



How to Start Selling on eBay

*A Quick Guide to Getting
Up and Running on
The World's Online Marketplace®*

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SECTION 1: EBAY SPECIAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I owned a web site called www.AuctionRookie.com (which I have since sold). As part of that site, I came up with this basic primer on getting started in selling on eBay. The first part of this document is a reprint of that special report.

The next part of the document is a number of great articles on selling on eBay. I hope this document gives you the impetus to test out selling your craft products on eBay.

There are over 740,000 people earning their primary or secondary income on eBay, with another 1.5 million people supplementing their incomes by selling on eBay. I hope you're at least try eBay out, and who knows... you could be the next eBay Power Seller!

HOW TO START SELLING ON EBAY!

I get a lot of questions from people who are interested in selling on eBay. Being an Auction Rookie right now, I do my best to answer their questions. Sometimes, I can answer the questions from experience; sometimes I need to research the answer.

One of the questions I can answer is: “How do I get started selling on eBay?” Here’s a quick run-down of the steps required:

1. Sign up to sell on eBay
2. Sign up to accept payments
3. Create your “About Me” page on eBay
4. Create your first auction listing
5. Get paid by the winning bidder and ship!

In this report, I’m going to give you the basics to setting yourself up to sell on eBay. For additional information, there are a number of books and programs on selling on eBay. You can check your local bookstore, www.Amazon.com, or do a search on www.Google.com.

STEP ONE: SIGN UP TO SELL ON EBAY

This is the easy step in the process. Simply go to www.eBay.com and click on the “Register” button on the left half of the page, and fill in the form. The information you will be asked for includes:

- First and Last Name
- Address
- Telephone
- Email Address
- eBay User ID

Your eBay User ID is the name that will show up as you buy or sell items on eBay. This is an opportunity to say something about yourself, so choose your name wisely. For example, if you specialize in selling old tin toys, you may want to create a user ID like “oldtintoys” or “antiquetintoys” to show people your specialization.

Once you’ve completed and submitted the registration form, you will need to respond to a confirmation email that eBay will send. Just click on the link in the email and you’re registered on eBay.

BUT WAIT! You want to sell on eBay, so you need to go further. On the registration completion page, you will want to text link that allows you to “create a sellers account” on eBay.

You will be redirected to a sign-in page. Enter your new eBay User ID and password to log into eBay. During this step, you will need to enter a credit card and bank account, which is required by eBay to verify your identity. This step helps protect eBay from fraudulent sellers (although fraud still happens sometimes).

PLEASE NOTE: If you are just starting out, a personal credit card and personal checking account are acceptable, but if you are serious about building a business on eBay, you should get yourself a business checking account and use a credit card exclusively for that business. It will make your life easier come tax season!

Please follow the instructions on the seller account set-up page closely. They are well written, but you need to make sure your bank account and bank routing information are correct.

That's it. You're now set up to sell your products on eBay. You're in business!

STEP TWO: SIGN UP TO ACCEPT PAYMENTS

There are a number of different options for accepting payments on eBay, and these include personal checks, money orders, credit cards, BillPoint, Western Union, and PayPal. Currently, PayPal is the most popular form of payment for those who are not set up to take credit cards directly (a merchant account).

PayPal allows you to accept credit cards through the PayPal system, and it is so easy and popular that eBay recently bought the company! So, to start with, I would suggest you sign up with PayPal to get instant auction payments (and streamline your online auction business).

To register, go to www.PayPal.com and complete the online sign-up form. You'll be asked for most of the same information you completed during the eBay registration:

- Name
- Address
- Telephone
- Email Address

You will also be asked to complete a couple of security questions and also fill in some randomly generated characters. This is for your protection, so please complete this information carefully.

At the bottom of the registration form, you will be asked the type of account you would like. You will want to make sure that you select either a "Premier" or "Business" account. These two types of accounts allow you to accept credit cards for a small fee (0.7% = \$.30 to 2.9% +\$.30).

These fees do subtract from your bottom line, but accepting credit cards, even through PayPal, will increase your business dramatically. When shopping online, everyone wants the convenience, and protection, of using a credit card. Without PayPal or a similar service, you will need to wait for money orders or personal checks to arrive in the mail before shipping your products.

Once you submit your registration form, please follow the rest of PayPal's instructions to complete the sign-up. Again, respond to all confirmation emails. You can also enter bank account information to become "verified" on PayPal. This offers another level of assurance for your customers, so I think it is worth the effort but make your own decision.

There are other services that will allow you to accept credit cards, but again, PayPal is the most popular. As your business progresses, you may want to start accepting credit cards directly, but that's for another report!

STEP THREE: CREATE YOUR “ABOUT ME” PAGE

One of the most important, and least-utilized, “freebies” on eBay is the “About Me” page. With the About Me page, you can promote yourself as a seller, promote all of your auctions, and show your feedback ratings.

To create your About Me page, you will want to log into eBay and go to the “my eBay” tab at the top of the page. Once this is selected, you will want to select the “about me” tab that is in the second row of buttons at the top of the page. This will bring you to the page that lets you create your About Me page. Simply click on the “create and edit your page” button to get started.

eBay offers three different pre-packaged layouts for you to use. I chose the two-column layout, but made a lot of changes to the page to customize it. If you’d like to check out my About Me page, click here (<http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/film-riter/> - NO LONGER ACTIVE).

When creating your About Me page, you need to think about what you are trying to accomplish with your eBay business. Let’s take the antique tin toy example and create some rough information you can use. Once you’ve chosen a format (for this example I’m going to use the two-column format), you’ll be asked to complete a form with the following information:

- Page Title
- Welcome Message
 - Heading
 - Text
- Another Paragraph
 - Heading
 - Text
- Picture
- Show Your eBay Activity
 - Feedback
 - Items For Sale
- Share Some of Your Favorite Things
 - Favorite Links
 - Favorite eBay Items

This is the most basic eBay About Me layout and information, because eBay allows you to go in and edit using HTML to personalize your page and make it look a little more “sexy.” I’ve done this a little bit, but for this example, let’s stick to the basics.

PLEASE NOTE: You can take a look at the HTML anyone has used for their about me page by going to the “View” pull-down menu at the top of your Internet Browser and looking at the “Source.” If you would like to see the HTML I used for my About Me page, you can see it on my site by clicking here (insert about me stuff URL)).

So, here’s the antique tin toy example:

Page Title: Chuck’s Antique Tin Toys

Welcome Heading: The Finest Tin Toys on eBay!

Welcome Text: Hi, my name is Chuck Smith, and I LOVE TIN TOYS! I have been collecting antique tin toys for over ten years, and discovered eBay was a great place to find more toys for my collection about three years ago. The problem was that I was buying so many, I was running out of money. But that’s not a problem – I know how to get tin toys at a great price from being in the business so long. So . . . I decided to use eBay to finance my hobby and I’m offering antique tin toys (at least the ones I don’t HAVE to have for my collection) on eBay.

Another Paragraph Heading: In my auctions, you will be given complete descriptions of each and every item I sell. You’ll see the exact condition, and I will describe any flaws in the auction listing text. I will also give you as much information about the toy, including manufacturer, history, and provenance as I can provide. I want you to feel comfortable when buying from me. On this page, you can see my Feedback and also the other Items I have for sale. I hope you’ll enjoy my auctions, and I look forward to doing business with you in the near future! Good luck!

Picture: You can add a picture of yourself holding a toy. To get a picture on eBay, you will need to either have a Web site where you can post files already, or you can use one of the many picture hosting services available on the Internet. You can find more information on picture hosting by going here (insert info URL).

Feedback: As you buy and sell items on eBay, you will want to have your Feedback listed on your About Me page. Here's you'll select the number of Feedback listings (I use the last 10) to show on your page, and eBay fills it in automatically. Feedback is the way that eBay lets other users know how you conduct yourself on their site. If you're an excellent buyer and seller, people will send you Feedback that is positive. Do something wrong, and you'll get negative Feedback. Make sure you run your business in an above-board manner! Feedback does count.

Items For Sale: This is similar to the Feedback line in that you select the number of Items For Sale to show, and eBay fills it into your page automatically. This is a great way to show potential bidders what items you have for sale.

Favorite Links: Here, you can link to your own Web site (I highly recommend you get your own Web site), or link to some favorite links. Perhaps there's a Web site out there that offers information and estimated values for antique tin toys.

Favorite Items: I don't use this, but if you have some favorite items you've purchased or seen on your eBay travels, then go ahead and list them. I would prefer not to send people to other eBay sellers, so be careful.

That's it. You can submit your sight, and eBay will automatically generate your page. You can also edit the page in HTML, but you want to be sure you know what you're doing in this case as it can get very confusing. My suggestion would be to use an external HTML editor like Dreamweaver, and then cut-and-paste the HTML text into the Edit page on eBay. I have instructions on doing this here (insert URL).

STEP FOUR: CREATE YOUR FIRST AUCTION LISTING

Now that you're set up to do business on eBay, you need to start selling. Perhaps you have an idea of what you would like to sell, but if not, find something in your house you no longer use, but still has some value. For example:

- An old set of golf clubs
- Personal development tape programs (HOT seller!)
- Electronic equipment you no longer use
- Gifts that you didn't like, but were too shy to return
- Cameras or camcorders that you no longer use

The list goes on and on. But the important thing is to find something to sell, just to get your feet wet and to get that first taste of auction success.

Now that you've chosen your item, let's start writing that first auction listing. To start with, you'll want to do the following:

- Description of truck in 45 characters or less
- List all of the unique features of the item
- Write down why someone would want to buy this item
- Take one or two (or perhaps even more) good pictures of the item

For this sample ad, let's continue using the tin toy example (and no, I don't know anything about tin toys!). Here's what a list of the unique features of an antique tin toy milk truck might look like:

- Manufactured by Acme Toys in 1932
- Replica of a Hoodsie Milk truck
- Excellent condition – all original
- Very rare item – most were melted down for bullets in WWII

Here's a list of why someone would want to buy this item:

- Your Dad probably had one just like this when he was young
- Everyone loves milk, especially kids
- Advertising collectibles are hot commodities
- The Hoodsie Milk company was famous for it's ads with Marilyn Monroe

After snapping a few pictures of your tin toy (preferably with a digital camera), you sit down to write your ad. It might go something like this:

Description: Rare, Vintage 1932 Acme Hoodsie Milk Tin Toy

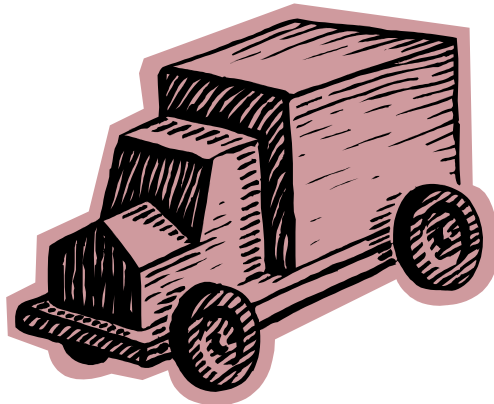
PLEASE NOTE: The description is what shows in the auction listings page, and what eBay browsers search on when looking for an item. You want to have as many possible key words for your audience in the Description as possible. In this case, eBay browsers will find your listing if they are looking:

- Tin Toys
- Tin Toys from 1932
- Hoodsie Milk Tin Toys
- Hoodsie Milk Collectibles
- Acme Toys
- Rare Toys
- Vintage Toys
- Etc.

The Auction Listing: In the auction listing, especially if the item is of some worth and is unique, you'll want to spend some time creating some excitement and fully explaining the item. Don't worry about the listing being too long – most auction listing don't do enough to fully describe the items and their benefits for the potential bidders. So go nuts!

RARE 1932 HOODSIE MILK TIN TOY TRUCK FROM ACME

This rare Hoodsie Milk Truck Tin Toy is from Acme Toy company. Manufactured in 1932, this truck is still in great condition, and ready for your collection. As you can see from the photo, this vintage tin toy is in excellent condition, with only normal wear and tear (the paint is chipping in spots, most noticeably on the front grill and back door).



There were only 2,000 of these promotional toys made by Acme Toys for the Hoodsie Milk company, and many of them didn't survive. Most of the trucks were melted down for the war effort during World War II. This truck is a precious piece of Americana, and is probably something your father played with or wished to have when he was a boy (if he remembers Hoodsie Milk's ads with Marilyn Monroe!).

I have seen this item on eBay for upwards of \$50 dollars, but the bidding on this auction starts at \$5, so it can be yours for a bargain price. This antique tin toy is sold as is. Buyer accepts payment via PayPal (preferred) or money order, and will ship via US Mail or UPS within 2 days of receiving payment.

P.S. Be sure to check out my About Me page for my other auction listings.

Thank you and Good Luck!

As you can see, I tried to weave a little bit of a story around the toy truck to make it a more interesting read for the potential bidders, while also creating some “want” to get them to bid. This is something that will come naturally to you as you create more and more auction listings.

PLEASE NOTE: Payment Terms and shipping are mentioned in the auction listing. You will want to familiarize yourself with eBay’s terms and conditions, and take advantage of their many excellent resources for sellers located in the [Seller’s Hub](#).

STEP FIVE: GET PAID AND SHIP

So you've listed your auction, and you've been following its progress all week (the seven day auction is the best performing for most items). It's come down to the last day, and you finally get that final bid in. Someone's won the auction!

The first thing you'll want to do is go to your "my eBay" page and click on the "Selling" tab. On that page, you'll find the "Items I've Sold" listings, which will have your just-completed tin toy auction. In this listing, you'll see the description, high bid, etc. The most important thing for you is the "Send Invoice" button. Click on this to send an invoice to the high bidder.

You'll want to include the shipping cost if possible. You can use the eBay shipping center to "guesstimate" the costs, but this can lead to some problems. Best to go to the post office or UPS to have them weigh and price the shipping.

Once you've sent the invoice, you'll need to wait at least three days before contacting the winning bidder again. eBay keeps track of this info, so you don't have to. But hopefully, you'll receive an email from PayPal with a notification of instant payment. You've got your first sale!

Now that you've been paid, you want to ship the item out as quickly as possible. Prepare your item for safe shipping by using plenty of packaging materials – bubble wrap, foam wrap, or packaging paper – and a good, sturdy box. You'll want to include an invoice with the shipment (in case the label comes off). Here's a sample that you can use:

INVOICE

Seller tintoyguy
Buyer ilovetintoy

Item Number	Description	Price
123456789	Rare, Vintage 1932 Acme Hoodsie Milk Tin Toy	\$42.50
	Shipping and handling	\$9.00
	TOTAL	\$51.50

Shipping address:
Bob Jones
13 Maple Street
Anywhere, MI 44444

Seller's address
Chuck Smith
13 Maple Street
Anytown, MA 01111
(978) 555 - 5555

Thank you, and Happy Holidays!

Chuck Smith
csmith@tintoyguy.com
www.tintoyguy.com

Now send out the package, then send out an email to the winning bidder with the specifics on the package. Here's a sample confirmation email:

=====

Hello [Name],

Your tin truck was shipped today via Priority Mail, and should arrive by Saturday or Monday. If you have not received them by Tuesday, please contact me.

Thanks,

Chuck Smith
csmith@tintoyguy.com
www.tintoyguy.com

=====

And that's it.

CONCLUSION

Selling on eBay is a simple thing. Building a business on eBay is a lot of hard work, but the basics of selling an item are the building block for a successful eBay business. Master listing and selling one item, and you can build yourself a successful eBay business selling tens or hundreds of items at the same time. You just need the right tools to automate the process. But that's a topic for another Report!

Thanks, and happy eBay selling,

Chuck Smith

csmith@auctionrookie.com

www.auctionrookie.com

SECTION TWO: ARTICLES ON EBAY SELLING

eBay: The First 10 Years.

Yes, you read that correctly: ten years. eBay was created in September 1995, by a man called Pierre Omidyar, who was living in San Jose. He wanted his site – then called ‘AuctionWeb’ – to be an online marketplace, and wrote the first code for it in one weekend. It was one of the first websites of its kind in the world. The name ‘eBay’ comes from the domain Omidyar used for his site. His company’s name was Echo Bay, and the ‘eBay AuctionWeb’ was originally just one part of Echo Bay’s website at ebay.com. The first thing ever sold on the site was Omidyar’s broken laser pointer, which he got \$14 for.

The site quickly became massively popular, as sellers came to list all sorts of odd things and buyers actually bought them. Relying on trust seemed to work remarkably well, and meant that the site could almost be left alone to run itself. The site had been designed from the start to collect a small fee on each sale, and it was this money that Omidyar used to pay for AuctionWeb’s expansion. The fees quickly added up to more than his current salary, and so he decided to quit his job and work on the site full-time. It was at this point, in 1996, that he added the feedback facilities, to let buyers and sellers rate each other and make buying and selling safer.

In 1997, Omidyar changed AuctionWeb’s – and his company’s – name to ‘eBay’, which is what people had been calling the site for a long time. He began to spend a lot of money on advertising, and had the eBay logo designed. It was in this year that the one-millionth item was sold (it was a toy version of Big Bird from Sesame Street).

Then, in 1998 – the peak of the dotcom boom – eBay became big business, and the investment in Internet businesses at the time allowed it to bring in senior managers and business strategists, who took in public on the stock market. It started to encourage people to sell more than just collectibles, and quickly became a massive site where you could sell anything, large or small. Unlike other sites, though, eBay survived the end of the boom, and is still going strong today.

1999 saw eBay go worldwide, launching sites in the UK, Australia and Germany. eBay bought half.com, an Amazon-like online retailer, in the year 2000 – the same year it introduced Buy it Now – and bought PayPal, an online payment service, in 2002.

Pierre Omidyar has now earned an estimated \$3 billion from eBay, and still serves as Chairman of the Board. Oddly enough, he keeps a personal weblog at <http://pierre.typepad.com>. There are now literally millions of items bought and sold every day on eBay, all over the world. For every \$100 spent online worldwide, it is estimated that \$14 is spent on eBay – that's a lot of laser pointers.

Now that you know the history of eBay, perhaps you'd like to know how it could work for you? Our next email will give you an idea of the possibilities.

eBay Income Possibilities

If you've ever read an article about eBay, you will have seen the kinds of incomes people make – it isn't unusual to hear of people making thousands of dollars per month on eBay.

Next time you're on eBay, take a look at how many PowerSellers there are: you'll find quite a few. Now consider that every single one of one of them must be making at least \$1,000 per month, as that's eBay's requirement for becoming a PowerSeller. Silver PowerSellers make at least \$3,000 each month, while Gold PowerSellers make more than \$10,000, and the Platinum level is \$25,000. The top ranking is Titanium PowerSeller, and to qualify you must make at least \$150,000 in sales every month!

The fact that these people exist gives you some idea of the income possibilities here. Most of them never set out to even set up a business on eBay – they simply started selling a few things, and then kept going. There are plenty of people whose full-time job is selling things on eBay, and some of them have been doing it for years now. Can you imagine that? Once they've bought the stock, everything else is pretty much pure profit for these people – they don't need to pay for any business premises, staff, or anything else. There are multi-million pound businesses making less in actual profit than eBay PowerSellers do.

Even if you don't want to quit your job and really go for it, you can still use eBay to make a significant second income. You can pack up orders during the week and take them down to the post office for delivery each Saturday. There are few other things you could be doing with your spare time that have anywhere near that kind of earning potential.

What's more, eBay doesn't care who you are, where you live, or what you look like: some PowerSellers are very old, or very young. Some live out in the middle of nowhere where selling on eBay is one of the few alternatives to farming or being very poor. eBay tears down the barriers to earning that the real world constantly puts up. There's no job interview and no commuting involved – if you can post things, you can do it.

Put it this way: if you know where to get something reasonably cheaply that you could sell, then you can sell it on eBay – and since you can always get discounts for bulk at wholesale, that's not exactly difficult. Buy a job lot of

something in-demand cheaply, sell it on eBay, and you're making money already, with no set-up costs.

If you want to dip your toe in the water before you commit to actually buying anything, then you can just sell things that you've got lying around in the house. Search through that cupboard of stuff you never use, and you'll probably find you've got a few hundred dollars' worth of stuff lying around in there! This is the power of eBay: there is always someone who wants what you're selling, whatever it might be, and since they've come looking for you, you don't even need to do anything to get them to buy it.

So you want to get started on eBay? Well, that's great! There are only a few little things you need to learn to get started. Our next email will give you the lowdown.

What You Need to Know BEFORE You Get Started on eBay.

So you've decided that you want to get started as a seller on eBay. There are a few things that you really need to know before you go and throw yourself in at the deep end.

What to Sell.

First off, you need to know what it is you're going to sell: what's your speciality? You'll do far better on eBay if you become a great source for certain kind of products, as people who are interested in those products will come back to you again and again. You won't get any loyalty or real reputation if you just sell rubbish at random.

