation, the area 17 may overlap with the primary area 9 or may be completely separate from the primary area 9.

5 Each of the personalising images 11 is reproduced according to the techniques described in the first embodiment as a second printing process to the official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation. Thus, a person wishing to personalise a stamp 3 for use
10 with a postal article, would separate the stamp 3 from the sheet 1, around the line of separation, and apply it to the postal article. The personalising image in the secondary areas 11 can then be separated from the sheet 1 around a separation line 19 to each of the secondary area 11. The
15 secondary areas 11 then may be applied over the area 17 to personalise the stamps 3. A resulting stamp 3 therefore has a thickness equal to twice the thickness of the sheet material 1.

 It can therefore be seen that each respective
20 area 17 defining a position in which to apply a respective secondary area 11 includes at least a part of the primary area 9 in the examples shown, and that the respective secondary area 11 is wholly within the respective primary area 9. Each of the secondary areas 11 is at the same
25 relative position on the sheet 1 to an associated primary area, and preferably there are the same number of secondary areas 11 as primary areas 9.

 Referring now to Figure 3 there is shown a third example of the present invention which is similar to the
30 example shown in Figure 2 except that in this embodiment, the sheet of stamps 1 is in the form of a strip wound into a roll. The official stamp image in primary areas 9, and the personalising image in the secondary areas 11 are produced in the same manner as described previously. These
35 stamps are preferably of the peel and stick type although producing a strip in a roll of stamps of the gum type is not excluded.

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Referring now to Figure 4 there is shown a still further example of the present invention in the form of a wallet of stamps 3. Here, the stamps 3 are produced in a manner similar to that disclosed in relation to Figure 2 except that the sheet 1 can be folded to form a wallet of stamps.

In the examples of Figures 2, 3 and 4, it is contemplated that the secondary areas 11 with personalising images thereon be removed from the sheet 1 and applied over the sheet material forming the stamp 3 to provide at least two thicknesses of sheet material 1 in the stamp 3. It is not outside the scope of the invention to provide the area 17 so it can be removed from the stamp 3 so that when the secondary areas 11 are applied to a postal article at the position defined by the removed area 17 the stamp 3 will have only a single thickness of sheet 1.

The above processes lends themselves to many ways of marketing sheets 1. For example, there may be many postal authority, postal carrier or authorised establishments for customer contact for obtaining the stamp sheets 1. These could conveniently be existing stamp retailers. In another proposal the sheets may be marketed only from a postal depot. In each of the above cases the sheet 1 with the personalised images 11 can be produced locally at those establishments. In another scenario, the digitalised imaging can be processed at those establishments and forward by any suitable data transfer means to a remote site where the sheets 1 with the personalised image in the secondary area 11 are produced. The sheets 1 can then be returned to the establishment for subsequent passing on to the customer.

In a further example, the sheet 1 may be provided with a photo sensitive area for the secondary area 11 such that a conventional photographic image can be provided thereon and replicated at one or more of the secondary areas 11 on the sheet 1 and then photographically developed to produce the required images. In this scenario the term

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"printing machine" is to be inclusive of embracing the necessary photographic image developing machinery.

These and other modifications may be made without departing from the ambit of the invention the nature of
5 which is to be determined from the foregoing description.

CLAIMS

1. A method of production of a sheet of postage stamps, said method having at least the following steps:
 - 5 1. producing said sheet with a plurality of postage stamps thereon, each stamp being separable from said sheet for applying to a postal article, there being an official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation on each stamp over a primary area of each stamp, 10 each stamp also having an associated secondary area where an image not needed for postal validation can be reproduced,
 2. providing the sheet produced at step 1 to a printer machine,
 - 15 3. capturing a personalising image to be applied as an image to said secondary area,
 4. manipulating the personalising image to a size to fit on said secondary area,
 5. reproducing the manipulated personalising 20 image on the sheet on a secondary area by said printer machine to provide a personalised image postage stamp in said sheet of postage stamps.
2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein all the 25 associated secondary areas are located at the same relative positions relative to the primary areas, and said manipulating of the personalising image is such that it is replicated at each secondary area during the reproduction.
3. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein each 30 secondary area is on a tab to each stamp.
4. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein each tab is separable from each primary area.
5. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein each stamp



is surrounded by perforations whereby it can be torn from said sheet along said perforations.

