

UNITED STATES MINT  
QUALITATIVE CUSTOMER RESEARCH  
7/24/06

**Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of the research is to collect information from the customers served by the U.S. Mint about their opinions concerning numismatic product lines. The United States Mint plans to conduct qualitative research (i.e., focus group interviews) to test numismatic product extension ideas and potentially new numismatic product lines. Specifically, the research aims to assess changing customer needs and concerns in a timely manner.

**Qualitative Research Topic Outline**

The topics planned for discussion are:

1. Customer preferences concerning existing products and services.
2. Customer preferences concerning product line extensions and new product/communications ideas.
3. Assessment and evaluation of new product concepts.
4. Elicit and enumerate additional new product ideas.
5. The quality of current United States Mint products.
6. The pricing of current United States Mint products.

**Sample Design and Methodology**

A total of no more than 12 focus groups conducted in four cities representing a cross-section of United States Mint customers.

**Methods to Maximize Response Rates**

We expect one out of every seven customers contacted will agree to participate in the study. Cities will be selected based on concentration of customers. By recruiting in cities with a higher number of United States Mint customers, the likelihood of participation increases. Appropriate screeners will be set up to guarantee selection of the right customers for the study. A monetary incentive will be offered. This is a common industry practice.

**Estimate of the Burden Hours**

The collection of information will involve up to twelve (12) focus groups with eight (8) customers in each group. Focus groups generally last from 90 minutes to 120 minutes per group session. Total estimated burden hours are:

<b>Method</b>	<b>Estimated Hours</b>
Focus Groups	192
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>

**U.S. Mint Focus Group Research  
Discussion Guide  
Customers/Non-Customers**

**I. INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)**

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1525-0012.

*Ground Rules:* Audio-taping, confidentiality, candor, cell phones, pagers, etc.

- *Background & Objectives:* The purpose of today's discussion is three-fold; namely to: 1) learn about your current coin collecting interests, behaviors and purchases (if any); 2) gather your feedback regarding the U.S. Mint website and other information sources; and 3) ascertain your reactions to some new product ideas.
- *Introductions:* First name, types of coins that are especially liked, length of time collecting and/or buying U.S. coins

**II. CURRENT COIN COLLECTING/BUYING PRACTICES (15-20 minutes)**

- *(Non-Customers) What particular types of coins have special interest or appeal to you and what makes these coins so attractive to you? Probe...*
  - Beauty or artistry?
  - The history associated with them?
  - Other factors, if any, that play a role in your attitudes and behaviors?
- *(Non-Customers) What coin purchases, if any, have you made? For example, have you bought any U.S. coins from dealers, Internet auctions, (etc.)?*
  - *If some:* Why have you not purchased any coins from the U.S. Mint?
    - To what extent is lack of awareness a factor?
    - What about limited knowledge/ dissatisfaction with current products?
    - How about the perceived value/prices of the products?
    - What do these other sources provide that the U.S. Mint does not?
  - *If none:* Why have you never purchased any coins from any sources?
    - To what extent is lack of awareness a factor?

- What about limited knowledge/dissatisfaction with current products?
  - How about the perceived value/prices of the products?
- Probe if any have purchased any special coins (similar to those included in the product concepts to be discussed later)
- **(Non-Customer Coin Savers)** *Have you ever considered purchasing coins to give as gifts? Probe...*
  - If so: For whom? What occasions?
  - If not: Why not?
  - What circumstances would prompt you to make such a purchase?
  - What types of items, if any, would propel you to make a purchase?
- **(Customers)** *What types of coins and coin-related products have you bought from the U.S. Mint? Probe...*
  - What types of coins have you purchased in the past, but do not do so today?
  - What types of U.S. coins have you purchased in the past two years?
  - What aspects of the coins are most appealing to you? Why?
- **(Customers)** *Thinking specifically about the coins that you buy from the U.S. Mint, what specific products and how much of each do you typically purchase directly from the U.S. Mint in a year? Probe (especially italicized items)...*
  - Annual coin sets (e.g., quarters, uncirculated proofs, silver proofs, etc.)
  - Commemorative coins
  - Bags/rolls
  - American Eagle proof coins (e.g., silver, gold, and platinum)
  - Medals
  - Other items (e.g., specialty products)
- **(Customers)** *What U.S. coins, if any, do you buy from other sources such as dealers, Internet auctions, etc.? Probe...*
  - Which specific coins/sets?
  - Precious metals (e.g., American Eagle Investment [bullion] coins)?
  - For items that could be obtained directly from the Mint: Why use these other sources and not the U.S. Mint?
- **(Customers)** *Typically, how do you place your orders for items you buy from the U.S. Mint? How about those items you buy from other sources? Probe...*
  - What method(s) do you use?
  - Why these methods?