When you think about what to sell, there are a few things to consider. The most important of these is to always sell what you know. If you try to sell something that you just don't know anything about then you'll never write a good description and sell it for a good price.

You might think you're not especially interested in anything, but if you think about what kind of things you usually buy and which websites you go to most often, I'm sure you'll discover some kind of interest. If all else fails mention it to your friends and family: they'll almost certainly say "Oh, well why don't you sell...", and you'll slap your forehead.

Out of the things you know enough about, you should then consider which things you could actually get for a good enough price to resell, and how suitable they would be for posting. If you can think of something of that you're knowledgeable about and it's small and light enough for postage to be relatively cheap, then that's great!

Don't worry if you think the thing you're selling is too obscure – it isn't. There's a market for almost everything on eBay, even things that wouldn't sell once in a year if you stocked them in a shop. You'll probably do even better if you fill a niche than if you sell something common.

Tax and Legal Matters.

If you earn enough money, you should be aware that you're going to have to start paying tax – this won't be done for you. If you decide to sell on eBay on a full-time basis, you should probably register as a business.

Prepare Yourself.

There are going to be ups and downs when you sell on eBay. Don't pack it in if something goes a little wrong in your first few sales: the sellers who are successful on eBay are the ones who enjoy it, and stick at it whatever happens.

Anyone can sell on eBay, if they believe in themselves – and if you do decide it's not for you, then the start-up costs are so low that you won't really have lost anything.

If you're ready to start selling, then the next thing you need to know is the different auction types, so you can decide which ones you will use to sell your items. Our next email will give you a guide.

A Beginner's Guide to the Different eBay Auction Types.

Over the years, eBay has introduced all sorts of different auction types, in an effort to give people more options when they buy and sell their things on eBay.

For every seller who doesn't like the idea that their item might sell for a far lower price than they intend, there's another who wants to shift hundreds of the same item quickly. eBay tries to cater to all tastes. This email gives you an overview of the different kinds of auctions and their advantages for you.

Normal Auctions.

These are the bread-and-butter of eBay, the auctions everyone knows: buyers bid, others outbid them, they bid again, and the winner gets the item. Simple.

Reserve Auctions.

Reserve auctions are for sellers who don't want their items to sell for less than a certain price – a concept you'll know about if you're familiar with real auctions. They work just like normal auctions on eBay, except that the buyer will be told if their bid does not meet the reserve price you set, and they'll need to bid again if they want the item. If no-one is willing to meet your price, then the auction is cancelled, and you keep the item.

Fixed Price ('Buy it Now') Auctions.

Buy it Now auctions can work in one of two ways. You can add a Buy it Now button to a normal auction, meaning that buyers can choose either to bid normally or to simply pay the asking price and avoid the whole bidding process. Some sellers, though, now cut out the auction process altogether and simply list all their items at fixed price. This lets you avoid all the complications of the auction format and simply list your items for how much you want them to sell for.

Recently, eBay added a twist to fixed price auctions: the 'best offer'. This means that buyers can contact you to negotiate a price, which could be a good way to get sell some extra stock at a small discount. The only downside to reserve and fixed price auctions is that you pay a small extra fee

to use these formats. In general, it is more worth using reserve auctions for higher-priced items and fixed price auctions for lower-priced ones – but remember that you can combine the two formats.

Multiple Item ('Dutch') Auctions.

These are auctions where you can sell more than one of a certain item. Dutch auctions can be done by bidding. Buyers bid a price and say how many items they want, and then everyone pays the lowest price that was bid by one of the winning bidders. If you have trouble getting your head around that, then don't worry – everyone else does too! These auctions are very rare.

What is more common is when a seller has a lot of one item, and lists it using a combination of two auction types: a multiple-item fixed price auction. This just means that you can just say how many of the item you they have, and offer them at a fixed price per unit. Buyers can enter how many they want and then just click Buy it Now to get them.

Now that you know about the different types of auctions, you should make sure that the items you plan to sell don't violate eBay's listing policies. The next email will let you know what's allowed and what is a big no-no.

Staying Out of Trouble with eBay's Listing Policies.

While you can sell most things on eBay, quite a few things are banned. If you try to sell any of these things then eBay will remove your auction and all bids will be void.

Here is eBay's full list of prohibited or questionable items:

- Academic Software
- Airline and Transit Related Items
- Alcohol (also see Wine)
- Animals and Wildlife Products
- Anti-circumvention Policy
- Artifacts
- Authenticity Disclaimers
- Autographed Items
- Batteries
- Beta Software
- Bootleg Recordings
- Brand Name Misuse
- Catalog Sales
- Catalytic Converters and Test Pipes
- Celebrity Material
- Charity or Fundraising Listings
- Comparison Policy
- Compilation and Informational Media
- Contracts and Tickets
- Counterfeit Currency and Stamps
- Counterfeit Items
- Credit Cards
- Downloadable Media
- Drugs & Drug Paraphernalia
- Electronics Equipment
- Embargoed Goods and Prohibited Countries
- Encouraging Infringement Policy
- Event Tickets
- Faces, Names and Signatures
- Firearms, Ammunition, Replicas, and Militaria
- Fireworks
- Food

Freon and Other Refrigerants
Gift Cards
Government IDs and Licenses
Hazardous, Restricted, and Perishable Items
Human Parts and Remains
Importation of Goods into the United States
International Trading - Buyers
International Trading - Sellers
Lockpicking Devices
Lottery Tickets
Mailing Lists and Personal Information
Manufacturers' Coupons
Mature Audiences
Medical Devices
Misleading Titles
Mod Chips, Game Enhancers, and Boot Discs
Movie Prints
Multi-level Marketing, Pyramid and Matrix Programs
OEM Software
Offensive Material
Pesticides
Plants and Seeds
Police-Related Items
Political Memorabilia
Postage Meters
Pre-Sale Listings
Prescription Drugs and Devices
Promotional Items
Real Estate
Recalled Items
Recordable Media
Replica and Counterfeit Items
Satellite and Cable TV Descramblers
Slot Machines
Stocks and Other Securities
Stolen Property
Surveillance Equipment
Tobacco
Travel
Unauthorized Copies

Used Clothing
Warranties
Weapons & Knives
Wine (also see Alcohol)

Most of this is very obvious – of course you can't sell illegal things like drugs, pyramid schemes or stolen goods. Almost everything that is on the list is there because there is law against selling it. Some of the reasons, though, are a little strange.

The 'autographed items' entry, for example, doesn't mean that you can't sell anything that's been autographed – it just means that you can only sell it if it comes with a certificate of authenticity. The 'artifacts' entry prohibits you from selling Native American graves; 'celebrity material' means you can't sell unauthorised pictures of celebrities; 'embargoed goods' means that you can't sell anything that comes from Cuba... on and on it goes, and most of it you never need to know.

If your chosen kind of item seems to be on the list, though, and you're concerned that you might not be able to sell it, then check the full list at <http://pages.ebay.com/help/policies/items-ov.html> to see whether the item is banned entirely or there are just a few restrictions.

eBay says it will remove any items that it believes violate copyright law, but in reality they don't have that many people to monitor the site. You will generally only find that your auction gets removed if someone decides to report you – and even then, they might not get around to it.

Really, buying and selling on eBay can sometimes feel more complicated than it really is, thanks to all the rules surrounding it – not to mention the jargon. Our next email is a 'jargon buster', to help you learn the language of eBay.

Learning the eBay “Lingo”.

Do you have trouble sometimes understanding when people talk about eBay? Don't worry, some of the jargon is really obscure, and you can't be expected to understand it until someone's told you what it means. Here's a little list of some of the most useful lingo to know, but you don't need to memorise it – even the most common jargon is only used relatively rarely.

Words.

Bid: telling eBay's system the maximum price you are prepared to pay for an item.

Dutch: an auction where more than one of an item is available.

Feedback: positive or negative comments left about other users on eBay.

Mint: in perfect condition.

Non-paying bidder: a bidder who wins an auction but does not then go on to buy the item.

PayPal: an electronic payment method accepted by most sellers.

Rare: used and abused on eBay, now entirely meaningless.

Reserve: the minimum price the seller will accept for the item.

Shill bid: a fake bid placed by a seller trying to drive up their auction's price.

Snail Mail: the post, which is obviously very slow compared to email.

Sniping: bidding at the last second to win the item before anyone else can outbid you.

Abbreviations.

AUD: Australian Dollar. Currency.

BIN: Buy it Now. A fixed price auction.

BNWT: Brand New With Tags. An item that has never been used and still has its original tags.

BW: Black and White. Used for films, photos etc.

CONUS: Continental United States. Generally used by sellers who don't want to post things to Alaska or Hawaii.

EUR: Euro. Currency.

FC: First Class. Type of postage.

GBP: Great British Pounds. Currency.

HTF: Hard To Find. Not quite as abused as 'rare', but getting there.

NIB: New in Box. Never opened, still in its original box.

NR: No Reserve. An item where the seller has not set a reserve price.

OB: Original Box. An item that has its original box (but might have been opened).

PM: Priority Mail.

PP: Parcel Post.

SH: Shipping and Handling. The fees the buyer will pay you for postage.

USD: United States Dollars. Currency.

VGC: Very Good Condition. Not mint, but close.

The chances are that you'll find more specific jargon related to whatever you're selling, but it'd be an impossible task to cover it all here. If you can't figure one out from your knowledge of the subject, then type the term into a search engine, followed by the word 'ebay'. The chances are that someone, somewhere will have seen fit to explain it.

While it's good to be able to understand others' jargon, avoid using it unless you really need to (for example, if you run out of space in an item's title). Many people on eBay are not experienced buyers and you will lose them if you write a load of gobbledegook all over your auction.

By now, you're well prepared for eBay life, and you're probably ready to get started with that first auction. In the next email, we'll show you how to dive in and get started.

5 Simple Steps to Posting Your First eBay Auction.

It's surprisingly simple to get started posting your very first auction on eBay. Here's what you need to do.

Step 1: Open an eBay seller's account.

If you've bought things on eBay, then you already have an account – just log in with it and click 'Sell' in the toolbar at the top of the page, then click 'Create a seller's account'. If you've never used eBay before, then you'll need to open an account first using the 'register' link underneath the toolbar, and then click 'Sell' and 'Create a seller's account'. The eBay site will then guide you through the process. For security, this may involve giving card details and bank information.

Step 2: Decide what to sell.

For your first little experiment with eBay, it doesn't really matter what you sell. Take a look around the room you're in – I'm sure there's something in there that you're not all that attached to and could put in the post. Small books and CDs are ideal first items.

Step 3: Submit your item.

Click 'Sell', and you're on your way to listing your item.

The first thing you need to do is choose a category – it's best to just type in what the item is and let eBay choose for you. Next, write a title and description. Include key words you think people will search for in the title box, and all the information you have about the item in the description box.

Now set a starting price. \$0.01 is the best starting price, as it draws people in to bid who otherwise wouldn't, and items will almost never finish at such a low price. The next thing to set is the duration of the auction: 3, 5, 7 or 10 days. This is up to you: longer sales will usually get more bids, but will also seem to drag on forever. If you've taken a picture, add it now – items with pictures always sell for more. Finally, tick the payment methods you will accept (just PayPal is best for now), and where you will post to (limit yourself to your own country to begin with). Submit and you're done!

Step 4: Wait for it to sell.

This is just a matter of sitting back and letting eBay do its thing – buyers will find your item and leave bids on it. Some bidders might email you with questions about the item, and you should do your best to answer these questions as quickly as you can.

Remember that if your item doesn't sell then you can list it again for free.

Step 5: Collect payment and post it.

eBay will send your buyer emails guiding them through the process of sending you payment for the item. Make sure you have the money before you send anything.

Once you've got the payment, all you need to do is pack the item for posting (make sure to use some bubble wrap), take the buyer's address from the confirmation email eBay sent you, and write it on the parcel. Put some stamps on, post it, and you're done!

I hope you enjoyed selling your first item. Now that you're starting to get into it, the next email will give you a checklist of things you need to do to be a successful seller.

An eBay Seller's Checklist.

Being a seller is a lot of responsibility, and sometimes you might feel like you're not doing everything you should be. This simple checklist will help you keep on top of things.

Have you found out everything you possibly could about your items? Try typing their names into a search engine – you might find out something you didn't know. If someone else is selling the same thing as you, then always try to provide more information about it than they do.

Do you monitor the competition? Always keep an eye on how much other items the same as or similar to yours are selling, and what prices they're being offered at. There's usually little point in starting a fixed price auction for \$100 when someone else is selling the item for \$90.

Have you got pictures of the items? It's worth taking the time to photograph your items, especially if you have a digital camera. If you get serious about eBay but don't have a camera, then you will probably want to invest in one at some point.

Are you emailing your sellers? It's worth sending a brief email when transactions go through: something like a simple "Thank you for buying my item, please let me know when you have sent the payment". Follow this up with "Thanks for your payment, I have posted your [item name] today". You will be surprised how many problems you will avoid just by communicating this way.

Also, are you checking your emails? Remember that potential buyers can send you email about anything at any time, and not answering these emails will just make them go somewhere else instead of buying from you.

Do your item description pages have everything that buyers need to know? If you're planning to offer international delivery, then it's good to make a list of the charges to different countries and display it on each auction. If you have any special terms and conditions (for example, if you will give a refund on any item as long as it hasn't been opened), then you should make sure these are displayed too.

Have you been wrapping your items correctly? Your wrapping should be professional for the best impression: use appropriately sized envelopes or parcels, wrap the item in bubble wrap to stop it from getting damaged, and print labels instead of hand-writing addresses. Oh, and always use first class post – don't be cheap.

Do you follow up? It is worth sending out an email a few days after you post an item, saying “Is everything alright with your purchase? I hope you received it and it was as you expected.” This might sound like giving the customer an opportunity to complain, but you should be trying to help your customers, not take their money and run.

Being a really good eBay seller, more than anything else, is about providing genuinely good and honest customer service. That's the only foolproof way to protect your reputation. Of course, you might be wondering by now whether it's really worth all the hassle to get a good reputation on eBay. Won't people buy from you anyway, and couldn't you just open a new account if it really comes down to that? Our next email will set you straight.

What's Your eBay Reputation Really Worth?

Your eBay reputation is everything you are on eBay – without it, you're nothing. Your reputation is worth as much as every sale you will ever make.

If you've ever bought anything on eBay (and the chances are you have), then think about your own behaviour. Buying from a seller with a low feedback rating makes you feel a little nervous and insecure, while buying from a PowerSeller with their reputation in the thousands doesn't require any thought or fear – it feels just like buying from a shop.

A Bad Reputation Will Lose You Sales.

In fact, a bad reputation will lose you almost all your sales. If someone leaves you negative feedback, you will feel the pain straight away, as that rating will go right at the top of your user page for everyone to see. Who's going to want to do business with you when they've just read that you “took a month to deliver the item”, or that you had “bad communication and sent a damaged item”? The answer is no-one.

Your next few items will need to be very cheap things, just to push that negative down the page. You might have to spend days or even weeks selling cheap stuff to get enough positive feedback to make anyone deal with you again.

It's even worse if you consistently let buyers leave negative feedback – once you get below 90% positive ratings, you might as well be invisible.

You Can't Just Open a New Account.

Besides eBay's rules about only having one account, there are far more downsides than that to getting a new account. You literally have to start all over again from scratch.

You won't be able to use all the different eBay features. Your existing customers won't be able to find you any more. Your auctions will finish at a lower price because of your low feedback rating. Opening a new account is like moving to a new town to get away from a few people who are spreading rumours about you: it's throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

A Good Reputation Will Get You Sales.

When a PowerSeller tells me something, I tend to believe them. They can be selling a pretty unlikely item, but if they guarantee it is what they say it is, then I trust them – they're not going to risk their reputation, after all. This is the power of a reputation: people know you want to keep it, and they know you'll go to almost any lengths to do so.

This is true even to the point that I would sooner buy something for \$20 from a seller I know I can trust than for \$15 from someone with average feedback. It's worth the extra money to feel like the seller knows what they're doing, has all their systems in place and will get me the item quickly and efficiently.

You really will find selling on eBay so much easier, and there's only way to get a good reputation: make sure you please your customers every time. But some customers can be, well, just a little difficult to please. In the next email, we ask: is the eBay customer always right?

Is the eBay Customer Always Right?

I can answer this question for you right now: the answer is ‘yes’. In fact, the answer is ‘YES!’ – the biggest yes you’ve ever heard. Of the course the customer is always right. If you want to be a successful eBay seller, you should go miles out of your way to make sure every single one of your customers is 100% satisfied, however much time or money it might cost you.

A dissatisfied customer will leave negative feedback, and negative feedback is to be avoided at all costs. That one piece of negative feedback will always cost you more than it would have to deal with the complaint, whatever the value of the items you sell. You should consider any positive feedback percentage under 100% to be an absolute disaster, and a personal failure on your part.

But What If...

But nothing! There is no situation where you, as a seller, should get into any dispute with a buyer. Here are a few common situations and how to handle them.

They say the item never arrived: Politely ask the buyer to wait a few more days to see if it turns up, and then email you again if it still hasn’t arrived. If it still hasn’t arrived, you should assume it was lost in the post somehow and offer to send a replacement if you have one, or give them a full refund otherwise. No, I don’t care what that costs you. Are you serious about selling on eBay or not?

The item has been damaged in the post: You must offer to replace it or take it back for a refund without hesitation.

They say the item doesn’t match the description: Resist the urge to email back with “yes it does, you just didn’t read the description properly”. Take the item back for a refund, and edit your description if you need to, to make any confusing points extra clear.

I’m sure you’re spotting a pattern by now. Offering a refund will make almost any problem go away, and it really will cost you less in the long run.

Remember, one piece of negative feedback will stay with you forever, while having a 100% positive rating is like owning a bar of solid gold.

You should always handle customers' complaints before they complain to eBay – in fact, you should email them pre-emptively to ask if they have any. Going through the dispute process is time consuming, reflects badly on you and is downright unnecessary.

Are you still not convinced? Think this would only work with cheap items? Well, you see, the higher the price of the items you sell, the more your reputation is worth to you. Let's say you were selling \$10,000 worth of items each week, for example, and making a \$1,000 profit per week overall. You might think that refunding one customer's \$1,000 purchase would be a tragedy, losing you your whole week's profit. It's far better to look at it this way: if you don't give that refund, then not only will you lose the next week's profit, but you'll probably lose a few weeks' profit after that too. Now which option looks better?

I absolutely can't emphasise enough the importance of really believing that the customer is always right. But trying to make excuses for complaints isn't the only thing you need to avoid. There are a lot of pitfalls that you need to avoid if you don't want to kill your business before it's even started properly – and I'll show you in the next email what they are.

10 Sure-fire Ways to Kill Your eBay Business.

It's surprisingly easy to kill your eBay business, if you're not careful – sure, you can start over from scratch without it costing you anything, but do you really want to? Still, if you want your business to end up dead in the water, here are some simple ways to do it.

Lie about an item: Say it works fine when it sometimes doesn't work. Say it's in perfect condition when it has a scratch. Your customers will hate you!

Post whenever you feel like it: Make sure to leave your customers hanging around, wondering when their item is going to turn up. This makes sure they buy from someone else next time.

Let items end anytime: Few people will be around to care about your auction if it ends in the middle of the night. Why go to the trouble of working out whether auctions will end at a good time?

Don't bother with email: Customers are just timewasters anyway. eBay businesses are supposed to run themselves! Never give informed responses to questions about your item.

Sell rubbish: Really, it's just eBay. You can just sell any old tat from the market for a 200% profit. Let quality be someone else's concern – I mean, really, what do they expect for that price?

Refuse to give discounts: You know what your items cost, you know what your profit margin is going to be, and you're not going to negotiate. Remember that giving customers special deals might make them feel good and come back to you again.

Make your listings ugly: As many colours, flashing lights and animations as possible will really give those customers a headache. Write as much in CAPITALS!!!! as you can. Preferably big, red capitals. Be sure to use the fonts Impact and Comic Sans. For an extra special touch, see if you can figure out a way to add some music.

Don't take photos: It's such trouble, after all. If buyers are picky enough to actually want to see items before they bid on them, then screw 'em, that's what I say.

Write short descriptions: Be as brief as possible, and use lots of mysterious abbreviations. This obviously makes you look very cool. You can even just write the title again in the description box. Think of the effort you'll save!

Use reserve auctions: Now, this is a fairly controversial final choice, but it really is one of the best ways to scare away your customers. They'll see 'reserve not yet met', and click that 'back' button before you know it. Luckily, they can always bid in a normal auction for the item somewhere else.

Now that you know the ten ways to kill your eBay business, how about we explore what to do if you want to do the opposite, and make a success of it? The next email will give you ten steps to successful selling on eBay.

10 Steps to Successful Selling on eBay.

So you want to be a successful seller with your own eBay business, do you? Here's a simple, ten-step path to eBay enlightenment.