6. A method as claimed in claim 3 wherein said tab has a line of connection with said primary area which is also perforated whereby said tab can be torn from said primary area along said line.

7. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein steps 2, 3, 4, and 5 are conducted at a postal authority or an establishment authorised by the postal authority whereby to provide monitoring of the personalising image to ensure it meets postal authority guidelines.

8. A sheet of stamps produced by the method of claim 1.

9. A postage stamp having a primary area containing a reproduced official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation, said stamp also having an associated secondary area where a personalising image not needed for postal validation is reproduced, said personalising image not needed for postal validation having been reproduced by a subsequent printing step to the printing of the stamp image recognisable for postal validation and printed on the same sheet to which the stamp is printed.

10. A stamp as claimed in claim 9 wherein said secondary area is a tab to the stamp.

11. A stamp as claimed in claim 10 wherein said tab has a line of separation with said primary area which will permit the primary area of the stamp to be removably separated from the secondary area.

12. A stamp as claimed in claim 11 wherein the line of separation is defined by perforations.

13. A stamp as claimed in claim 9 wherein said secondary area is applied over the top of the primary area within an area defining a position in which to apply the



secondary area, so the thickness of the stamp at the secondary area is at least equal to twice the thickness of sheet material to which the official stamp image and the personalising image are reproduced.

- 5 14. A sheet of postage stamps with a plurality of postage stamps thereon each stamp being separable from said sheet for applying to a postal article, there being an official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation on each stamp over a primary area of each stamp,
10 the sheet also having a respective associated secondary area for association with each primary area where a personalising image not needed for postal validation can be applied.
- 15 15. A sheet as claimed in claim 14 where all the associated secondary areas are located at the same relative positions relative to the primary areas.
16. A sheet as claimed in claim 14 where the secondary areas are separable from said sheet so they can be applied to a postal article in association with a stamp
20 having a primary area.
17. A sheet as claimed in claim 14 wherein each stamp includes an area defining a position in which to apply the secondary area.
18. A sheet as claimed in claim 17 wherein each
25 respective area defining a position in which to apply the associated secondary area includes at least a part of the primary area.
19. A sheet as claimed in claim 18 wherein each
30 respective secondary area is wholly within respective primary area.
20. A method of production of a sheet of postage stamps, said method having at least the following steps:
1. producing said sheet with a plurality of



postage stamps thereon, each stamp being separable from said sheet for applying to a postal article, there being an official printed stamp image recognisable for postal validation on each stamp over a primary area of each stamp, said sheet also having for each stamp a respective secondary area where an image not needed for postal validation can be reproduced,

2. providing the sheet produced at step 1 to a printer machine,

10 3. capturing a personalising image to be applied as an image to said secondary area,

4. manipulating the personalising image to a size to fit on said secondary area,

5. reproducing the manipulated personalising image on the sheet on a secondary area by said printer machine to provide a personalised image sheet of postage stamps.

21. The method as claimed in claim 20 which in order to provide a personalised postage stamp has the additional steps of:

20 6. removing a primary area produced at step 1, to provide a stamp,

7. removing a secondary area reproduced with a personalising image at step 5, and

25 8. applying the removed primary area to a postal article in association with applying the removed secondary area to said postal article, so the postal article has the appearance of having a personalised stamp.

22. A method as claimed in claim 20 wherein said stamp includes an area defining a position in which to apply the secondary area.

23. A method as claimed in claim 22 wherein the area defining a position in which to apply the secondary area



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includes at least a part of the primary area.

24. A method as claimed in claim in claim 22 wherein the secondary area is wholly within the primary area.