- ***(Customers)*** *How do you decide when to place your orders? Probe...*
  - Order immediately when product is issued (or become aware of)
  - Sometimes delay/wait to place order **Probe reasons...**
    - Can't afford it
    - Consolidate shipping charges
    - Other
  
- ***(Customers)*** *How might the U.S. Mint improve the ordering process for you? Probe...*
  - Channels for taking orders
  - Subscription-type programs (e.g., variations on current program, etc.)
  - Other
  - **(Note: If participants raise issues related to price for shipping or layaway, skip forward to the appropriate sections)**

### III. ORDER FULFILLMENT (15-20 minutes)

- ***(Customers)*** *How would you characterize the order fulfillment process (i.e., from the time you place your order all the way to when you receive the product)? Probe for...*
  - Timeliness
  - Requesting information about order status
  - Nature/accuracy of information received (active or passive) about delays/problems
  - Quality of merchandise when received
  - Packaging of merchandise
  - Other
  
- ***(Customers)*** *If all was satisfactory (i.e., no problems/issues): What, if anything, could the U.S. Mint do to improve the order fulfillment process?*

- **(Customers) If not satisfactory: For each type of problem identified above...**
  - What was the specific nature of the problems you experienced? Probe...
    - If order delay: length of delay, communications regarding delay, etc.
    - If order was cancelled: circumstances, how resolved
    - If damaged merchandise: resolution process, and outcome
    - If contact service center, wait time, service representative's knowledge, resolution, etc.
  - What could the U.S. Mint have done to better address the problem you experienced? Probe...
    - How are similar issues handled by other companies from whom you purchase (better/worse)?
    - What specific changes would you recommend (e.g. procedures, etc.)?
  - How have these experiences affected how you will approach ordering from the U.S. Mint in the future (e.g., reduce purchasing, consolidate orders, order earlier, etc.)?

*[Explore additional issues and concepts related to order fulfillment as warranted.]*

#### **IV. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT COIN PRODUCTS AND NEW PRODUCT IDEAS (15 minutes)**

*[For non-customers, distribute US Mint catalog. For both customers and non-customers, subsequently distribute Annual Proof Sets, Uncirculated Sets, Silver Eagle Proof, Gold Eagle Proof.]*

- **(Customers/Non-customers) Overall, what are your impressions of the coin products that the U.S. Mint produces? Probe...**
  - Which ones are best? Worst?
  - What is your assessment of their overall quality?
  - How about their artistry?
  - What about their long-term value and investment potential?
- **(Customers/Non-customers) Suppose you were the head of new product development for the U.S. Mint and your charge was to develop new products for next year. What products would top your list and why?**

*[Use flipchart to capture ideas]*

## V. REACTIONS TO NEW PRODUCT CONCEPTS (20-30 minutes)

*[Introduce the 1st product description.]*

- **(Customers/Non-customers)** *For each product concept, ask...*
  - Would you be interested in buying this product, either from the U.S. Mint or secondary sources?
  - What specifically do you like about this new concept? Dislike?
  - What concerns, if any, would you have about this product?
  - Explore reasons for disinterest; **Probe...**
    - Too expensive
    - Poor quality/appearance
    - Don't like the design themes
    - Don't want to feel compelled to purchase the entire series
    - Other barriers
  - What do you think the U.S. Mint could do to make purchasing this product more compelling (**Probe** packaging, presentation, alternate designs, combination with other products)
  - What quantity would you want to buy?
  - In what ways, if any, would the availability of this new product affect the types/quantities of coins you now purchase from the U.S. Mint? From other sources?
  