Step 1: Identify your market. Take a while to sit and watch for what sells and what doesn't out of the items you're interested in. Any market research data you can collect will be very useful to you later on. You'll probably see the 'sweet spots' quite quickly – those one or two items that always seem to sell for a good price.

Step 2: Watch the competition. Before you invest any money, see what the other sellers in your category are up to, and what their strategies are. Pay special attention to any flaws their auctions might have, because this is where you can move in and beat them at their own game.

Step 3: Find a product: Get hold of a supplier for whatever it is you want to sell, and see what the best rates you can get are – don't be afraid to ring round quite a few to get the best deal. If the eBay prices you've seen are higher than the supplier's, then you're set.

Step 4: Start small: Don't throw thousands at your idea straight away – get started slowly, see what works and what doesn't, and learn as you go. Remember that it's very cheap to try out even the craziest ideas on eBay, and who knows, they might just work!

Step 5: Test and repeat. Keep trying different strategies until you find something that works, and then don't be ashamed to keep doing it, again and again. The chances are that you've just found a good niche.

Step 6: Work out a business plan: A business plan doesn't need to be anything formal, just a few pages that outline the market opportunity you've spotted, your strategy, strengths and weaknesses of the plan and a brief budget. This is more for you than it is for anyone else.

Step 7: Invest and expand: This is the time to throw money at the problem. Buy inventory, and start spending more time on your business. Set a goal number of sales each week, increasing it each time.

Step 8: Make it official: Once you've made a few thousand dollars worth of sales, you should really register yourself as a business. Don't worry, it's not expensive or hard to do – a lawyer is the best person to help you through the process.

Step 9: Automate: You'll probably find that you're writing the same things again and again in emails or item descriptions. This is the time to give up on the manual method and turn to automated software that can create listings for you, and respond to completed auctions and payments with whatever message you provide.

Step 10: Never give up: Even when it looks like it's all going wrong, don't stop trying until you succeed. If you keep working at it then you'll almost always find that you make a real breakthrough just when things are starting to look desperate.

Once you get into the swing of things, you might start thinking that you should quit your job and take up eBay selling part time. But it's not always as easy as that – there are all sorts of factors that you need to consider. The next email will weigh up the case for and against taking up eBay full-time.

eBay – Part Time or Full? How to Decide.

Going full-time as an eBay seller is living the dream: making a real income, working from home, being your own boss and all the rest of it. It's the promise of a million scams, and it's finally come true – at least for some.

What they don't tell you in the success stories, though, is that becoming a full-time eBay seller is by no means for everyone. You really, really ought to try it part-time before you even consider taking it up full-time, and even then, caution is advisable. Before you burn your suit, here's a list of questions you should ask yourself.

How Much Do I Earn From eBay Now?

Work out how many hours a week you spend doing eBay-related things (be honest here), and divide it by the average amount of profit you make in a week. If you were doing full-time hours, would you earn as much as you earn now?

Do I Have a Good Job?

Think about what you might lose if you give up your job to focus on eBay. If you're in a well-paid job with good promotion prospects then it's well worth reconsidering: you might get a few years down the line and wish you'd stayed in your traditional job, as you'd probably be the CEO by now.

Would I Really Make Much More Money?

Unless you're selling a large quantity of small goods, most of what you do on eBay will be waiting for auctions to end – and you can wait at work just as easily as you can at home. This is why whether you would make more money on eBay really depends on what kinds of items you're selling – for low value items, going full-time could be a good move. For high-value ones, the chances are you'll hit the limits of how much money you have to invest in inventory long before you hit the limits on your time.

Is my Home a Good Place to Work?

Quite apart from anything else, you might find that the dream of home working is more of a nightmare in reality. People can start to depend on you

to get things done that need to be done during the day. If you have a wife and children then they can resent the fact that you're in the house but refuse to have anything to do with them for large parts of the day. Giving in to any of these things and stopping work for a while will cause your profits to fall.

Can I Survive if it All Goes Wrong?

In the end, would you be able to get by if you had a month or two where you sold literally nothing? Or would you be desperately looking around for a job and cursing the day you ever discovered eBay? That's the real test.

If you made it through all these questions, then I guess you're cut out for the eBay life – and even if you didn't, you'd be surprised just how far you can get part-time. In our next email, we'll show you how to think like the eBay elite: the PowerSellers.

How to Think Like an eBay PowerSeller.

So what's a PowerSeller? PowerSellers are the people on eBay who've made it, recognisable by the little 'PowerSeller' badge next to their name. You've probably seen these people around – and to succeed on eBay, you want to think the way they do.

How to People Get the Right to Call Themselves PowerSellers?

eBay gets to decide who can be a PowerSeller and who can't, and they have strict requirements. To get in at the minimum PowerSeller level, you must have a feedback rating of at least 100 (minimum 98% positive) and sell at least \$1,000 worth of items every month for three months in a row. There are different levels of PowerSeller membership as you sell items of greater value: \$1,000 total is bronze, \$3,000 is silver, \$10,000 is gold, \$25,000 is platinum and \$125,000 is titanium.

If PowerSellers ever fail to meet the required amount of sales, or their feedback falls below 98% positive, then they lose their PowerSeller status. In short, the only people who get to be PowerSellers on eBay are the people who have been successful for a good while, and are on track to stay that way.

The Shop and the Marketplace.

This is the most important part of understanding how PowerSellers think. They don't see what they're doing as being some random bazaar, or a hobby – instead, they see themselves as a business.

Put it like this. If you run a stall in a marketplace, the chances are that you have a general area of business, but you mostly just sell whatever you can get your hands on that week. If your dodgy buddy got his hands of a job lot of something at a discount, then that's what you'll be selling. This might be fun – and when you have a good week, you'll have a really good week – but it's no way to run a real business in the long-term.

PowerSellers think far more like shops. They sell the same things again and again, every week – regular stock for regular customers. They do 'boring' business things like keep inventories and budgets. They know what they're going to be selling, how much they buy it for and how much they expect to

sell for. Just like a real shop, there can be hard times sometimes, but their income is stable and their business can grow slowly.

The best advice I can give you on thinking like a PowerSeller is this: don't take long-term risks for short-term gain. Look after your reputation, manage your selling properly, provide good customer service and the rewards will come to you in due course. And you'll get a little badge next to your name that makes people trust you more!

One possibility that you might have realised so far is what eBay can do for any other businesses you might have. Remember, millions of people visit eBay every day – why keep everything separate when you're starting to tap into that kind of power? The next email will show you a few ways you can use eBay to grow your other businesses.

How to Use eBay to Grow Your Other Businesses.

Most of the people who make money from eBay don't actually make all of that money on eBay. There are all sorts of ways you can use eBay to give your existing businesses a helping hand.

The Supply Side.

If you have any leftover stock or used items from another business you run, then why not sell them on eBay? You can make this a regular thing, using it to get rid of things that won't sell for the premium you ask for in a shop, or items that are no longer in demand in the town or city where your business is based.

You can really make a lot of money this way, if you know what you're doing. You will, of course, already be an expert in the items you're selling, as you use them in your business, and you'll know that the items are of high enough quality to be sellable. This is a whole new market for your old inventory!

Not only that, of course, but remember that your good eBay reputation will make you a great buyer! If there's ever anything you want to get for your business, the chances are you'll be able to get it on eBay for a discount.

The Sales Side.

Here, though, is where the true power of eBay lies. eBay give you an 'About Me' page, where you can write anything you like and link anywhere you like. This means that you can get traffic to your business' website by linking to your website from your About Me page and linking to your About Me page from each auction.

To create an About Me page, just click on 'Community' on the toolbar, scroll to the bottom of the page, and click 'Create an About Me page'. You then get the option to either enter your own HTML or let eBay guide you through the process. All you need to do is write a little about your website, link to it, and you're done – you'll notice that more people start to come to your site straight away.

There are thousands of people who swear by this technique to drive traffic from eBay to their website – with a little persuasive sales copy on your site, they say, you can sell directly to buyers, cutting out the eBay middleman. What’s more, all the traffic you’ll get will be targeted – because the people who click through were interested in your auction to begin with.

This can be a really powerful technique, especially if you’ve already got an e-commerce site. Even if you haven’t, you might find it worth your time to set up a website that does nothing but list your eBay inventory with a few dollars off each item, with a PayPal ‘Buy Now’ button for each item. Then simply make the link to your About Me page read ‘Visit my website for even more bargains!’, and you’re done.

Now that you’ve seen how to drive visitors to your website, maybe you’d like a little help getting your auction in front of buyers. That’s why our next email will show you the secrets of taming the eBay search engine.

Taming the eBay Search Engine.

If you know what you're doing, you can quickly find what you're looking for on eBay – and the more you know about how buyers find you, the easier you'll find it to be found. Here are a few golden searching rules.

Be specific: If you're searching for the first edition of the original Harry Potter book, you'll get further searching for 'harry potter rowling philosopher's stone first edition' than you will searching for 'harry potter'. You'll get fewer results, but the ones you do get will be far more relevant.

Spell wrongly: It's a sad fact that many of the sellers on eBay just can't spell. Whatever you're looking for, try thinking of a few common misspellings – you might find a few items here that have slipped through the cracks.

Get a thesaurus: You should try to search for all the different words that someone might use to describe an item, for example searching for both 'TV' and 'television', or for 'phone', 'mobile' and 'cellphone'. Where you can, though, leave off the type of item altogether and search by things like brand and model.

Use the categories: Whenever you search, you'll notice a list of categories at the side of your search results. If you just searched for the name of a CD, you should click the 'CDs' category to look at results in that category only. Why bother looking through a load of results that you don't care about?

Don't be afraid to browse: Once you've found the category that items you like seem to be in, why not click 'Browse' and take a look through the whole category? You might be surprised by what you find.

Few people realise just how powerful eBay's search engine is – a few symbols here and there and it'll work wonders for you.

Wildcard searches: You can put an asterisk (*) into a search phrase when you want to say 'anything can go here'. For example, if you wanted to search for a 1950s car, you could search for 'car 195*'. 195* will show results from any year in the 1950s.

In this order: If you put words in quotes ("") then the only results shown will be ones that have all of the words between the quote marks. For example, searching for "Lord of the Rings" won't give you any results that say, for example "Lord Robert Rings".

Exclude words: Put a minus, and then put any words in brackets that you don't want to appear in your search results. For example: "Pulp Fiction" – (poster,photo) will find items related to Pulp Fiction but not posters or photos.

Either/or: If you want to search for lots of words at once, just put them in brackets: the TV example from earlier could become '(TV,television)', which would find items with either word.

Don't get too tied up learning the ways of the search engine, though: a surprising number of eBay users don't search at all, preferring to look through eBay's category system and save their favourites in their browser. The next email will show you how to make sure these people can find you too.

How to Choose the Right eBay Product Category.

Some people think it's easy to choose the right eBay category, and often it is. Sometimes, though, it might not be quite clear exactly what to go for.

Why is it Even Important?

Plenty of people use the category system to find items, when they're not looking for something specific. If your item is listed in the wrong category – or you've just given up and listed it in 'Everything Else' – then these people aren't going to find your auction.

Also, listing items in the wrong categories is against eBay's rules, and eBay say they will remove any auctions that are wrongly categorised. They don't often actually do this, but it's not worth the risk – especially since breaking any rules can cause them to penalise your account, including losing PowerSeller status if you have it.

So What Can You Do?

eBay will suggest categories for you when you sell your item, if you type in a few words to describe the item on the category selection page and click 'search'. You can make the best of this feature by typing in exactly what your item is, with brand name and model number (if any), so that eBay can find the best category for you.

If that doesn't work for you, then search yourself for items like yours, and pay attention to which category most of them seem to be in (you can see this near the top of each item's description page). Try different words and see which ones come back with the most results. You can also browse through all the available categories from eBay's front page.

Remember that the more specific the category is, the better – use as many subcategories as are appropriate. Don't just list your HP laptop in the 'Computers' category, for example – list it in 'Computers > Laptops > HP'. Don't worry: your item will still appear in the 'Computers' category, as well as 'Computers > Laptops', because items listed in subcategories are always listed in every category above.

Take some time to look through all the categories and get familiar with the way eBay as a whole is laid out. After all, that's better than getting a few months down the line and finding that you still think of eBay's category system like it's some kind of scary jungle.

What if More Than One Category Fits?

Don't worry, eBay have you covered. For a small extra fee, you can list your item in an extra category, to increase the number of potential buyers who will see it. This isn't always worth it, though – some items only really fit properly in one category, and listing them in extra categories is just a waste.

Once you know where to list your item, the next step is to write your auction's title. The title is the most important thing about your auction – the difference between a good title and a bad title can be the difference between \$10 and \$100. That's why I'll take you through the dos and don'ts in the next email.

eBay Title Writing Tips.

Trying to help your buyers find your auctions can be a truly daunting task. Most people only search eBay by title, not by description, and that means that you only have those 55 characters of the title to cover all the possible search terms. That's not easy. In this email, I'll give you a few pointers.

Don't bother with eBay clichés: There are plenty of eBay auction titles that say things like "Super rare camera wow look low price". These are stupid things to put in your title, as no-one is going to search for them.

Think like a buyer: If you were looking for your item, then what exactly would you type into that box? If you think it'd help, try searching yourself to find someone else selling your item. What were the first things you thought of typing?

Think like other sellers: Keep an eye on which sellers are doing best with items like yours, and try to copy their title styles – if it works for them, it can work for you.

Be specific: You should be sure to write the item's brand and specific model number in the title, as people will often search only for this information. Make sure that you also say exactly what the item is.

A Few Examples.

Here are a few examples of good titles. They're real, and they're on eBay right now, making their sellers money. So what makes them good?

"Dell Latitude Laptop P3 500mhz Notebook PC Computer"

If you know about computers, you'll know instantly what this auction is selling. It has manufacturer (Dell) and product line (Latitude), followed by a few technical specifications (P3 500mhz is the processor speed). Notice also that the title includes the four words 'laptop', 'notebook', 'PC' and 'computer', as the seller wants people looking for any of those words to see his auction.

“OASIS Don't Believe the Truth CD Album (New)”

This auction for a CD is well formatted: it gives the artist name in capital letters, followed by the album name. It then manages to include the two key words ‘CD’ and ‘album’, as well as the word ‘new’ – that means that anyone searching for ‘new oasis cd’, ‘oasis new album’ and so on will find this auction.

“1840 Penny Black stamp, certificate, four margins”

Here’s a slightly more obscure one, from the exciting world of stamp collecting. A penny black is one of the oldest and most famous stamps. It uses a few key words that collectors will consider important: ‘four margins’ indicates that the stamp has been cut out with some margins around it and so isn’t damaged, and ‘certificate’ tells you that the item has a certificate of authenticity – it’s a real penny black. Remember to use every bit of space to squeeze in as much important information as you can in the title.

So now that you’ve written a winning title, you need to start on a great description. The next email will show you how.

eBay Description Writing Tips.

Once you've drawn the buyers in with your title, the next thing to do is to tell them all about your item with the description. But just what should you write in your description?

At its heart, your item description is an ad. Without making it too obvious, you should be writing sales copy. You're trying to get buyers excited about your products, and that's usually hard – but on eBay, if you have the right thing to sell and give enough details, the buyers almost excite themselves.

Technical Details.

Include every technical detail you know, including the item's manufacturer, its condition, how big it is, where and when it was made, its history, and anything else special about it. Don't be too boring, though: the best descriptions are written in friendly, conversational language, and show a real knowledge of the item. Whatever you do, make sure you tell the truth!

Remember that most of the people who'll be buying your item will be just as knowledgeable about it as you are, if not more – this is their hobby, and they're experts. Don't feel like you need to explain the basics of the item: just go into as much technical detail as you can. As a rule, don't write anything in the description if you don't know what it means, as the chances are someone will, and if you've got it slightly wrong then you'll look like you don't know what you're talking about.

Interesting Details.

You might find that you enjoy writing a few things about how you got the item, why you're selling it, and who you think might like it. This isn't strictly necessary, but it gives your auctions some character and a personal touch, and can make people more likely to trust you. People might wonder what you're doing selling 500 CDs all at once, and if you tell them the reason, then they'll feel reassured that nothing dodgy is going on. If you're selling them because you're having a baby and you need the space, just say so.

Write as Much as You Can.

Leave nothing out of your description, even if that seems to you like it makes it cumbersomely long. There is no way you can be too thorough: someone, somewhere will appreciate that you took the time to write the extra information.

Don't assume that anyone who wants extra information will email you to ask a question: many buyers are shy and won't do it. Think of questions that buyers might have and add the answers to your description, as people generally tend to ask the same questions over and over again.

Each time a buyer does email you with a question, you should both answer their question and update your description so that it will include the answer next time. If people ask questions that are answered in the description, try putting these parts of the auction on a line alone, or in bold, to make them easier to notice.

In the next email, we'll focus on increasing the number of buyers who respond to your auctions.

10 Tips for Increasing Your eBay Response.

So you've got the buyer in front of your auction, and they've read the description. They're must be interested, or they wouldn't be looking... but just how can you push them over that line and make them leave a bid? Read on for some tips.

Improve your picture: In all that description writing, you might have missed the vital importance of your item's picture. A picture with bad lighting or an intrusive background looks amateurish and won't make anyone want to buy from you.

Add an About Me page: You'll be surprised how much you can reassure bidders just by creating an About Me page and putting a little bit about yourself on your business on there. You can also have a few special offers there for people who bother to look at the page, and let people subscribe to your mailing list so that you can email them updates.

Use SquareTrade: Signing up at SquareTrade and displaying their logo on your auctions shows that you are committed to have them resolve any disputes that arise. You always see this on PowerSellers auctions – it makes you look more professional.

Write terms and conditions: Have the 'small print' clearly visible on all your auctions, giving details of things like shipping times and prices, your refund policy, and any other business practices you might have. This helps build confidence with buyers.

Show off your feedback: Copy and paste a selection of the feedback comments you're most proud of to each item's description page, instead of making bidders go and look for it. If you have 100% positive feedback, be sure to write that on every auction too.

Add NR to your titles: If you have extra space in a title, put 'NR' (no reserve) on the end. Bidders prefer auctions that don't have a reserve price, and doing this lets them see that yours don't.

Benefits not features: Make sure your description focuses on the benefits that your item can give to the customer, not just its features. This is a classic

sales technique. If you have trouble with this, remember: ‘cheap’ is a feature, ‘save money’ is a benefit.

List more items: If you want more people to respond to your items, then list more items! You might find you have better like listing items at the same time, instead of one-by-one. There’s no need to use a Dutch auction – you can just keep two or three auctions going at once for an item you have more than one of in stock.

Accept unusual payment methods: To reach those last few buyers, accept payment methods that many sellers don’t, like cheques.

Buy some upgrades: The best upgrade is the most expensive one, which makes your item appear first in search results. In crowded categories, you might find that this is worth the money.

Once you’ve got some buyers, you want to keep them coming back to you. The next email will show you how to turn one-time buyers into long-term customers.

How to Turn eBay Bidders into Long-term Customers.

Once someone's bought something from you on eBay, you suddenly have all sorts of details on them. In marketing terms, this information is gold dust. If someone's bought from you once before, then the chances are that at some point in the future they'll want to buy a similar item, and you can take advantage of this to market to them directly.

The simplest form of direct marketing is the email newsletter – and it's one that is still oddly underused on eBay. Simply ask people who buy from you if they'd like to be added to your mailing list, and then send them a monthly update on your new items. You should also include some information you think might be useful to them, to give the email more value.

For example, here's a newsletter you might write if you were selling DVDs.

“Here are the dates for this month's new DVD releases:

[list of release dates].

If you want to pre-order anything on this list, just click here [your website/email] and let us know.

Meanwhile, we've got some great deals for you this month!

[links to your best ebay auctions]

You are receiving this email because you signed up for my newsletter when you bought an item from me on eBay. To unsubscribe, hit reply and type 'remove'.”

Isn't that simple? As long as you can remember to do it once a month, people will come to like your information, and perhaps take a look at some of the things you're offering.

It's all about building up a customer relationship, and making the customer feel like you are providing them with some information they wouldn't otherwise have. Make your email a useful service to them, whether they buy anything from it or not.

Remember that it's not a newsletter without the news, and send out the best things you can think of: you might even try writing an article or two. Think

of it as a free gift for your customers: the gift of useful information. Apart from anything else, it's quite fun to have your own newsletter.

If you sell items that a seller is likely to need more than one of, like auto parts for example, then you can even try highly targeted emails like this.

“I'm sending you this email because you bought a [item name] from me a while ago – I hope you were happy with it. This is just to let you know that if you ever need another [item], I'm currently doing special offers on them. [link]”.

You would probably want to automate this, though, as it could quickly get tedious to do it manually.

Of course, that brings us on to our next subject: eBay stores. eBay stores offer you an easier way to sell your items than having to list them every time on eBay, and they have built-in facilities for targeted direct marketing. You can read all about it in the next email.

What? You Don't Have an eBay Store?

In fact, you might not even have heard of eBay stores. Read on to find out what you've been missing.

eBay stores come at three levels: Basic for \$15.95 per month, Featured for \$49.95 per month or Anchor for \$499.95 per month (yes, that is typed correctly: almost \$500). The best place to start out is with Basic (you can even get a month's free trial), but if you like what you find then you should upgrade to Featured quickly, simply because it has so many extra features. Note that you must have a feedback rating of at least 20 before you can get an eBay store.

But what is an eBay store? Basically, it lets you list a set of fixed price auctions together on one page for much longer than auctions usually last – and most sellers with eBay stores list the items at a slightly lower price. It's like a list of your special offers. You can put your logo on the store and write a little about your business and policies, and your customers can search your store for anything they might want. Buyers can click through to your store using the door symbol next to your name.

A good way to look at it is that it's a little like having your own e-commerce site outside eBay where you can list your items more long term – except it's all done for you without you having to learn a new system. Items in eBay stores can be listed for 30, 60, 90 or 120 days, or you can list items permanently, paying monthly for each one.

So you Want an eBay Store Now?

You can visit eBay stores at <http://stores.ebay.com>. Go there now and click the 'Open a Store' button on the right of the screen to start signing up for the free trial. Then there are a few steps to go before your store can open for business.

Step 1: Pick a theme. You can have whatever design you want on your store, but to begin with pick something from eBay's options that you think would be appropriate.

Step 2: Add your store's name, description and logo. You can pick one of eBay's pictures for the logo or upload a logo of your own if you have one. Don't worry, you can always change this later.

Step 3: Choose your subscription level, and then click 'Start My Subscription Now'. Your store is ready! Remember that you can customise it more at any time.

Listing items in your store is just like listing items on normal eBay using 'Buy it Now', except that the durations you can choose from for the store are much longer.

By now, you've probably spent enough time in eBay that you're starting to get used to it – but then again, you also might have been a victim of fraud by now, or at least seen fraud happening to others. The next email will tell you how to fight eBay fraud.

How to Avoid Being a Victim of eBay Buyer's Fraud.

From everything you've heard about the risk of fraud on eBay, you might think it's only buyers getting scammed – but you couldn't be more wrong. Here are a few common scams that sellers fall for every day.

The Rubber Cheque.

This one obviously isn't limited to eBay – it's been going on for years in all kinds of business. It works like this: a buyer sends you a cheque that they don't have the funds to cover and you pay it in your bank. You then send the goods right away, only to find out a few days later that the cheque bounced.

The solution to this is simple: don't send anything to a buyer until their payment has cleared, no matter how quickly they might say they need it. Advise them to pay electronically if they don't want to wait so long for their items. Then again, if your items are quite small, you could just take the loss from an occasional bounced cheque. Think of it as a small price to pay for faster and better customer service.

'I Never Bought Anything!'

This is one of the riskiest scams to fall victim to. In this case, the credit card's real owner still has control over it – no-one has stolen their details. They have realised, however, that they can phone up the bank who issued their card to say that it's being used fraudulently and they never bought any such thing, and the bank will often reverse the transaction without even investigating. The only way to beat this scam is to make all your sales through eBay, as they keep a record of transactions.

The Unconfirmed Address.

It is quite easy to steal PayPal accounts from inexperienced users: all you need, after all, is their email address and password. PayPal tries to protect against credit cards registered on stolen accounts being used to buy things by listing a 'confirmed address' for each buyer – an address that matches what is registered with their credit card issuer.

What many scammers will do is ask you to ship to a different address – unless you're very sure of them, this is a bad idea, as they could be trying to

commit credit card fraud. Be especially suspicious of anyone who wants to pay a higher price and get overnight shipping, especially if not even to the same country as the confirmed address. The fraudster is trying to make sure the item reaches them before they are discovered.

It's up to you to take responsibility for fraud on PayPal, as eBay's favourite way to refund fraudulent payments to their rightful owner is to just reverse it from you! This is considered an occupational risk of PayPal usage, and sellers who get burned severely sometimes go as far as moving to a rival electronic payment service. See www.nopaypal.com for more.

In the next email, we'll take a closer look at PayPal, and ask: should it be the only kind of payment you accept?

Should PayPal be Your Only eBay Payment Option?

You may have noticed that many sellers list PayPal as the only payment option they accept – they simply can't be bothered cashing cheques and money orders, never mind any of the other strange ways some people want to pay. Like all things in life, though, PayPal has its advantages and disadvantages. Let's take a look at what PayPal can do for you, and what it can't.

The Disadvantages.

PayPal is very vulnerable to fraud, and it's you as the seller who'll be paying the price when it happens. What's more, they do take a percentage from every transaction that you could be keeping if your buyers were paying by cheque.

You might also have noticed that PayPal come from the eBay school of customer service, enjoying such pastimes as hiding their phone number and only ever sending out automated responses to emailed queries. PayPal has an unusual number of campaigners against it, most of them people who've had their accounts frozen and had to chase PayPal for months for thousands of dollars. Some of these people recently filed a class action lawsuit against PayPal, claiming damages for lost business – and they won. This alone should make you cautious about using PayPal.

The Advantages.

PayPal is quick and easy for buyers to use, and is certainly a more secure and reassuring way to accept credit cards than signing up for your own merchant account. You'll probably also find that it's cheaper for you.

That's before you even consider that eBay buyers are more eager to buy from someone who accepts PayPal, as it saves them all sorts of hassle with posting payment and then waiting around. PayPal lets you give speedier customer service.

But Should You Use It Exclusively?

The most important thing about only accepting PayPal is, again, a matter of customer service: some of your potential customers might not have or want a

PayPal account. Not everyone loves electronic payments – some fear them, and like eBay because it is one of the few places on the Internet where many sellers will accept payment by more traditional methods. Do you want these people as customers, or don't you?

You might notice that some people are aware of the issues of PayPal and refuse to use it, but still want to pay electronically. For these rare cases, it's worth opening an account at a well-known PayPal rival that has a better reputation – the current favourite seems to be NoChex (www.nochex.com), which offers free chargeback protection.

NoChex is quite a lot better than PayPal by most standards, but just doesn't have the same market penetration or convenience of use on eBay. Still, there's nothing stopping you from accepting both, just as long as you make it clear that you do on your auctions. If you find that you really prefer NoChex to PayPal, then you could offer your buyers a discount for paying through NoChex.

Once you've got the payment, the next thing you need to do is ship the items. In the next email, we'll take a look at what you should write on your eBay shipping boxes.

What Else Belongs on Your eBay Shipping Box?

The quickest answer I feel I should give to this question is this: not your handwriting! Scrawling addresses on boxes with a pen is extremely amateurish, and you shouldn't do it. Print your own labels instead. But what should you put on them?

The buyer's address: This might sound obvious, but you need to make sure the full address is there, including country and zip or postal code. Make sure you spell their name correctly, too, as they might be a little insulted if you don't.

The eBay item number: Write this somewhere discreet and quite small, in this form: 'Item number: 123456789'. Under the address is a good place. This makes it easy for the buyer to find the auction again if they need to look at it for any reason.

Your logo: Putting your logo on the shipping box looks professional, and lets your buyers see what it is that has arrived. A good logo can make the whole package look very nice, and can help build recognition of your business.

Your address: It's worth putting your own address on the box in case the item can't be delivered and needs to be returned to you. It looks good to write this under your logo, as it reinforces the impression that you're a real business with a real address, not some shady operation.

Stamps: If you start to sell on eBay in a significant quantity, you might consider buying a postage meter. Again, this is a matter of looking professional – it looks much better than having stamps stuck everywhere. It also saves you from having to weigh your items at the post office and buy stamps there.

The 'eBay Items' Debate.

Some sellers like to mark their shipping boxes with a phrase like 'eBay items', while some feel that this is an unsafe practice that could mark their boxes out to get stolen or interfered with in the post. Whether you're willing to risk it is up to you – it's probably better to be safe than sorry, though, and

there will be few of your customers who get so many packages that they won't know what yours is.

And Inside?

You'll probably find it worth printing off a 'receipt' from eBay – the confirmation of payment page – and putting it in the envelope. If you want to make your customers feel even better about having ordered from you, you can also include a compliments slip, featuring your logo, your website address and a message like 'Thank you for your order. Please contact me if there are any problems. [Your name].'

Always remember: the more they like what they get, the more likely they are to come back and order again from you in the future.

In the next email, we'll look at exactly that, using a strategy you might not have considered. You can make backend sales over and over again, simply by emailing buyers with good offers for things you think they're going to need. See you there.

How to Increase Your eBay Backend Sales.

It shouldn't too hard to increase your eBay backend sales – because the chances are you currently aren't making any! Backend sales are sales to customers who have already bought an item, also known as 'up-selling'. These are usually easier sales to make than normal sales: in sales-speak, your existing customers are 'warm leads'.

It's a technique you've probably noticed being used on you in shops: you buy something, and you're offered a \$5 piece of equipment to keep it clean, or make it easier to use. The usual human response is to say to yourself "heck, what's another five dollars – it might be useful". It's just another five dollars to them, but they might have just added 20% to your profit margin.

Figure Out What Goes Together.

Out of the things you stock, which cheaper things are there that could be useful to someone who now owns one of the more expensive ones? For example, if you sell digital cameras, the backend product is digital camera memory – they never come with enough out of the box. The backend products for a printer would be ink and paper. Try to think laterally!

If you can't think of anything, take a look around at the cheaper 'extra' items that your competitors offer, and see if you can find a supplier for them. There are very few product areas where this technique doesn't apply.

Include Letters in Packages.

When you send items out in the post, include a brief sales letter with products you think might be of interest to the customer. It's like sending out a personalised, targeted catalogue to your customers with every purchase. Again, you'll find that a significant percentage of people won't have bothered to look at what else you were selling, and will go back to buy a few more things.

To stop people from just putting such a letter aside and thinking they won't do anything about it right now, you might like to include some kind of limited time offer – 10% off if you order within the next month, for example.

Email Your Customers.

Each time you sell something to a customer, you get valuable market information about them, and they get to see that they can trust you as a seller. That's why backend sales are so powerful. Keep your customers updated in your newsletter, making sure you list any new products there that you might have in stock. The chances are that these customers will be far more eager to buy from you.

Consumable Products.

If the product that the customer bought from you to begin with is consumable (it will run out), then this is a special case. You shouldn't try to make the backend sale straight away, but should instead wait long enough that the average customer would have just run out of the product. That's the time to strike.

If you want to keep your buyers, then you need to provide good customer service. Our next email will show you exactly how to reduce eBay buyers' complaints.

How to Reduce eBay Buyer Complaints.

Buyers are funny creatures, aren't they? One minute they're over the moon because they've got themselves a bargain, and the next they're upset because their bargain seller doesn't provide first-class customer service. There's only really one way to reduce complaints: give these people what they want!

Post as soon as you can: The number one cause of eBay complaints are impatient or anxious buyers, who want to know when their item is going to turn up. If you get an order on Monday and wait until Saturday to post it, that's bad customer service. Try to post items at least twice a week, to avoid making your buyers wait too long.

Make the description crystal clear: You need to make sure that your buyers know exactly what they're buying, so they won't be surprised when it turns up and isn't exactly what they expect. Don't be afraid to describe small defects in your description – it's better to list it there than have buyers discover it for themselves later. If you get a lot of confusion about something, say it twice or even three times, and say it in a large font.

List all costs up-front: Don't hide away your shipping costs if you think they're too high – nothing will annoy buyers more than keeping costs secret until you expect them to be paid. If you really don't want to display your shipping costs, just offer 'free' shipping and add the shipping costs to the item's price.

Pack well: Spend as much as you need to on packing materials, and be careful with it. Remember that your item is going to have to travel through the post, and you want it to arrive in the condition it left. Wrap things securely in a few inches of a material like bubble wrap or styrofoam, and be sure to use a sturdy box. If you go around using boxes from the supermarket and old newspapers, expect things to break in the post.

Tell them to complain: This might sound a little counter-intuitive, but one of the best ways to stop your customers from complaining is to tell them to contact you if they have any complaints. Most people only complain if they feel a seller is unresponsive and confrontation – asking people to complain is more likely to get you shy and polite enquiries than complaints. You might not believe it now, but try it for a while and you'll see your customer relations improve.

Respond to emails promptly: Check your email as often as you can, and never leave an email around to respond to later or tomorrow. Having to wait days to have their email answered upsets customers more than anything, especially if they're already waiting for their item – it makes them feel stranded and powerless. Always respond to emails as soon as you can, and certainly within a maximum of 24 hours.

However much you might try to stop your buyers from complaining, though, someone will sooner or later.

How to Respond to an eBay Buyer's Complaint.

At some point in your eBay selling life, one of your customers is going to send you a complaint. As long as you respond to it properly, however, it's easy to keep a complaint from turning into a crisis.

Respond Immediately and Grovellingly.

Someone might complain to you directly, or they might do it through eBay. Whatever happens, you need to email them immediately. Here's a template to use:

"I have just received your complaint and I would like to say that I am very sorry you aren't satisfied. If you would like, I can send you a [replacement/refund] for the item, as part of my 'no questions asked' guarantee. I apologise again for our mistake."

Whatever you do, don't start making excuses for yourself. "Oh, sorry, I didn't get around to posting it yet because I've been busy at work and I'm going on holiday next week..." – no-one cares. If the buyer isn't satisfied, then you screwed up, and you need to apologise repeatedly and do everything you can to make them happy again. Besides, is it really worth your time to go through eBay's long-winded dispute process when all it's going to do is alienate your customers?

This an attitude that will give you a massive advantage in eBay selling, for the simple reason that many smaller sellers are confrontational, unhelpful and out for every penny they can get. If buyers are rude to you, it's just because they're used to dealing with rude sellers.

Responding politely, promptly and being willing to do anything for your buyers will mark you out as different. It's so rare that you might even manage to turn your complaining buyer into one of your most loyal customers!

Let People Phone You.

Don't insist that everything is done with email – allow frustrated buyers to phone you and have a chat about their item. The chances are that they will never have talked to a human voice before about an eBay complaint, and

will be even more impressed with anything you offer them to solve their problem.

Neutralise Negative Feedback.

If it really comes down to it and your complaint ends up as a piece of negative feedback on your record, make sure you post a response – and don't make it something like “buyer was impossible to work with, avoid”!

Instead, post an apology, and detail what you did to put things right, for example: “Very sorry for the scratched item, I have sent a replacement”. You may also find that some buyers leave feedback before you have the chance to put things right, in which case you could write a phone number in the response space, or something like “I have emailed you about a refund”.

This will let anyone looking through your feedback see that not only are negatives very rare, but the few that there might be aren't really worth counting.

In the next email, you'll learn how to turn your shipping costs into a profit center.

Turn Your eBay Shipping Costs into a Profit Center.

You might think that shipping costs are simple: surely you just add up the price of your item's postage and the price of packing materials, and charge that – right? Well, you could do that, but there are better ways to make your shipping costs work for you.

Find Cheaper Materials.

The key to making profit on shipping is to use the cheapest materials you can get for packing, without compromising on quality. The great thing for you is that many eBay PowerSellers have made a business out of providing sellers with quality packing material in bulk at really low prices.

To get an idea of what's out there, take a look at this category: Business & Industrial > Office, Printing & Shipping > Shipping & Packing Supplies. You might also try paying a visit to a big-box office supplies store.

Buy in Bulk.

Always buy hundreds of the same sized packing boxes at the same time. Since you should be selling the same items over and over again, you'll need the same sized boxes each time. You will always be able to get discounts for bulk – if the place where you're shopping won't give you any, go somewhere else.

Streamline Your Packing.

Try to pack every time using the same amounts of the same materials in the same way, so that you don't need to think about it too much. Have all the labels for the packages printed up in advance, and do the items in that order. The less time you spend on the packing, the more profit it is for you.

Round to the Next Dollar.

Let's say you're buying items for \$2, and selling them for \$4 + \$1.50 shipping. Rounding the shipping to \$2 would make you an extra 40 cents on each sale – considering you're currently only making \$2 profit, that's a percentage profit increase of 25%!

You see, this extra money will be far more important to you than it is to the buyer, because it's on the margin. For you, it's extra profit for nothing, and for the buyer, it's too small an amount to bother caring about. Everybody wins in this scenario.

The Ideal Price Point.

Find out what your rivals are charging for shipping, and try to just undercut them while still making a profit. If you managed to buy some cheaper materials, this shouldn't be too hard for you – most of the sellers on eBay are buying envelopes and boxes one-by-one, which is a very expensive way to do things. If you work things out correctly, you should be able to offer shipping at a price point which makes your rivals look silly, and still be making a good profit on it!

If you're running the kind of operation where shipping is a big concern, then the chances are that you're listing a significant proportion of your items using 'Buy it Now', instead of going through all the trouble and uncertainty of using real auctions every time. But wait! Using 'Buy it Now' isn't always the right thing to do. Our next email will give you a few tips on when to do it and when not to.

When NOT to Use “Buy Now”.

As you get more experienced on eBay, you might be tempted to use fixed price auctions, just so you can budget better. It's often more reassuring to know that either you will make a small profit on an item instead of having to wait and see whether it makes a big profit or a big loss. However, you should be aware that there are some times when you really shouldn't use 'Buy it Now'.

In the Holiday Season.

The market goes absolutely crazy just before the holidays – and that's why you shouldn't list items using Buy it Now. Do you really want to wake up one morning and find that all your stock has been bought up, the current highest bidders on your rivals are bidding double what you just sold them for, and the people who bought your item have relisted it with a starting price higher than what they paid? Of course you don't.

I would recommend that you stop listing anything as fixed price as soon as you get into December, unless you have a lot of accumulated stock that you want to get rid of for low prices.

When an Item is In-demand.

If an item is selling within a few hours each time you list it using Buy it Now, then you really ought to consider using a normal auction format instead. The chances are that the final price you'd get would be much higher than whatever you're charging now.

When You Have the Only Item on the Market.

If you have a hard-to-find item that no-one else is currently selling, then it makes no sense to use Buy it Now. You'll be surprised just how high buyers will go on things that are truly rare, and how upset they'll be if someone snatches it away from them using Buy it Now. It's only fair to give everyone a chance to pay you more and more money, isn't it?

If Your Item Doesn't Sell.

If you keep needing to relist your item because it consistently fails to sell, that might be the time to give up on listing it in the fixed price format. Buy it Now only works for things that people always want – traditional auctions involve them more with things that they wouldn't usually buy. You might end up with a slightly lower price than you wanted in the end, but at least that bad item will be off your hands.

If No-one Ever Buys From You With It.

It's simply not worth having a Buy it Now button on every one of your auctions if nobody ever touches the thing: it's just sitting there, costing you money for each listing. When it comes down to it, Buy it Now is expensive, and you should only use it in auctions where you really think it will help the item to sell.

Now you might not have noticed, but there's another 'alternative' auction format that often goes ignored: the multiple-item, or 'Dutch' auction. In the next email, I'll show you how these auctions work, and explain why they could be good for your business.

How do Dutch Auctions Work on eBay?

A multiple-item ('Dutch') auction is an auction where more than one of the same item is being sold at once. There are two kinds of Dutch auctions.

Without Bidding.

The most common Dutch auctions are actually a combination of two auction types: they're multiple-item fixed price auctions (Dutch Buy it Now auctions to you and me). This just means that you can offer more than one of an item at a time for a fixed price.

This is very powerful if you're selling something small in large quantities. You can just say how many of the item you have, and the Buy it Now auction will stay there until its duration is up or all the items have been sold.

Buyers aren't limited to only buying one item at a time, either: they can enter how many they want and then just click Buy it Now to get them. If you're selling small things loose, then this can be really great – instead of selling them in packs of 50, you can sell 24 to one person and 95 to the next. It lets buyers save money by buying exactly what they need, and it lets you offer them the flexibility to have as many or few of an item as they want.

With Bidding.

Dutch auctions can also be done by bidding, but the process is rather complicated. Buyers bid a price and say how many items they want, and then everyone pays the lowest price that was bid by one of the winning bidders. Let's say there are 10 of an item for sale. Anne bids \$5 each for 4, while Bob bids \$4 for 6. Anne will get her 4 and Bob will get his 6, but they will both only pay \$4.

Here's another example. If there are 5 items for sale and Anne, Bob, Carol and Dean want to buy 2 each, then obviously someone is going to lose out. Whoever bid the lowest will only get one of the item. If Anne bid \$5 each, Bob bid \$4 each, Carol bid \$3 each, and Dean bid \$2 each, then Anne will get 2, Bob will get 2, Carol will get 1 and poor Dean gets nothing. So then: how much they pay for the items?

Starting to sound like a particularly evil math problem, isn't it? The answer is that everyone will pay \$3, as Carol's bid was the lowest one that won anything. If you have trouble getting your head around that, then don't worry – everyone else does too! That's why Dutch auctions with bidding are so rare.