- **(Customers/Non-customers)** *Probe any additional issues/reactions*

*[Introduce additional product descriptions and repeat sequence above.]*

## VI. LAYAWAY PROGRAM (15-20 minutes)

- **(Customers/Non-customers)** *Have any of you recently used a "layaway" program to make any types of purchase?*
  - What types of items?
  - Why did you choose this approach?
  - How well did the process work? What frustrations/problems, if any, did you encounter?

- ***(Customers/Non-customers) If the U.S. Mint were to introduce a layaway program...***
  - How likely would you be to use it? Probe...
    - Types of items
    - Circumstances
  - How do you think it should be structured? Probe as necessary for...
    - Down payment level (percent? dollar amount? etc.)
    - Maximum time limit
    - Forfeiture policy
    - Etc.

*[Distribute and review layaway program concept statement.]*

- ***(Customers/Non-customers) How do you feel about this layaway concept?***
  - What do you like about it? Dislike?
  - What concerns do you have (i.e., concerns either for using layaway yourself or regarding the impact of other potential layaway users on you)?
  - How would this affect your ordering practices?
- ***(Customers/Non-customers) What improvements to this idea would you recommend? Probe...***
  - Down payment level (percent? dollar amount? etc.)
  - Maximum time limits
  - Forfeiture policy
  - Etc.
- ***(Customers/Non-customers) Do you feel the U.S. Mint should introduce such a program? Why/why not?***

## **VII. SHIPPING CHARGES/PRICING - (10-15 minutes)**

- ***Customers What, if any, shipping charges do you pay for your U.S. Mint orders?***
  - Are you aware of them when you place your orders?
  - How do you feel about these charges (e.g., too high, reasonable, etc.)? (Probe for degree of dissatisfaction and underlying reasons)
  - How do these charges compare to other shipping charges that you incur (e.g., comparable types of order sizes/weights from other organizations)?



- **(Customers) How do these shipping charges affect your ordering practices?**
  - Consolidate orders?
  - Decide not to order?
  - Overall, what has been the impact on the total amount of products you have ordered?
  
- **(Customers) What, if anything, about the way shipping charges are assessed do you feel needs to be redesigned? Probe...**
  - Shipping price amounts/rates
  - Flat rate approach versus indexing to number of items ordered
  - Special shipping options/upgrades
  - Other ideas
  
- **(Non-Customers) What prices would you expect to pay for shipping for the types of items the U.S. Mint sells?**
  
- **(Non-Customers) How would you expect/prefer the shipping charges to be structured? Probe...**
  - Flat rate approach versus indexing to number of items ordered
  - Special shipping options/upgrades
  - Other ideas

## VIII. COMMUNICATIONS - ALL (15 minutes)

*[Introduce specific communications issues/topics per prior discussion within group, as well as other issues identified by U.S. Mint.]*

- **(Non-customers and Customers) How well do you believe the U.S. Mint is performing with respect to this particular aspect of its communications with the public? Probe for...**
  - Positive characteristics
  - Areas for improvement
  
- **(Non-customers and Customers) What specifically would you recommend the U.S. Mint do to improve its performance in this area?**

*[Repeat sequence for each communications topic.]*

**IX. MISCELLANY & WRAP-UP (5 minutes)**

*[Complete rating sheets defined by U.S. Mint related to specific topics discussed.]*

- ***(Customers/Non-customers) Probe additional issues identified by U.S Mint; thank and conclude***