In fact, even eBay's normal one-item auction format has all sorts of problems, not least of which is auction sniping. Snipers are buyers who come along at the last minute to bid a few cents more than the highest bidder and win the item. Your buyers will find this infuriating – and you're the only one with any power to help them out by stopping it. The next email will show you what you can do.

How to Stop eBay Auction Sniping.

Every day, hapless bidders get beaten to the punch by auction snipers who jump in at the last minute. I know how annoying it can be, as I once had it happen to me three times in a row on the same item! The thing is that the only people who can help the poor bidders are us, the sellers.

The Problem.

Bidders will bid on an item and then wait for days until it finishes, only to have someone else outbid them at the last minute. In a traditional auction at a real auction house, this isn't a problem at all, as the auction keeps going until everyone has bid as much as they want to, and the auctioneer double-checks with the classic phrase "going, going, gone".

The problem on eBay is caused by the fixed length of time that eBay's auctions last, and the fact that they aren't extended significantly if someone places a new bid in the last few seconds of the auction. Imagine if a real auction house worked that way, letting people shout "50 cents more!" at the last second and win an item. It would simply be unfair, and many buyers think it's unfair on eBay too.

The Solutions.

Until eBay decide to fix the problem (and by now it's looking unlikely that they ever will), you're the only one who can do anything for your buyers.

First off, you can encourage your buyers to use eBay's proxy bidding system the way it was intended. The idea of the system is that they enter the maximum they're willing to pay for an item and eBay places bids for them automatically up to that maximum. They're not supposed to come back and bid an extra dollar every time they get outbid.

If your bidders are bidding high enough, then no sniper will even come along and beat them – because they will have set the maximum snipe level in their sniping software to less than the normal bidder's maximum. Changing the way people use eBay is hard, though.

One alternative is to keep an eye on who's bidding on your auction, and cancel bids from known snipers – but this requires you to be around right at

the end of the auction to cancel their bids. You might also want to set your auction to end sometime when bidders will be around so that they can outbid snipers themselves. This is good business sense anyway – most of the bidding always takes place in the last few hours of an auction.

An easier way to thwart bid snipers is to offer ‘Second Chance’ sales to bidders who get outbid by a sniper at the last minute. This is good for you, and for them – they still get to buy the item they wanted, and you’ve just made two sales: one to the sniper and one to them.

Once you’ve sold your items, though, you might be upset to find that one of them gets returned for a refund. Our next email will show you how to turn these returns into profits!

How to Turn eBay Returns into Profits.

Don't worry, getting items returned happens to everyone eventually. You can't satisfy all of the people all of the time, and occasionally someone's going to want to send something back to you. Turning returns into profits isn't easy – but with a little determination, you can manage it.

Don't refund shipping charges: If followed our advice and you're now making a decent profit on your shipping charges by using cheaper materials, then you might still be able to come out ahead with returns. Just refund the charge of the items but not the shipping. I know sellers who make \$1 profit on the sale and \$2 profit on the shipping. If they get a returned item then they don't really mind: they still get to keep two-thirds of their profit.

Charge a restocking fee: You're perfectly within your rights to charge a restocking fee, and that's nothing but profit for you. Bear in mind that this will get customers very annoyed, however.

Resell with a better description: Now that you know if there's something wrong with the item, you can write a more honest description. Surprisingly enough, items can sometimes sell for more the second time around, simply because word has had time to spread that you were selling the item and there might be a few people looking out for another.

Take their packing materials: Inexperienced buyers will send back your items using all sorts of expensive luxury packing materials – take them and re-use them the next time you want to give a buyer an extra special service. Incidentally, this also applies when you buy things on eBay – you'll find that you can save a lot on packing when you re-use every piece of packaging that comes your way. Make sure to take off any labels first, though.

You know what they want: Remember that every buyer who buys something from you and then returns it was at least interested in it. They're a potential sales lead, and you should add them to your mailing list to follow up later – if you were nice to them when they returned the item, they might be willing to give you another chance.

Replace with a better model: Finally, if the buyer is returning the item for a replacement, then tell them that the only replacement you have in stock at

the moment is a slightly more expensive model – but you’ll send it to them if they pay the extra. Again, more profit for you.

Of course, it’s up to you whether you want to use these techniques: you might think it’s more valuable to refund the shipping on returns as a gesture of goodwill, as part of your perfect customer service. I would tend to agree with you: your reputation is invaluable. If what you’re interested in is making as much profit as possible in the short term, then go right ahead – but remember that in the long-term you might be sacrificing some repeat business for the sake of a few dollars.

In the next email, we’ll look at the myths and magic of drop-shipping vendors, and what they can do for you.

The Myths and Magic of eBay Drop-shipping Vendors.

If you've never heard of drop shipping, then prepare to be impressed – it sounds like every eBay seller's dream. With drop shipping, you don't have to keep any stock at all. You simply list auctions for what your drop shipper sells, without actually seeing it yourself.

Each time something sells, you let them know, and they deliver it for you – directly to the customer. They'll charge you a near-wholesale price for the item they delivered, you charge the customer whatever price you agreed, and then you pocket the difference as profit.

The Magic.

Just think of the sheer amount of trouble this takes out of eBay selling. You don't have to find space in your house to keep your stock in, or money to buy it with. You don't have to take any risk by buying things that might not sell. You don't have to deal with suppliers. You don't even have to pack or post the auctions yourself. Wow! Can you imagine how good this would be if you could pull it off?

But, as with all things in life, if it sounds too good to be true...

The Myths.

Drop-shippers don't do deals with just anyone – any drop shipper who says they'll take orders from unregistered businesses is likely to be a scammer. They might not send out anything at all to your customers, or you might send out very poor quality merchandise that they will then return to you for a refund.

Also, beware of companies that claim they will put you in contact with drop shippers for a fee – they are inevitably rip-offs. At the end of the day, the best way to find drop shipping companies is to contact them in the 'real world', not by typing 'drop shipping' into a search engine.

Doing it for Real.

If you want to make a profit with drop-shippers, be prepared for it to be quite a small one: you're not going to make sales on eBay at a big mark-up

from drop shipping prices. You will also have to accept that you can't inspect stock before it gets sent out, and some of your descriptions might not be as good as they could be.

You should also be prepared for a few frustrating experiences with your drop shipper, as they might not share the same customer service values as you. The first time you'll realise that they never sent something to one of your buyers is when you hear about it from the buyer a week later.

If you can accept all these things, though, and find a reputable drop shipper, then there's money to be made. Good luck!

If you'd like to give up a little more profit and control over your eBay business to save the trouble of doing everything yourself, then you might be interested in eBay consignment centers. You can sell your items at an eBay consignment center by just leaving them there. Stay tuned to these emails for more.

How eBay Consignment Centers Work.

You might not ever have heard of eBay consignment centers – don't worry, most people haven't, as they're a relatively new concept. The idea is that you drop off anything you want sold, and then the consignment center will sell it for you and share the profits.

You Can Sell at Consignment Centers.

Just find something to sell and take it to a consignment center – they'll sell it for you on eBay, handling all the listing, description and shipping.

You do, however, give up some profit when you sell through a consignment center, not to mention losing all control over your auctions – and who's to say that you couldn't sell it better than they can? The chances are they will only give you a fraction of the item's real value, to the point where you might as well have just taken it to the pawn shop.

You Can Be a Consignment Center.

A better option is to be a consignment center for the non-eBay-using public in your area. After you've been selling things on eBay for a while and you've told a few people about it, someday a friend will walk up to you and say "Hey, could you sell this on eBay for me?" Give it a try – if you like doing it, then why not start up your own consignment center business?

Put an ad like this in your local newspaper or anywhere else you think is appropriate:

"Create Space and Get Money For Doing It! How would you like someone to come and clean out the old stuff in your house that's taking up all your space, and then give you cash for the lot? I am currently looking for things to sell on eBay and I can do this for you. Call me on [your number]."

Go round to a few people's houses and take some things that you think are sellable, giving the items' owners a sensible amount for them – not too much, since they don't know how much they're worth. It's best to try to take things that are part of a set or collection, so you can sell lots of the same kinds of items. You're in a strong position: why would they so no when you're offering them money for things that, to them, are rubbish?

The only requirement to be successful with this is that you need to know what you're doing, and be able to spot a high-value item when you see one, regardless of what it might be. It's also worth opening a new account to sell items you get from other people. You can't guarantee quality as well, and your regular account should only be used to sell the one kind of item that you decided you're an expert in.

One thing many sellers don't realise when they sell items is that they need to change their strategy depending on what season it is – things sell for different prices depending on the time of year. We'll take a look at this in the next email.

Seasonal Selling on eBay.

When you sell on eBay, it's important to know how to take advantage of the kinds of markets you encounter in the different seasons. As a rule, the summer months are slow and the winter period is fast, but there's more to it than that.

It Depends What You're Selling.

Your sales won't necessarily be slower in the summer than in winter – they might just be different. If you're selling sports equipment, for example, you'll probably find that surfing gear sells in summer while skiing gear sells in winter. You should make sure you are aware of any seasonal variations there will be in your particular market, and plan in advance to take advantage of them.

Selling in Peak Season.

The holiday season is eBay's peak, and the best time to be selling on eBay – the December rush is relatively short, but if you play it right then you could make half your year's profit over those few days.

In the holidays, people are looking for presents, and eBay run more advertising than usual targeted towards buyers, not sellers. Target your auctions more towards new users than experienced ones, writing easy-to-understand descriptions. If you have any items that are in demand, try listing some at auction and some with high Buy it Now prices, to see what works best.

The chances are you'll be surprised when the Buy it Now auctions go almost instantly and the auctions rack up bids like nobody's business. It is important to remember, however, that most of these buyers will only buy from you once.

Selling Off-peak.

For the rest of the year, the market is far slower. Don't worry though – you can still make money. It's a little like being a stockbroker: you can make money whether the market is good or bad, if you know what you're doing.

Remember that your target market is a little more 'expert': you're mostly selling to people who know what they're buying, and know what they want to pay. Cater to this by providing a service suitable for these customers. Show that you know what you're selling and sell things consistently and you'll have people coming back again and again.

Here's one extra tip that you might try. If you know of items that have a consistent value, it might be worth buying up as many as you can cheaply in the summer, storing them for half a year, and selling them during the winter rush. If you're willing to give over a little space for storage, you can make a lot of profit for little effort. After all, you don't even have to take the items out of the packaging the last seller put them in.

If you've tried searching for a few more eBay tips using the big search engines like Google and Yahoo, then you might have come across someone offering to sell you all the secrets of eBay success for a 'low, low price'. In the next email, I'll let you in on their little secrets for free.

Are There Any eBay “Secrets” That Are Worth Buying?

If you look around a little on the web, you’ll no doubt come across people trying to sell you ebooks about eBay’s ‘secrets’ for as much as \$20. Here’s a sample:

“Along with 400,000 other excited eBay fanatics I now make a living using the Internet and eBay. I can go days without ever speaking to a single customer, but I have a world wide customer base. My online business runs like a well oiled machine with a part-time effort!”

You too can get such valuable tips as:

“All you need to do is write a list of questions other people would pay to get the answers to, give that list to a friend, have the friend call you on the phone and ask you those questions, record the call, have the recording transcribed, and edit the transcription! Presto - you’ve just created a ‘meaty’ ebook fast!”

So What Do These Books Contain?

Don’t be deceived by the slick sales copy and promises of ‘automatic sales machines’ and unique sales strategies. Most of these ‘winning money-making strategies’ boil down to the same thing. Follow their advice, and you’ll be writing long, old-fashioned sales copy in an effort to sell shoddily-written downloadable ebooks to gullible souls, either directly through eBay or by trying to redirect people through your About Me page to your website.

The theory is that the rubbish ebooks will sell themselves, and you won’t have to do a thing.

Here’s a question to ask yourself: if these ‘secrets’ work so well, then why aren’t the ebooks authors spending every hour they have putting them into practice, instead of trying to sell you ebooks? If these secrets were so valuable, then why would they give them away for that price, or any price? Out of charity? Yeah, right.

Here’s the reality: trying to sell ebooks on eBay or anywhere else is very likely to get you nowhere, and fast. The bottom fell out of the ebook market a long time ago – in fact, it’s doubtful whether it ever had a bottom to begin

with. The ebooks are an effort to get you sign up for all sorts of services, making money for the ebooks' writers each time. In short, the only way to profit from 'secrets of eBay' ebooks is to be selling them, not buying them – and do you really want to become a con artist?

If you'd like to take a look at one of these ebooks, try searching for the name and picking through results. The chances are you'll find an excerpt or review – and if it's not by someone trying to sell you the ebook then it won't be a favourable view. The fact that most ebooks you buy for \$20 come with unlimited resale rights should tip you off if nothing else does.

It's All Out There for Free.

You can almost any information that someone might be trying to sell you in an ebook for free using a search engine, if you take the time. Ebooks aren't worth the paper they're not printed on.

If you'd like a real way to make more money, look out for our next email: we'll show you how and when to use eBay's powerful 'Second Chance Offer' feature.

How to Use eBay's "Second Chance Offer" Feature.

When someone wins your auction, you might think that's the end of it. In fact, you can offer the item to anyone else who bid in the auction but didn't win.

Why Would I Do That?

There are three reasons you might want to do this:

1. Your top bidder never paid. Unfortunately for sellers, it is all too common for buyers to win an item and then decide they don't want it after all. Making a second chance offer lets you offer the item to a buyer with a better reputation.
2. You have another one. If you have another item just like the one you just sold then you might as well sell it to another bidder – after all, you know they're interested and what they're willing to pay.
3. A buyer emails you directly to ask. If they got 'sniped' at the last second, or just weren't around when the auction ended, then a buyer might email you to ask if you'll sell them one for however many dollars. You might as well make them an offer – it's a free sale.

So How Do You Make a Second Chance Offer?

Well, it's easy really. The easiest place to send a second chance offer from is the My eBay screen – simply go to the Selling page and click 'Make a Second Chance Offer'. eBay should also provide a link for you to make a second chance offer in the email you will receive after the sale of an item is completed, or you report a non-paying buyer.

What Happens Next?

The buyer can choose to either accept or reject your offer. If they decline, that's the end of it, and you pay nothing for making the offer. If they accept, then things work exactly the same way they would if they'd won the auction – you pay a final value fee, they pay you, and you can leave feedback for each other as normal.

Making a second chance offer on all your auctions can be a great way to make extra sales. You will probably find that about 50% of the buyers you

make offers to will take them up, and you save the effort of relisting the item and paying another insertion fee.

The only disadvantage is the time that it might take you to send so many second chance offers, but the chances are it will be time well spent. If you find that it doesn't work for your particular kind of items, though, don't keep pushing it – just re-list the item and let people bid again. It might be that the buyers for your items just aren't the negotiating type – or perhaps they hope that the next one will sell for less.

By now, you're probably starting to make a success of your eBay business – I hope you've enjoyed it so far! But the chances are you still want a few more strategies to increase your profits. Well, in the next email, we'll take a look at what you can discover from taking a good look at your competitors' auctions.

What You Can Learn from Competing eBay Auctions.

If you've a savvy businessperson, the chances are you've already taken a look at your competitors' auctions. What you might not have realised is just how much you can learn if you know what you're looking for.

To begin with, don't bother looking at listings that haven't ended yet – you don't know what's going to happen with them. Instead, use the advanced search page to search for listings that sold. Just go to the advanced search page, type in the keywords that you know will find your competitors' items, tick 'Completed listings only' and set the minimum number of bids to 1. Set it to sort by 'Price: highest first'.

This will show you auctions competing with yours that have recently finished, starting with the ones that sold for the most (ignore any with prices in red – they didn't sell). Go through and take a look, paying special attention to the following points:

Titles. What information do the top sellers of your item put in their titles, and what do they leave out? If your titles are very different to theirs, it might be time for a rethink.

Descriptions. You'll probably notice that the highest sellers haven't just copied text from the company's website or an Amazon.com review – they've gone to the trouble of writing a little about the item, and about themselves. Learn from their example.

Pictures. I can almost guarantee you that the listing will have very nice pictures – not catalogue quality, but good enough to see what you're getting. With items of any significant cost, you'll probably find more than one photo from different angles.

Style. Is it written conversationally, or in terse businesslike language? The way you should write entirely depends on what the market seems to like – and the market seems to like what the top sellers wrote.

Time. It's pretty easy to ignore this as a factor without meaning to, but pay attention to when the top selling items' auctions began and ended. This might give you a few clues about the best to catch buyers who will bid highly on your item, and then you can schedule your items accordingly.

Price. If your competitors are selling using Buy it Now, you can see what the maximum is that they've managed to sell for recently, and set your own Buy it Now price slightly below that.

Shipping. Look around to see the sweet spot for shipping. If you can figure out a way to get your shipping costs lower than the highest sellers, then this is a great opportunity to differentiate yourself in the market.

Once you see what works, you can start to emulate your competitors – of course you can't just copy them completely, but you can structure your auction similarly and make sure it includes the same information.

If you want your items to do even better, then start stocking the items in your category that are the most in-demand. We'll show you how to tell what's selling and what's not in our next email.

How to Determine What's Really Selling on eBay.

If you want to make the most money you can on eBay, then you need to know what sells. But how can you find that out?

The Manual Way.

If you're just starting out, you might find it easier to simply go to your category, tick 'Completed listings' in the left-hand menu, and then click the 'Show items' button. Sort them by highest price first, and there you have it: the items that sell for the highest prices. In most categories this will change often, but it's still useful to know – if you think you can get an item quickly for less than the kind of prices it is selling for, then go for it.

eBay's search interface can be slow and hard to use, however, and you're unlikely to discover everything you could learn this way. There's more than one way to do things, though.

The Statistical Way.

If you'd prefer to do a little hardcore statistical analysis to determine what's selling and what not, then don't worry – you can do that too.

eBay make all their market data available to third-party developers through what's called a 'programming interface' – this basically means that you have a wide choice of programs that can take market statistics from eBay and analyse them for you. Type 'ebay analysis' into a search engine for a long list.

In my opinion, some of the best eBay statistics tools out there are made by Andale (www.andale.com). Andale are one of the oldest and most established sellers of services for eBay. However, their solution is web-based, and you may prefer to buy a piece of software that you can install on your computer, such as AuctionIntelligence.

These automated programs will almost do everything for you, and come with help and tutorials. You should be aware, however, that eBay charge them for the data, which means that they will never give you their programs for free.

Keep Your Finger on Pulse.

If you want a quick, big-picture snapshot of what people are looking to buy on eBay, then go to <http://pulse.ebay.com>. This is a page where eBay list the top 10 most searched for words, and the top 5 largest eBay stores.

Looking at it, it's easy to spot current trends. For example, right now all of the top stores are selling media items, either books or music. That suggests that these are good things to be selling, at least if you want to shift volume. Right now the word 'ipod' is at number 4, and 'ipod mini' is at number 6 – there are a heck of a lot of people out there looking for a cheap iPod or iPod mini. If you could find a good supplier for them then you could make a lot of money.

If you're having trouble finding suppliers, though, don't worry: there's more than one way to get hold of things to sell on eBay. The next email will give you a few tips.

10 Great Ways to Source Low Cost Products for eBay.

So you're having trouble finding stock cheaply enough to sell it for a good profit? Well, you've come to the right place.

Garage sales. The chances are you've gone most of your life seeing ads for these and ignoring them. Start going to as many as you can. You won't find good things at every one, but when you find one person with good stuff, make them an offer for the lot – they'll be so happy about it that you can get a real bargain.

Markets. If your area has a market, then go there and look around for anything good. You could buy it there if it's cheap enough, or try to make friends with the market traders and find out who their suppliers are.

Pawn shops. Pawn shops don't usually know what to do with the junk they accumulate (unless it's jewellery, of course). Generally, they put their stock out on the shelves haphazardly, hoping that someday someone with a little money will just happen to come in, search around and buy wildly obscure things. Get them to offer you a discount for bulk.

Real auctions. Go to a real auction, as the chances are that you can resell things for more than they will sell them. After all, they only have a few hundred people in that room – you have a few million to sell to!

Local newspapers. Place an ad in the local paper that reads “I pay cash for [your item type]”, with your phone number. If you can afford it, make it a big display ad, so it'll be noticed.

Ad boards. Get one of those little ads in the grocery store.

Friends. Ask your friends if they have anything they'd like to sell you, and ask them to spread the word to their friends.

Become known. Give out business cards, mention to people what you do. The chances are that you'll come across someone who'll say “Oh, really? I've got a load of [item] I don't want”.

Shops. This might be a little surprising, but some real shops even sell things more cheaply than they sell on eBay. Take a look around your local deep

discounters, and pay special attention to any shop that takes trade-ins from customers. The chances are they take a loss on trade-ins as a promotion, and are dying to get rid of that stock.

And finally: eBay! When you're looking at the completed items view, you'll notice the massive range of prices that items can sell for on eBay. Try taking the highest-priced item and searching for it on its own, then sort by lowest price first: I can almost guarantee that you'll see an auction for the same item where it sold for almost nothing. The trick is to find these flawed auctions before they close, win them using a bid sniping service, and then turn around and resell the item.

After all that trouble, though, when you do sell the item you might find that a buyer leaves you a feedback rating you just don't think is fair. The next email will show you what to do about it.

How to Dispute Unfair Ratings on eBay.

So you've done everything you can to keep your buyers happy – but still someone's left you negative feedback! You don't think it's fair, either because you fixed the buyer's problem, or they never gave you a fair chance to fix it. What can you do?

Communicate.

Tell the buyer that you don't think that feedback was fair, and give them a list of the things you'll do in exchange for them withdrawing it. You can offer refunds, replacements, or even to 'compensate them for their time' (that means bribe them), depending on how desperate you are. If they agree, you can go through the mutual withdrawal process detailed below.

Respond.

Leave a comment under the negative feedback explaining what happened – this at least minimises the damage it will do to your reputation if anyone looks at it. Remember that you can more-or-less write whatever you want, as there is no facility for the buyer to respond to your response – and anything you write will show up on their 'Feedback Left for Others' page! If you're a little devious, you can make them look very bad.

Retaliate.

However much you're not supposed to do it, you really shouldn't let a buyer leave you negative feedback without leaving them a negative in return. Be polite and factual, saying something like "buyer did not give me a fair opportunity to fix their complaint" (note that this is one of the reasons why you should always leave feedback second, or not at all). This might not be the 'nicest' way to do business on eBay, but it's the only realistic way to protect your flawless reputation.

Don't be worried: retaliatory feedback is not against eBay's rules, however much it should be. Anyway, you're not just doing this for revenge – it's essential for the next step.

Try for a Mutual Withdrawal.

Since the buyer probably won't want a negative response or feedback comment on their record, you can do a simple "I'll take away my negative if you take away yours" deal. This is called mutual feedback withdrawal, and the process can be started at this page:

<http://feedback.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?MFWRequest>.

This will cause eBay's system to send an email to your buyer, asking them if they agree to withdraw their feedback in exchange for you withdrawing yours. You should get them to agree before you press the button, though, because you can only use it once per transaction.

Use Dispute Resolution.

You and the buyer can take your feedback dispute to SquareTrade, where you can both give your side and they will cancel feedback that they feel is unfair – they are far more responsive than eBay. Be aware that this costs about \$20, but it has the advantage that if the buyer doesn't respond to the process then their feedback will be removed automatically.

Of course, at some point you might find yourself with an even worse buyer than one that just leaves negative feedback – they might refuse to pay, or harass your other buyers. Our next email will tell you how to get in touch with eBay's 'Safe Harbor' team, and what they can do for you.

How to Get Help from eBay's SafeHarbor Team.

SafeHarbor are the eBay police department. If a buyer does something they're not supposed to, then it's SafeHarbor you should be reporting it to.

Non-paying Buyers.

This is the most common rule buyers break -- it's all too easy for them to just change their minds and try to get out of the auction. eBay, however, regard every auction as a contract. They will punish the buyer for you if they don't go through with their end of the deal, by giving them a 'strike' against their account. A buyer who doesn't consistently doesn't pay for items they win will probably get banned.

To report a non-paying buyer, you need to file an 'Unpaid Item' dispute, which you can do here:

<http://feedback.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?CreateDispute>. All you need is the item number. Once you do this, eBay will send the buyer a reminder that they must pay for the item they won, wait a while, and then take action against them. You must wait 7 days before you can file a dispute.

This isn't that helpful to you, of course, since in most cases you still won't get paid for the item or have anyone to post it to: it is a rare buyer who responds to eBay's threats and pays up just to avoid a little warning from eBay. You will, however, at least get a refund of your final value fee and be able to relist the item for free – and you can send a second chance offer to someone else if you want.

Auction Interference.

If someone ends up with a grudge against you, then you might find that they start emailing your bidders and telling them that you're a scammer, they should cancel they bid, they shouldn't deal with you, and so on. You might even find that you have unscrupulous competitors who will try this tactic to get buyers to bid on their auctions instead!

SafeHarbor will investigate this for you – the procedure to report it is to click 'Help' on the toolbar, then 'Contact us' from the menu. This can be a bit of a maze: you need to choose 'Report problems with other eBay members', then 'Problems with buyers', then finally 'User is emailing

buyers to warn them about seller or item'. This will then let you send SafeHarbor an email.

Feedback Extortion.

You might find that someone tries to intimidate you into giving them something using the threat of negative feedback – in its crudest form, this could be as simple as “Pay me \$20 or I’ll leave you a negative comment”.

To report this to SafeHarbor, you should also use ‘Contact Us’, making sure you attach all the emails you have that prove the extortion happened.

You know, if it’s not one thing, it’s another. Maybe you’re not be having all that many problems with the buyers you do get, but you seem to be having a problem with items that just don’t sell. Never fear: the next email will give you some hints on what could be going wrong.

Top 10 Reasons Why eBay Auctions Fail.

Are you finding that auction after auction fails to attract any bidders or buyers? It happens to the best of us sometimes – take a good look at these things to see if any of them could be making your bidders avoid you.

The starting price was too high: People don't want to have to make a high bid before anyone else has – you should always start your auctions low and let the bidders bid them up.

The fixed price is too high: If you're just selling with Buy it Now, then of course your items won't sell if they're too expensive. Try reducing the price a little each time the item fails to sell.

No picture: Most buyers are reluctant to bid on something without a picture, and that goes even more for high-value items. Think of it from the buyer's point-of-view: would you want to bid on an item when you've no idea what it looks like?

You had a reserve: Reserve prices scare away buyers like you wouldn't believe, not to mention costing a percentage of your final sale price. Avoid them like the plague.

Bad spelling and grammar: If your titles are spelled wrongly, then no-one will find your auctions. If your descriptions are incoherent, then no-one will know what you're talking about. Always run your text through a spelling and grammar checker before you put it up on eBay.

Too much for shipping: You might be expecting people to pay more for shipping than they're prepared to. Give them a few cheaper options that will take longer, or use cheaper materials.

Negative feedback: If you got negative feedback on your last transaction, expect things to be slow for a while. Try selling cheap things for a while to get your account back in good standing.

Nasty terms: Don't write things all over your auction like "I will only accept returns in PERFECT condition" or "Serious bidders only, no timewasters!!" This is entirely unnecessary and just makes you look difficult to deal with.

No PayPal: Many buyers simply avoid any seller who doesn't accept PayPal as a payment method – they can't be bothered with the hassle of anything else. Even if you don't like PayPal, you should accept it if you want to business on eBay.

The items were bad. You will have to accept that there are some items no-one wants – perhaps they were hyped to begin with, but now people had heard that they're useless and stopped buying. Before you come to this conclusion, though, check everything else you can, and check if anyone else is managing to sell it. If you're sure, try to return the items, and buy in some new stock.

When selling on eBay is so much trouble, you might start to wonder: should I just go and sell my stuff somewhere else? In the next email, we'll take a look at the various alternatives to eBay that have sprung up over the years.

Should You Run Auctions on Other Sites Besides eBay?

eBay doesn't have very many competitors, and the ones that there are remain small by comparison – that's part of what makes eBay so powerful for niche items. If you're selling more common things, though, you might like to list auctions on other sites besides eBay, to increase your potential customer base and avoid some of the occupational hazards of relying on eBay for all your business. But which ones are worth bothering with?

Yahoo! Auctions.

Yahoo Auctions wins in one big way: selling there is free. There are no listing fees or final value fees. What's more, Yahoo is still one of the biggest sites around, and gets plenty of traffic to its auction site. The site benefits from Yahoo's experience in providing good, categorised searching, and the site is easy to use all round.

The rub, though, is that dodgy buyers and sellers are even more rampant on Yahoo than they are on eBay, and that's saying something. Sellers on Yahoo Auctions can expect to run into far more non-paying buyers than they would on eBay. Also, the site is plastered with text ads, which get in the way, and the design in general leaves a lot to be desired – but then, so does eBay's.

uBid.

uBid's model is to offer more security for less flexibility. They pre-screen everything: sellers must be registered businesses and buyers must pre-register a credit card. It takes some of the 'Wild West' feeling out of selling – but it also takes away most of the fun.

On eBay, you have complete control over what you're doing, while selling on uBid feels like you're just a faceless supplier for a big company. Searching for anything vaguely non-mainstream will come back with no results, to the point that it will quickly get frustrating for your buyers. If you're just selling common consumer goods for the money, though, then by all means do it at uBid.

Amazon Auctions.

Amazon Auctions is an underused auction site. The design is quite bad, and searches don't turn up many results. The payment system is the same one people use to buy things from Amazon itself, though, which seems more secure than PayPal.

You might be more interested in becoming an Amazon Marketplace seller, which means that you can list your items on their main pages for people to see when they click the 'Used & New from...' link. This can be a good way to make a few sales, as you can simply keep your inventory updated at your Buy it Now prices and someone will occasionally buy something. You don't even have to write a description or upload any pictures. This is probably a better thing to be using than Amazon Auctions.

To sum up, registering your items at a few other auction sites could get you a few extra sales – but compared to eBay, they're all very unimpressive, and have nowhere near as many users.

If you're trying to think of ways to expand your business, then there might be a shock in store for you with what I'm going to tell you next. Did you know that your eBay income is taxable? But stay calm – the next email will explain everything.

Is Your eBay Income Taxable?

The income you get from selling items on eBay is just like the income you get from any other business: it is taxable, at least in theory. In practice, many get away without declaring profits from their eBay sales just because they're hard for the government to track. If you want to be strictly within the law and legit, though, you should be paying tax.

Income is Income.

If you make money from it, then it's income – and if it's income, then it's taxable. There is a question of scale involved, though, where the more you've sold, the more important it is to declare your eBay income. If you don't, you risk getting yourself into all sorts of trouble.

There are some rules for deciding whether your income counts as taxable or not. If you depend on the income you get from eBay, spend a lot of time on it, or just act as if you are running a business, then you need to file a Schedule C tax form and pay tax as a business.

How Do I Work Out How Much to Pay?

The 'income' you make from eBay is how much profit you make. Remember that you can subtract absolutely all of your costs from this income, like this.

Sale price - cost of item - eBay fees - PayPal fees - cost of postage - cost of packing materials = income.

For example, let's say you sell CDs for \$10 each, including shipping. You pay \$5 for the CDs at wholesale. That's \$10 - \$5 (cost) - 25c (insertion fee) - 52c (final value fee) - 30c (PayPal fixed fee) - 29c (PayPal percentage fee) - 37c (stamp) - 50c (packaging) = \$2.77 income.

For reference, eBay's final value fee on a \$10 item is 5.25%, while PayPal's cut is 30c + 2.9% for most sellers. These numbers will vary depending on the value of what you sell and the kind of account you have.

When you work this out at the end of the year, you can calculate your overall price for all sales, and then work out how much of that you actually

received, remembering to adjust for non-paying buyers. Then just subtract what you spent on shipping and packing. There's no real need to do tax calculations on a transaction-by-transaction basis, although it is advisable to keep a printed record of everything you buy and sell.

However, there could be a few advantages to paying tax on your eBay sales – you might be able to make it back through deducting tax on your business expenses. All of the costs in the sum above that aren't profit are business expenses and so tax-deductible. You may also be able to deduct the cost of any computer equipment you buy, as well as ink and paper for your printer. You could even try something a little unusual, like deducting the cost of renting your home office from yourself.

Whatever you do, though, don't just rely on the information in this email. If you want advice about tax issues, you should really go to an accountant.

Another way to make back the money you spend on tax, of course, is to simply make more profit on each item to begin with. Our next email will show you how to get more bidders with the power of pictures.

Why Adding Pictures Increases eBay Bid Response.

Buyers really like pictures. The more pictures you have, the more they'll feel like buying their item from you, and not from your competitor. In fact, there are plenty of buyers who will literally leave your auction within 5 seconds of arriving if they don't find a picture there waiting for them.

A little extra work on photography can pay off massively, especially if you're working on slim profit margins. But why is it so effective?

It shows you're serious. Sellers who take the time to take good pictures and present them carefully are surely more likely to go to the trouble of providing good customer service, and buyers know this, at least on a subconscious level. If you can't even be bothered to take a photo and upload it to eBay, are you really going to pack their item properly? Are you going to post it on time?

It makes them trust you. Your buyers will feel more comfortable that you actually have the item if they can see that you have your own photo of it. It also reassures the buyers that your item isn't a beaten up and broken piece of rubbish.

It makes your auction stand out. When your picture is displayed on the search results screen, people can see your item right there instead of having to read your title. People prefer to work visually, and are more likely to pay attention to a result with a picture.

But if you want the benefits of the response pictures can bring, then what should you do? Here are a few simple tips to make your pictures better.

Bombard them with images. eBay might want you to pay for the privilege of adding more than one picture to an auction, but if you have your own web hosting then you can do it for free. Just take as many pictures as you want, upload them to your webspace, and then add them to the auction using HTML.

You might not know how to do this, but it's very simple. Just write this in your description each time you want to insert a picture: ``

Take better pictures. Use an image-editing program to touch up your pictures. There are plenty of choices – Ifranview (www.ifranview.com) is good, and free. Adjust things like brightness and contrast to make sure that buyers get the best view of your items.

Improve picture quality. Get a good camera, and pay attention to technique and composition when you take the photos. Don't just throw them on your bed and take photos. If you're not sure of yourself when it comes to photography, an empty, lightly coloured table against a white or nearly-white wall is always a good place to put things when you take photos of them.

Another good way to get more people to respond to your auctions is to find the best price points, including starting prices, Buy it Now prices and shipping. The next email will give you a few pricing strategies.

eBay Auction Pricing Strategies.

If your items aren't selling, then you might have a bad pricing strategy. There are as many pricing strategies in the world as there are buyers – if you look at two businesses selling the same thing, often the only difference you'll be able to find between them is pricing.

The 'Few Dollars More' Strategy.

Here's something you might not have thought of. If you set your auction's starting price to what you would usually charge for Buy it Now, while setting the Buy it Now price a few dollars above, you can make a profit by setting off an interesting psychological reaction in the buyer's mind.

Here's what they'll think. They want the item, but why should they bother bidding for it? After all, they could use Buy it Now for just a few dollars more, and be sure of getting it! Doing things this way makes the value of the Buy it Now option extra clear to the buyer, and makes them more willing to pay extra for the privilege.

The 'One Dollar Less' Strategy.

This is simple, but requires you to keep an eagle eye on your competition. As soon as they start a Buy it Now auction for an item you stock, start an auction for one of those items yourself. Match the title closely, but price your item one dollar less than theirs. This will mean that your auctions will sit together in the search results, and who's going to see both and go for the one that's a dollar more expensive?

The 'Free Shipping' Strategy.

Buyers really hate paying for shipping. With Buy it Now, you might find it easier to incorporate the shipping cost into the main price of the item, and then write "free shipping" in the auction's title. You'd be surprised how many buyers would prefer to pay one price including shipping for the auction, instead of having shipping added on at the checkout. Again, this is psychological: they pay the same at the end, but it doesn't feel like they've paid an unnecessary 'extra' cost for Internet shopping.

The 'Go for It' Strategy.

If you'd like a slightly more risky strategy, try this. List your item for the maximum duration (ten days), starting the listing on a Thursday so it goes across two weekends and finishes on a Sunday. Set the starting price to the minimum (one cent).

What you're trying to do here is give bidders as long as possible to discover your auction, so that they push the price up themselves. Pay for a few upgrades like bold and highlight, to give them a helping hand. If you do this right, you can make a much bigger profit than you would have with any Buy it Now price, especially with a medium or high value item.

Since running your auction for longer means that more people see it, you should always take the longest duration of ten days, right? Not always. In the next email, we'll talk about how long your eBay auction should run for.

How Long Should your eBay Auction Run?

When it comes to durations, you have a wide range of choices: your auction can run for 10, 7, 5 or 3 days, or even only one day if you have a good enough feedback rating.

There's a reason why you get to choose your duration, and that's because different durations are good for different things. To decide how long you should list your items for, all you need to do is ask yourself a few questions.

Do you want to sell things quickly? If you'd rather sell now than in a few days, even if it means losing a little of your profit, then go ahead and choose the shortest duration you can get. If you're the more patient type, on the other hand, you might as well sell slowly.

How much is your item worth? Items with a higher price are worth re-listing every 3 days or so using Buy it Now. The fees aren't that big as a percentage of the item's cost, and you'll sell more when you're constantly higher up in the search results.

Could your item benefit from competitive bidding? Not every item is going to make bidders get excited and try to outbid each other. If you have items that consistently attract more than five bidders, though, you should always list them for as long as possible, to get the best price you can. People will be quite happy to follow your auction for days, bidding the price higher and higher as they go.

What did the seller getting the best price do? Go back to that completed items display, and take a look at which durations the top seller uses the most often. The chances are that what they're doing works.

Can you ship quickly? You might find that customers get frustrated if they have to wait for over a week for your auction to end, only to have to wait some more for the item to actually turn up. If you're running auctions with the longest duration, try to have the thing packed and ready to go for posting the day it ends.

Is there a rush on? If it's the holiday period, or there's a sudden surge in demand for your particular item, then don't list items for as long as you

would usually. It's in your interest to have a quick turnover, then you should be listing for the minimum of one day.

How visible do you want to be? You might have noticed that most of the effects caused by varying item durations are basically caused by the fact that, by default, eBay sorts search results so that items ending sooner appear first. Since it's the default, this is the view most people use – meaning that items ending sooner get viewed much more.

If you'd like a few more tips about increasing your auction's visibility on eBay, make sure to check out the next email. See you there!

How to Increase Your Auction's Visibility on eBay.

Once you've optimised your titles for search terms and your items have short durations to get them near the top of the results, there's really only one sure-fire way to make your auction stand out from the crowd. Unfortunately, it involves paying eBay more money – but it can really pay off, especially for higher-priced items.

In this email, I'll take you through the various 'listing upgrades' eBay offer, how much they cost, and whether they're any good. Remember that if you want any of these, you can just tick their box while you're going through the process of listing your item. The charges will be added to the other fees you're charged for the listing.

Gallery. The most basic of upgrades, this will show your photo on the search results page as well as inside on the item's description page. This is always worth having. Cost: 35c.

Subtitle. If you add a subtitle, you get a little more space to fit in any extra information that you couldn't squeeze into the title. Use this if you're selling a relatively technical item that just has too many good features to fit into that 55-letter title space. Cost: 50c.

Bold. This will put your auction's title in bold on search results pages. Not especially noticeable, but might make your auction stand out a little. Cost: \$1.

Border. Choose this option to put your listing inside a coloured box on results pages, making it look a bit special. Cost: \$3.

Highlight. You can get your listing highlighted in purple on results pages. Cost: \$5.

Featured Plus. This upgrade will show your item at the top of the page in the search results, with the 'featured items', for the duration of your listing. It will also be shown in the featured items list seen by people who browse by category. This is easily the best upgrade you can buy, and will easily pay for itself twice over with an item that's worth more than about \$100 and getting a decent number of bids. Cost: \$19.95.

Gallery Featured. This will show your item first when someone chooses to view items using the 'Picture Gallery' view. Few people ever use this view, but it might be useful for some kinds of items. Cost: \$19.95.

Home Page Featured. This is the ultimate in listing upgrades, but its value is questionable, especially given the small space featured items are actually given on the home page. If you think you could pull a lot of buyers into your auction with nothing but the first four or five words of your title, go for it. Really, you have to get yourself on the home page at least once in your eBay life, don't you? Cost: \$39.95.

Instead of going to expense to get new buyers through the listings, perhaps you should talk to your existing ones and create some new sales opportunities that way? If you'd like to know how, be sure to read the next email.

Create Selling Opportunities by Communicating with Your Buyer

One thing many eBay sellers neglect is to actually communicate with their buyers – not with some automated ‘suggestion’ system, but with actual person-to-person contact. If you can be friendly and sound nice, then you can make them think you’re doing them a favour while you make a few extra sales.

‘I Could Throw In...’

When you receive an order for an item that costs a lot for shipping and needs some kind of equipment, this is an ideal opportunity to make a ‘friendly’ extra sale. For example, if someone has just bought a computer, you could send an email like this:

“I’m just emailing you to ask if you’d like a mouse or a keyboard – since you’re buying a computer from me, I can throw in any accessories you want without charging any extra shipping. If you’re not interested though, then don’t worry about it – it was just a thought.”

Note how informal this email has to be. It can’t stink of sales, or the whole ‘communication’ thing will be ruined. Would you rather buy something extra from someone who says “you might as well, since you’re paying shipping anyway” or from someone who says something like “our valued customers will also love our GREAT DEALS on mice – check it out!” I know what my answer is.

Know Anyone Else?

Here’s a simple thing to try: when you thank your buyer, simply say that if they’re pleased with you then you’d really appreciate it if they could spread the word. Many eBay buyers feel like they’ve got a real bargain, and combining this with good customer service could be enough to make your customer go out and start writing down your eBay store’s address on pieces of paper for their friends. If you notice a lot of orders coming from the same town, then you’ll know that this technique is working.

Any Problems?

If you contact the buyer a few months down the line to ask if their product is still working fine, you might find that they're having a problem you can fix, by sending a spare part or an upgrade. This is another opportunity to make a sale – not to mention helpful for them.

Anything to Sell?

If you've just sold them a brand new item, ask your buyer if they have an old one that they might like to trade in. They will often be delighted to take you up on your offer, since they were wondering how they were going to get rid of their old one anyway. Give them a fair price for it and offer to pay their postage and you won't believe how happy they'll be – and the chances are you can make a good profit on what they send you.

When everything is going to plan with your buyers, it's nice to be able to spend a while every week leaving them all big chunks of positive feedback. But how do you make this feedback the best it can be? We'll take a look at the dos and don'ts of leaving feedback for buyers in the next email.

How to Leave Great Buyer Feedback.

So your buyer has paid on time, you've shipped them the item, and they've left you positive feedback. Everything is going great! You know that leaving your buyer some nice feedback will finish everything off, and make them glad they chose to buy from you.

When you see that little feedback box, though, you might find that you have no idea what to write to make your buyer happiest. Well, here's a guide.

Don't write "A+++++++". Once upon a time, leaving grades on eBay buyers actually meant something. Now, though, writing an 'A' and filling the rest of the space with pluses seems to have become a common way of saying 'good'. The meaning of the grades is gone entirely – no one ever leaves a B-, after all – so it's a pretty useless thing to write. Try something more descriptive.

'Prompt/fast/instant payment'. Did the buyer get on PayPal within hours or even minutes of winning the auction and pay you as quickly as they could? If they did, then your comment should include the words 'prompt payment'. This is a big thing for buyers, as other sellers will really prefer to deal with someone they know will pay on time.

'Great communication'. If you found the buyer was very responsive to all your emails, then point this out. It's especially worth putting this if there was a problem that you had to overcome, and the buyer was co-operative and easy to work with.

'A pleasure to deal with'. If this was one of those very easy transactions where nothing went wrong, then you should put that the buyer was a pleasure to deal with, or 'the way ebay should be', or just a 'great ebayer'.

'Great as always'. When it's the second or third time that the buyer has bought from you, make sure to point it out. The fact that they go back to the same seller more than once and build up a relationship is a good thing for them to have on their record.

The Main Rule: Praise to the Skies.

Think of anything good you have to say and try to fit as much of it as you can in that limited space. Don't worry too much about punctuation. Here's a good example comment: "Instant payment, great communication - excellent buyer!".

As a side effect, this then gives you the power to leave slightly negative feedback for some buyers without actually having to make it negative, like this: "Paid quite quickly, communication fine". Making very short, to-the-point comments also reflects badly on the buyer: if you just write "OK", it means "I really wanted to leave a neutral or a negative". Don't do this if that's not the meaning you intend.

Don't spend too much time agonising over what to write in your feedback comments, though – the chances are you'll be leaving hundreds every week. You might find it worthwhile to come up with a few standard ones for different situations, and use eBay's Selling Manager to leave feedback in bulk.

Of course, before you can leave your buyer any feedback, you need to make sure they've paid you. Luckily getting your buyer to pay is easy, as eBay handle most of it for you. In the next email, we'll take a tour of eBay's checkout.

How to Use the eBay “Checkout Service”.

Back in the ‘old days’ of eBay, getting payment for the item was entirely left up to sellers: you had to choose your payment service, sign up for it and then send links to your buyers. Now, though, eBay handle most of the complexities of payment for you with their checkout.

How Do I Offer the Checkout?

The checkout will be offered to your buyers automatically. When they win an item, eBay send them an email with a ‘Pay Now’ button that takes them to the checkout, and they can also access it through their My eBay page.

It is in step 4 of the ‘Sell Your Item’ process, the payment and shipping step, that you can choose which kinds of payment you want to accept through the checkout and which you don’t.

PayPal: You should be accepting PayPal. You might want to click ‘Edit Preferences’, however, to either select or de-select the ‘tell buyers I prefer PayPal payments’ box – you don’t want to tell people you love PayPal when you only tolerate it. If you’re selling Buy it Now items, you can also tick the box to require immediate PayPal payment for them.

Money orders and cheques: tick these boxes if you want to accept the more ‘traditional’ payment methods. Your address will be revealed to your buyers so that they can post the payment to you – you should make sure eBay have the correct address.

You may also tick credit cards to accept, which you should do if you have your own merchant account or an account at somewhere like NoChex that you’d like to use.

It’s also worth writing any instructions that might be needed in the box on this page, such as who to make cheques out to or a warning that international non-PayPal payments might take a long time.

What Happens When Buyers Use It?

Once you’ve set the checkout up on your items, buyers will be able to choose which way they would like to pay you out of the options available,

and eBay's checkout will take them through the process step-by-step. This will save you the trouble of having to explain things.

When the buyer pays or agrees how to pay, eBay will send you an item letting you know what happened. It might tell you that the money is now in your PayPal account and you should send the item, or it might say that they've put a cheque in the post. Remember to wait for payments to clear before you send anything.

That's it – the role of the checkout is over. You just configure the checkout; it's the buyer who deals with it the most. You might have noticed, though, that you can configure the checkout differently for different items. This is sometimes worth doing if you some of the items you sell are worth more than others, and you'd prefer not to accept PayPal for the highly-valued ones, for example.

By now, you might be a little sick of going through the 'Sell Your Item' screens each time you want to list something. The next email will show you how to use eBay's automated listing tools.

How to Use eBay “Listing Tools”.

Listing tools automate the process of adding listings to eBay, to stop you having to go through the ‘Sell Your Item’ process every time. There is a surprising amount of choice out there when it comes to eBay listing tools, to the point where you might not know what to choose. Here’s an overview of what’s useful and what’s not.

Turbo Lister.

Turbo Lister is a free download from eBay, and allows you to sell on eBay without ever having to actually visit the site. You can write descriptions, save them and list them over and over again – if you want to, you can even do most of your eBay work offline, and just go online for a few seconds to upload it.

You can list in bulk and schedule your listings to start any time. Since this is eBay’s officially supported program, you’re guaranteed that upgrades to eBay’s site will never break it and leave you out in the cold. Personally, though, I find the design quite bad – it’s not really that much easier than just going through eBay directly.

Blackthorne.

Also from eBay, this is what used to be called the ‘Seller’s Assistant’. It’s a downloadable program, but it’s more powerful than Turbo Lister is. It lets you do everything in bulk: listing, re-listing, and even feedback. You can export your sales data to an accounting program, and track your auctions while they’re still going on. You only have to enter things like payment choices and shipping details once, and they’re saved forever.

So where’s the disadvantage? It costs \$9.99 per month, or \$24.99 for the pro version, which also lets you print shipping labels in bulk and manage an inventory.

Andale Lister.

If you want to try something that’s not been made by eBay, Andale’s lister is still web-based, but aims to streamline the process.

You can create ‘profiles’ with different selections for your auctions. For example, you could create a ‘Normal’ profile that doesn’t include any of the listing upgrades, a ‘Promote’ profile that includes Bold and Highlight, and a ‘Super Promote’ profile that buys Bold, Highlight and Featured Plus. This makes it easier to choose the set of options you want for each item.

It’s all about saving things you’ve done. Each time you upload a picture, it gets added to a ‘Picture Library’ for you to use again, and you can store an inventory and choose from it to create a listing. You also get nicer-looking templates than eBay provide.

Of course, if eBay had their act together then this is what their own process would be like – but they’re happy for third-parties to make money doing the work instead of upgrading their own site. Andale Lister can cost anywhere between 20c and 4c per listing, as you get discounts for volume.

Now that you’re listing in bulk, you can spend more time trying to attract people to come and bid on your auctions. But how should you be doing your marketing? In the next email, we’ll go through some of the options available to you.

How to Market Your eBay Business.

So you want to market your eBay business? Well, you probably won't have too much luck with traditional marketing methods – they're just not targeted enough. The best way to do things is to pay for targeted advertising, which comes up when people search for keywords you specify: they're looking for exactly what you're selling, and so many of them will click on your ad.

On eBay.

You might not have noticed that eBay offer this kind of advertising, but they do. You can pay them for a small ad that will appear above the search results (next to the banner ad) for any keywords you want. Buyers will then be able to click through and get to your eBay store – and you only pay for clicks, not for views. You can also set a budget for how much you want to spend, and your ads will simply stop if they go over-budget.

If you do this, it is best to create very targeted ads for specific products. Buy a specific model of something as your keyword, and write how much you sell it for in the ad – this will be more effective than just advertising across the name of a whole category.

There are some products that this approach simply doesn't work for, though, and you might be better off spending your money on a more visible Featured Plus listing for your item, especially if you're trying to advertise on valuable keywords.

Search Engine Ads.

If you want to market your business more widely, then you can try to bring in business from outside eBay. The best way to do this is by buying keyword-targeted ads on search engines. With Google AdWords, for example, your ad will appear in their 'Sponsored Links' section when someone searches for your keywords. Again, you set a maximum budget and only pay for clicks.

This can be very effective, as you've just taken your products to the world outside eBay – imagine someone going to a search engine, typing in what they're looking for and seeing your store right there! What's more, if you target this approach to specific models of a product it can be very cheap.

Most advertisers try to get as much traffic as they can instead of targeting their ads as specifically as you will be, meaning there won't be much competition for the keywords.

eBay benefit from this as well as you, since it drives new buyers to eBay as a whole, not just to your site. They actively encourage sellers to go and advertise on search engines by offering you 75% of your final value fee back for each item that someone finds and buys this way. On expensive items, that's probably enough to pay for the advertising to begin with!

If you'd really like to try a little marketing in the real world, though, you might want to make some flyers. Did you know that eBay can do this for you automatically? The next email will tell you how.

How to Use eBay's "Promotional Flyer" Tool.

If you have an eBay store, then you can print off promotional flyers for it for free.

You might have seen ones that other sellers have sent you – they're basically lists of items available in their eBay stores, usually bearing this default message: "Thank you for your purchase! Please visit my eBay Store for more great items and friendly, reliable customer service." If you know what you're doing, though, you can really make your flyer stand out from the crowd.

How Do I Do That?

Go to 'My eBay', then 'Manage Your Store'. Now click 'Promotions', and you'll see the 'Store Promotional Flyer' option there for you to use. A flyer will be automatically created using the settings and items from your eBay store, and you can customise it however you want. Be sure to add a border, to make your flyer more attractive visually.

Once you've created a flyer, you can print it as many times as you need to – it will be updated each time you print it to show your latest items, so you should only print what you need that day.

What Can I Do With the Flyers?

Well, there are all sorts of uses for promotional flyers.

While you could go and hand them out on the street, that probably wouldn't be especially effective. Most of the people who walk past you and take the flyer will have no interest in your product, and it'll just be a waste of paper, ink and time. No, as with all marketing, there are better ways to target your flyers.

Put them in envelopes: if you've been putting business cards or compliment slips in your envelopes, use the flyers instead. It's like sending out a mini-catalogue to your buyers, and including the right items on it might help you make a few backend sales.

In your shop: If you have a real shop or business, then you can hand flyers out to your customers to let them know that you also sell things on eBay.

At a rival's shop: This is a bit of guerrilla marketing, but maybe you're into that. You can try handing your flyers out outside a shop that sells your items. Be aware that this might get the shop's owners a little upset if they see you, however – you should only give flyers to people leaving the shop, not entering it.

Send them to businesses: Look up the addresses of businesses in the area that might need what you're selling, and send them flyers in the post.

Flyers give you another advantage: If someone types your store's address as it appears on the flyer and then buys something, then you'll get the 75% final value fee credit for advertising, without even having to pay anything for advertising!

Users who are inexperienced on eBay, though, can create a few problems for you – they might not quite know what they're doing, and that's never good. In the next email, we'll cover how to report and handle eBay transaction problems.

How to Report and Handle eBay Transaction Problems.

Even when there aren't any disputes, you might run into a few transaction problems on eBay – glitches that aren't really anyone's fault, but are just the result of a technical malfunction or another situation beyond the buyer or seller's control. The number one cause of problems like this is email.

Email Problems.

If you use the Internet a lot, you'll no doubt be familiar with the problems eBay can cause, and many buyers and sellers are relying on email to keep them informed about their transactions.

Sometimes, you might find that your emails to a seller bounce –you might have the wrong email address, or there could be a problem with their email. This happens especially often when buyers have free webmail accounts at places like Hotmail and Yahoo Mail.

When this happens, the buyer might not know you're trying to contact them. Consider it urgent to contact them in the real world, before they leave you bad feedback. To find out someone's real-world contact details, follow these steps: Click 'Advanced Search' near the top of your eBay screen, then 'Find Contact Information' in the menu on the left (under the 'Members' heading). All you need to do then is enter the other users' eBay ID and the item number of what they bought.

You might find that the address you end up getting doesn't exist, and the phone number seems to be disconnected, or wrong. However, if you didn't get any working contact information for the buyer, then this means they've violated eBay's contact information policy. You can report them at <http://pages.ebay.com/help/policies/identity-false.html>, and nothing that they do from then on will reflect badly on you.

Be patient, though: Don't send masses of angry emails to someone's account: for all you know, they might be having problems with their computer or their Internet connection. Try phoning, and try waiting a while for a response.

PayPal problems.

You might also find that you have problems with people who aren't quite sure how PayPal works. For example, they might try to send you money directly and send the wrong amount – this means that you need to refund any overpayment and get them to pay underpayment. If your buyer is reasonable, though, this should be an easy enough problem to solve – remember that they're hardly going to refuse to pay the right amount when you've already got some of their money!

If Nothing Helps, Who Do I Report It To?

You need to click 'Help' on the toolbar and then 'Contact us', to contact eBay's customer service. You might find you have better luck with the 'Live Help' function than you do with trying to get sensible responses to emails. PayPal have the same procedure – 'Help' then 'Contact us' – and offer limited phone support if you need it.

If you run lots of auctions at once, some of your problems might be caused simply by things getting lost and forgotten, because you have no way of keeping track of them. In the next email, we'll look at how to manage multiple auctions effectively.

Tips for Managing Multiple eBay Auctions.

It can be very time-consuming to keep your auctions ticking along, especially if you have hundreds listed at a time. Don't despair, though: there are a few things you can do to take the weight off you.

Use My eBay.

If you want a broad overview of where you are with your auctions, make sure you pay a visit to My eBay occasionally instead of just relying on emails. With my eBay, you can see all your auctions in a big table, and sort by things like the number of bids and the current price. If you want to see which of your auctions currently has no bids, then you can do that.

One of the most useful things about My eBay, though, is the 'Summary' view. If you're not sure what you should be doing next, then this acts effectively as an eBay to-do list: anything you need to be doing will end up here.

Use Selling Manager.

If you're willing to pay the fee of \$4.99 per month, you can sign up for Selling Manager, which is a more effective version of the My eBay 'Selling' view. It lets you customise your view more effectively to see the information that's important to you, see useful snapshots of how things are going, make automated responses to your buyers using email templates, and more.

Selling Manager Pro gives you more features: it keeps track of inventory for you, and lets you relist items in bulk. It will even produce a monthly profit and loss report to help you keep track of the big picture. Unfortunately, it costs \$15.99 per month.

Use a Listing Tool.

Even though they're called listing tools, much of the software out there lets you manage what you're doing long after it's been listed, with all the features of Selling Manager and sometimes a few more besides. These programs also often have the advantage of being programs instead of websites, meaning they're faster to respond and can do more sophisticated analysis.

Remember the 'Relist' Button.

After your auctions end each time, there's an easy way to put the exact same thing back again: the 'Relist' button. You can Relist items quickly and easily this way, as long as you don't want to change in the listing.

Pay Someone!

Here's something you might not have considered: if you're listing so many expensive items that even automated selling tools take too long to use, then have you considered paying someone to help out, as an employee? After all, you wouldn't try to staff a shop full-time on your own, would you? If you already run a business, you could even give the responsibility to someone who works for you there. Freeing up your own time to do something else might pay off for you in the long run.

When you're managing so many auctions, sooner or later you might need to cancel one of them early. The next email will let you know when and how you can do it.

When and How to Cancel an eBay Auction Early.

One day, you might decide that you want to end an auction early. Before you do, though, you should consider why you want to do it: cancelling auctions upsets buyers and upsets eBay, and there might be a better way to get what you want.

I Want to Change my Listing.

If you just want to revise your listing, you don't always need to end it. For listings that have more than 12 hours left to run and haven't received any bids, you can revise almost everything. You can remove the Buy it Now price or reserve price, change the duration of the listing, or add listing upgrades.

If the listing already has one or more bids, then you can still add upgrades, or add to the description. You can add more pictures too, if you want to. Once the listing gets into its last 12 hours, however, what you can do becomes far more limited, even if it has no bids: you can only really add to the description.

It's a very bad idea, by the way, to cancel one listing and ask bidders to bid on another listing for the same item instead. The chances are they'll be annoyed with you, and won't bother.

The Item is No Longer for Sale.

Perhaps you sold the item to someone else, you lost it or it got broken. Whatever happened, if you no longer have the item to sell, you should remove your listing – in fact, this is just about the only situation when eBay allow you to.

However, you need to make sure you get the listing removed quickly – if you leave it to the last 12 hours, eBay will refuse to let you remove it, whatever has happened. This might seem cruel, but it's there to stop people from backing out in the last few hours because they want to try again for a better price.

So How Do I End My Listing Early?

You can do it at this page:

<http://offer.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?EndingMyAuction>. Just type in the item number and hit 'Continue'.

Now, be very careful. The option you almost certainly want to choose is 'Cancel bids and end listing early', NOT 'Sell item to high bidder and end listing early'. You'll be asked to choose a reason why you ended the listing, and then it will end. Your bidders will be emailed to let them know what happened.

Note that ending a listing early because it looked like it wasn't going to get a good price is against the rules, and eBay could come after you and get upset.

Speaking of breaking the rules, if you're selling software on eBay, did you know that there are special rules that apply to you? Plenty of sellers have no idea, and are being caught out every day – that's why our next email will explain the rules clearly for you, just in case you need to know.

Special Rules for Selling Software on eBay.

Computer software is one of the biggest sellers on eBay – after all, everyone using eBay has a computer, don't they? There can be problems, however, if you try to sell certain kinds of software that eBay doesn't allow. Used software is a minefield, and you could end up buying something dodgy to resell without even realising it.

Here are the various kinds of software that you're not allowed to sell on eBay, and how to spot them. You should always try installing used software before you sell it, as this might give you a few clues.

Pirate Software.

This one is reasonably obvious, but pirate software can be hard to spot. The biggest things to look out for are auctions that don't have pictures or only have pictures from catalogues, unrealistically low prices, and come with no manuals or documentation. Microsoft software comes with a 'Certificate of Authenticity', which you should check. Software that is on recordable media such as CD-RWs is usually pirated.

If you see software that offered for download only, it is often pirated – but not always. Some small software developers allow download licenses for their software to be resold on sites like eBay. Type the name of the software into a search engine, and go to the manufacturer's site to check. Remember that software you download is very unlikely to come with resale rights, though.

Beta Software.

Beta software is pre-release software, issued by companies for testing purposes. Companies generally do not give permission for their beta software to be sold or redistributed, as it won't be as good as the final product. Do not buy anything that says it is 'beta', and return anything you receive that says 'beta' or 'not for resale or distribution' anywhere on the CD or during the install.

Academic Software.

Some companies sell special ‘educational editions’ or ‘student licenses’ for their software, which are designed to make it affordable to students and teachers. You can only sell this software if you are a licensed educational reseller for the company, and your buyers are educational users. Academic software will usually say somewhere on its CD or in its installation what it is.

OEM Software.

OEM stands for ‘Original Equipment Manufacturer’ – this is software that is only supposed to be distributed with a new computer, as it came pre-installed on the computer. The licences for this software usually stop you from selling it without also selling any hardware. Look out for the message ‘for sale with a new computer only’, or similar. Note, though, that it’s usually fine to bundle any OEM software you come across with computers that you sell on eBay.

If you sell any kind of software that isn’t allowed, then eBay might shut down your auction, or your sellers might realise what they’ve bought and leave you bad feedback. It’s not really worth the risk.

Now that we’ve got that out of the way, how about we try to get you a few more customers for the items you have that aren’t against the rules. In the next email, we’ll take a look at the real power of eBay store newsletters.

The Power of eBay “Store Newsletters”.

eBay Stores come with a very powerful feature: store newsletters. When buyers add your store to their favourites, you can offer them the chance to join your mailing list. You can then send highly targeted emails to people who you know were at least interested enough in your products to add the store to their favourites.

How Do I Send Them?

First, you need to get some people to sign up for your newsletter – this will happen with time, as people buy from you and browse your store.

Once you’ve got a few subscribers, it’s worth sending out a newsletter. To send store newsletters, go to My eBay, click ‘Manage My Store’, and then click ‘Email Marketing’. Once you’ve done that, click the ‘Create Email’ button, and you’re away.

All you need to do now is write an email subject and a message, choose any items you want to include in the email, and specify who you want to receive it. The subject and message can be something relatively generic, like ‘here are my latest deals’ – it’s the targeting that’s important, and eBay’s is powerful. You can choose to only send an email to people who’ve bought from you in the past, or only to people who’ve opened your email before.

It is important to note, though, that you can only send one email per week to a mailing list.

The Ups and Downs.

The downside of store newsletters is this: they’re expensive. A basic, \$15.95 per month store only comes with 100 emails, while \$49.95 comes with 1000. Even the \$499.95 anchor store only comes with 4000! Extra emails for all stores cost 1 cent each. That’s \$1 per hundred extra emails. If your mailing list has a significant number of people on it, then that’ll get really expensive, really fast.

Surprisingly, though, it can often be worth it, despite the cost. It’s very rare to send out a newsletter to a mailing list of a hundred and not get at least one sale, and you’ll often get three or four, even to small lists.

Measure Your Success.

Each time you send an email, eBay produces a report telling you how well that email did. You can view these reports on the 'Email Marketing' page by clicking the subject line of an email you sent.

This report will show how many people received your email, how many opened it, the number of clicks it generated on your items and your store, and the number of bids and Buy it Now purchases that resulted from the email. Some of the numbers might be too low, though, as many people use email software that displays email in plain text format and so stops eBay from collecting statistics. Also, you will notice that you'll have more success if you send out emails regularly, as people will start to expect them, and react in a more open way – don't expect the Earth from your first email.

By now, you're probably getting pretty good at selling on eBay – isn't it nice to have all those satisfied customers? Not to mention the money... However well you're doing, though, there's always room for improvement. The next email will give you ten tips for being an even better seller.

10 Tips for Being a Better Seller.

If you've got this far, you've got the basics of eBay. There are a few things left, though, that you might not have thought of trying. Quite a few of these tips go against the advice many give for eBay selling – some are a little risky and some are just odd. They're all worth a try, though, and I'm sure you'll find at least some you want to keep using.

1. Keep more records. It might sound time consuming, but you'll actually find it easier in the long run – less time spent trying to figure out which item that cheque you got this morning is for.
2. Post without payment. Don't even wait for payment to clear! That might sound risky, but it'll mean that the buyers get their items more quickly – for small items, you might find it worth the occasional loss to give such quick service.
3. Post every day. Once you start shifting a high volume of items, go and post them every day – again, they'll get there more quickly, making your customers very happy. The best way to do this is if you have items small enough to drop in a postbox.
4. Encourage an auction mentality. Don't have a Buy it Now price, and make it very clear when it's the last or only stock you'll be getting in. Always refer to winning bidders as 'winners'.
5. Mention every defect your item has. Now why would you do that, you might ask? The answer is that it builds credibility: the small hit you take from the slight flaws is nothing compared to the big boost in trust you get for admitting it. People bid more when they trust the seller.
6. Say how you got the item. Don't be afraid to go off on a tangent and give all sorts of fun details of how you got hold of what you're selling – it gives your auction character and, again, builds trust.
7. Accept odd payment methods. Sooner or later you're going to get a buyer who wants to pay by sending cash in an envelope, or something equally unusual. Why not let them? Be flexible.

8. Don't be afraid to sell low. Let the occasional item go for a really low price to a good buyer. You might only just break even on the item, but the person who got that bargain will be back again and again.
9. Give free shipping for a certain number of orders, or orders over a certain amount. People might buy something else they don't want as much, just to get the free shipping. (Amazon use this strategy to great effect).
10. Ship worldwide. Take the time to investigate the prices, and be nice to international customers – imagine how much you're expanding your market. That's not to mention the effect of people bidding highly for items that are rare in their country.

Another way to make it easier is to be a better seller is to use some of the many third party eBay tools that are available. The next email will take a look at a selection of tools you might find useful.

A Look at Third Party eBay Tools.

There are plenty of companies out there offering third party eBay tools. Most of them are web-based instead of downloadable, so you pay a monthly fee instead of just buying the software. But do you know what these sites can do for you? It can be hard to get to grips with what's out there using a search engine, so here's a quick rundown of the key players.

Andale (www.andale.com).

Andale offer lots of small products instead of one solution that does everything: you can take your pick from a lister, image hosting, counters, analysers, a gallery, a checkout and an email manager. The price plans are a bit of a maze, but quite reasonable as long as you don't go and use everything.

Andale's real claim to fame is that they've been doing it for so long – they're not some fly-by-night organisation, and many eBay sellers have been using their free counters for absolutely years. They also have a reputation for being very responsive to customers, and will often talk to you directly on their forums and implement any suggestions you might have for improving their software.

Vendio (www.vendio.com).

Vendio offer two editions of their software, Sales Manager: a Merchandising edition and an Inventory edition. The difference between the two is that the Merchandising edition is designed to make it easier to list individual auctions, while the Inventory edition is for sellers who sell many of the same item. They offer a pay-as-you go price of 10c per auction.

They also offer software called Tickets Manager, special software for people who sell lots of tickets on eBay – an odd product to have, but useful if you happen to sell tickets. Other services offered by Vendio include web and image hosting, fancy Flash galleries of your products for your listings, and stores.

ChannelAdvisor (www.channeladvisor.com).

ChannelAdvisor offer their software in three versions: Enterprise, Merchant and Pro. Enterprise and Merchant are both designed for very big businesses, though, and the chances are that the Pro version does everything you'd want. ChannelAdvisor is popular among sellers who want a solution that they know is used and trusted on a very large scale by enterprise-level customers.

It offers all the standard bulk listing and inventory features, as well as the unique feature of being able to create auctions from an Excel spreadsheet of your inventory. The cost is high, though, at \$29.95 per month.

And Many, Many More...

eBay maintain a comprehensive directory of third-party software, which you can browse through anytime you have a few days to kill. You can look either for complete solutions or for each part of what you want individually – the choice is so daunting that there's bound to be something out there for you. You can look at their directory at <http://cgi6.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?SolutionsDirectory>.

Once your items have sold and you're about to ship them, you might be a little nervous about whether you can trust your buyer. Our next email will give you a few tips for spotting problem buyers before you send them anything.

Tips for “Knowing Your eBay Buyer” Before You Ship.

Before you send anything to that buyer, you might want to get to know them, especially if you’re selling them a high-ticket item that you couldn’t afford to lose. Even if the buyer has paid, the PayPal transaction could still end up being reversed, leaving you out of pocket. So how do you figure out if you can trust your buyer?

Look at their feedback for others. Go to their feedback page and click ‘Left for Others’. If they leave a lot of negatives for their sellers, then you should try to get away from them as fast as you can – if you do deal with them, make sure not to leave your feedback first. You should consider a negative someone has left to be just as bad as a negative left for them.

Look at feedback from sellers. Click ‘From Sellers’. You might find that they have more complaints from sellers than from buyers – or, on the other hand, it might be the other way around. Some people really are just better at selling than buying, or vice versa.

Pay attention to bid retractions. If they have a high number of bid retractions, you should regard this as a red flag that something might be wrong.

See what else they’ve bought. When someone goes from buying items worth \$1 to suddenly buying something worth \$1,000, you might want to be a little suspicious of them.

See what they’re bidding on now. If they’ve never shown any interest in your kind of item before, and now suddenly they’re bidding on lots of them, then that’s cause for concern. You should also be suspicious of someone who seems to be spending a lot of money all at once – few buyers have thousands at a time to blow on eBay.

Check their ID history. People who’ve changed their ID are often trying to get away from someone who’s trying to find them. This is another warning sign – be especially wary of someone who changed their ID very recently.

Be nice to new buyers. Genuine new buyers will probably have a name ending in a number and a feedback score of 0 – don’t always think these people are fraudsters. Somewhat counter-intuitively, people trying to

commit fraud will almost never do it when they have a feedback score of 0 – they'll think it's too obvious. New buyers often have problems with being inexperienced on eBay, however, and you might have to guide them through things like opening a PayPal account.

Email them! If you want to get to know your eBay buyer, why not have a little chat with them about the item, what they plan to do with it? Say that how you know they're going to love it, and ask if there's anything else you can do for them. Few buyers who seem chatty and nice will turn out not to be in the end.

If you keep having trouble with buyers you don't want winning your high-value auctions at the last second, you might want to use eBay's 'pre-approved buyer' function. The next email will show you how.

How to Use eBay's "Pre-Approved Buyer" Function.

For sellers who constantly have to put up with bid snipers, non-paying bidders and other anti-social, timewasting buyers, eBay's 'pre-approved buyer' feature is a godsend.

Pre-approving buyers lets you choose in advance who you're going to allow to bid: not by banning people you don't want, but by explicitly allowing people you do want. Anyone who is not on the pre-approved list will have to email you and ask you to let them bid.

While that might sound great, it's only really a good idea to do it on very, very high value items. After all, half the point of eBay is that it's such an open marketplace – if you're going to restrict bidding to a few people, why not just email them to offer the item?

Most buyers will be very upset if they come across an item that they need to be pre-approved to bid in. They almost certainly won't have heard of the rule before, and they'll think this 'new feature' (it must be new if they've never heard of it, right?) is absolutely terrible. The one time I required pre-approval for an item, someone actually wrote to eBay to complain about the auction's format – as if eBay had nothing to do with letting me list that way! The chances are that almost no-one will ever email you asking to be included in the auction – they'll go somewhere else instead.

Of course, it'd be better if you could just require that bidders have a minimum feedback level, but then that might overly restrict the choices of new buyers, and make them less likely to buy anything to begin with. There's a delicate balance at play between trust and openness, and pre-approval tends to violate it. If one of your regular buyers wants to bid on your item only to find out they weren't pre-approved, the chances are they'll be more than a little offended at your lack of trust.

The only situations in which you might find an advantage in pre-approving bidders are if your auctions get consistently disrupted. Jokers sometimes bid millions because they think it's funny, or people bid high and then don't pay as a protest against whatever you're selling – this is a pain to deal with. Requiring approval makes sense on very high-ticket items simply because it shows the buyer is serious about wanting to buy.

Before you can restrict an item to pre-approved buyers, you have to list it and get an item number. You can then set up pre-approved bidding on this page: <http://offer.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?PreApproveBidders>. From there on, it's a simple process – just type the usernames of the people whose bids you want to accept, and then keep checking your email.

Remember, though, that you don't need to restrict your auction to pre-approved bidders to keep people you don't like from bidding on your auctions. You can simply cancel these buyers' bids when they appear, and then use eBay's 'block bidder' function to ban them from bidding on any of your auctions again. Edit your block list here: <http://offer.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?bidderblocklogin>.

In the next email, we'll take a look at whether your eBay design is as effective as it could be.

Design Tips for eBay Templates.

Templates are the design elements that you might have noticed some sellers using on their auctions, like the borders around the edge, and the different fonts. Many sellers who are new to eBay don't bother using them, and you might not have either – generally, a descriptive listing and a good picture will do the job just fine.

If you want to really finish your auctions off and make a really good impression on your buyers though, it's useful to have a good template. Here are a few tips on what to do and what not to do.

Choose something appropriate. The most important part of your template is what you choose in eBay's listing designer (in step 3 of the Sell Your Item process), or the equivalent in whatever listing software you're now using. You might prefer to use third-party software for this, as eBay's designs can be somewhat... unimpressive.

Anyway, the different template designs will usually be themed, with names like 'Computers', 'Toys' or 'Crafts'. Make sure what you choose is appropriate for what you're selling – those flowers might be very pretty, but what exactly do they have to do with DVDs?

Put the photo at the top. The photo of your item is far more important than the text. Put your best photo at the top of the description, followed by the text, and then finally any extra pictures you have. The full-size photo of the item is the first thing your buyers want to see when they click your auction – why leave it for last?

Add your logo. A well-designed logo gives a professional air to your auctions, especially if the colour scheme and look fits in with the rest of the template, and it also serves to create more recognition when people have seen your auctions before. Pay a logo designer a few dollars to do you a logo if you don't have one already.

Don't be afraid of large fonts. Fonts are supposed to be different sizes sometimes. When you have something important to say, don't be afraid to put it in a bigger font, headline-style... just as long as you don't get carried away, of course.

Learn a little HTML. It might sound scary, but there are plenty of books out there about learning HTML, and a little goes a long way. Once you know what you're doing, you'll find all sorts of ways to make your auction look better – you'll be able to put complicated information in a table,

Preview your listing. Remember to click that 'Preview listing' button to see what everything's going to look like when it goes live. Good luck!

One of the best things you can put into your auction template to make it more appealing to buyers is something called a 'SquareTrade seal'. This seal is a promise that you will handle any disputes using SquareTrade, an independent dispute resolution service. We'll take a closer look at what it is and how to get one in the next email.

Increase Your eBay Sales with A “SquareTrade” Seal.

SquareTrade are eBay’s chosen provider of dispute resolution services. If you want your buyers to have a little more confidence in you, you can get a SquareTrade seal, and put it on each one of your auctions.

The chances are that you’ve seen these seals around. They show SquareTrade’s blue and green logo, along with the eBay user’s ID and the current date. This is followed by the text “SquareTrade Verified Seller, Click to Learn More”. SquareTrade is also used on sites other than eBay, for example Yahoo and eLance – it’s an Internet-wide trust system.

So why will this little seal increase your sales? Well, it signals a number of things to your buyers.

Your identity has been verified. Before you can get a SquareTrade seal, you need to let them confirm your real name, address and phone number, which they can do in various ways. They can check you out with a credit reference agency, ask you to fax them a utility bill, or send you a letter in the real mail with a code you need to enter online.

You are committed to resolving disputes through SquareTrade. If you ever refuse to resolve any dispute with a buyer through SquareTrade, then they’ll take away your seal, and you’ll never get it back. This lets buyers know that there’s someone independent they can go to for help if you prove not to be trustworthy.

Real people will review their case. Buyers like that someone will actually take the time to read the emails, establish the facts and all the rest of it – they feel like eBay normally traps them in a chain of automatic responses.

You meet SquareTrade’s criteria. SquareTrade monitor your feedback, and if they feel you’re not up to scratch, they’ll take your seal away. They also operate an anti-fraud ‘early warning system’, which keeps track of the kinds of items you buy and sell, and takes action if your account starts doing unusual things.

Buyers are covered for an additional \$250 against fraud. This is very important to buyers – eBay’s standard purchase protection isn’t very much,

and this more than doubles it. If they get PayPal's fraud protection as well, then they're covered for quite a lot overall.

How Do I Sign Up?

If you want a seal of your very own, all you need to do is go to www.squaretrade.com, choose 'eBay seller' under the 'eBay seal services' heading, and click 'Apply'. Enter your name, address, phone number and eBay details here.

You should note, though, that SquareTrade costs you \$9.50 per month – it's up to you to decide if it's worth it. Ultimately, it is often worth signing up just to get the facility to effectively dispute and remove negative feedback. If you think you can maintain a good record alone then it might not be worth subscribing to yet another service to use with eBay.

Here's a warning: there's one thing that, if you don't do it, could land you with an awful lot of negative feedback. Make sure you read all about it in the next email.

How to Place Your eBay Store on “Vacation”.

So you're going away for a while, and you're not going to be able to ship people's orders from your eBay store? Imagine how you'd feel if you got home from a nice vacation, only to find that your feedback rating had been trashed!

Buyers can find your store, pay for items, and then complain about you for not shipping them or responding to emails – without you even being there to stop it. What's more, no-one will accept the fact you were on vacation as an excuse: after all, what were you doing listing items on eBay if you were on vacation?

So what's the solution to this little problem? Well, it's easier than it sounds. Whenever you go on vacation, just make sure you don't forget to send your eBay store on one of its own.

What Do You Mean?

eBay offer a facility to put your store on 'vacation', which basically means that it is temporarily suspended while you're unavailable to ship items. This means that you don't need to be available 365 days a year just in case someone orders from your eBay store.

How Do I Put the Store on Vacation, Then?

Go to My eBay and click 'Manage Your Store'. Now click 'Change vacation settings' and choose 'Turn vacation settings on'. Click the 'Save Settings' button, and it's done. Once the settings are on, you have a few options about what you want your store to do while you're away.

Hide your listings. You need to do this – your listings will be hidden from buyers, so they can't bid on them. Be aware that it can take a few hours for your listings to disappear from the search results, though.

Display messages. If you want, eBay can put a message in your listings and on your store to say that you've gone on vacation – just in case anyone wonders what happened to you. You will be asked to say when you expect to come back. You should always do this, as it's quite inconsiderate to just disappear without telling your loyal customers where you went!

Will I Still be Charged for My Store While I'm Away?

Unfortunately you will – not only the subscription for the store, but also for any listings that expire while you were gone. This is quite cruel of eBay, but what can you do? To lessen the impact of this, make sure you don't list any new items for a while before you put the store on vacation.

I'm Back! How Do I Turn the Store on Again?

Click: My eBay, Manage Your Store, Change vacation settings, Turn vacation settings off, Save Settings. Everything will now go back to normal. You might want to send out a newsletter at this point, to let your buyers know you're back.

Here's another little headache that could get you into some trouble: eBay's 'VeRO' program for copyright holders. I'll show you how to avoid falling foul of it in the next email.

Understanding eBay's VeRO Program.

‘VeRO’? What on Earth is that? Well, it’s a very scary eBay program that can get your auctions shut down, that’s what it is.

VeRO stands for ‘Verified Rights Owner’. It is the eBay policy that deals with complaints about your auctions from companies who own copyrights, patents or trademarks on the items you are selling. Unfortunately, it is often abused to remove items from eBay that are perfectly legitimate to resell, simply because the copyright owner doesn’t want people getting their hands on them.

If the copyright of something you’re selling is owned by one of eBay’s 5,000 verified rights owners, be prepared for trouble. eBay have given these companies the right to remove any auction from eBay that they see fit, and, say eBay, “eBay cannot require the rights owner to provide you with the exact reason of the request to remove your listing”. Worse, eBay may even suspend your account, or give your real-world contact details to the company in question.

Why Do eBay Do This?

Basically, they do it to avoid getting sued, or even getting threatened with being sued. There is a law called the DMCA (digital millennium copyright act) that means that eBay must either take these auctions down when it asked to or take full responsibility for them from that point on. eBay doesn’t want to take any responsibility for your auctions.

It’s not worth worrying too much about it – 99% of the VeRO program is aimed at stopping fake brand-name goods or pirated media being sold through eBay. Big companies also seem to get quite upset when eBay sellers take the company’s ad copy, logos or professional pictures and use them for selling on eBay.

If you’d like to take a slightly patronising quiz about copyright to help you understand eBay’s policy, go here:

<http://pages.ebay.com/help/tutorial/verotutorial/intro2.html>.

So Who Are These Companies?

There's a complete list available here:

<http://pages.ebay.com/help/community/vero-aboutme.html>. This list includes everything from the Microsoft and Adobe to Chanel and Nike, not to mention the RIAA (recording industry association) and MPAA (motion picture association). Most of the companies, understandably, deal in software, media or fashion.

eBay Say I Violated VeRO and I Want to Appeal.

Use the link at the bottom of this page:

<http://pages.ebay.com/help/confidence/vero-removed-listing.html>. That'll get you to eBay's VeRO Seller Appeal Form, where you can put your case to them directly. You are supposed to take it up with the company that complained about you first, however – and sometimes you might find that they just back down, which makes the whole thing a lot easier.

If you have no luck getting any response from eBay by email, it's not really worth trying to phone them – you'll find they're most responsive if you use the 'Live Chat' feature or write them an actual, real-paper letter. You're best off being nice to eBay: they have absolutely no obligation, after all, to ever let you sell anything at all.

On a happier note, have you ever heard of eBay Anything Points? No? Well, you're not alone. The next email will explain what these little-used points can do for you.

Using the eBay Anything Points Program.

eBay Anything points are a loyalty scheme, just like you might get in a shop. The buyer earns points on their purchases, which they can then redeem for money off when they pay for items through PayPal.

Buyers can also earn eBay Anything points when they use the eBay credit card, or exchange their frequent flyer miles for eBay Anything points. People think it's really great to take frequent flyer miles they're never going to use and get stuff on eBay for them.

How to Offer Points to Your Buyers.

Go to <http://anythingpoints.ebay.com/offer.html> and click 'Log In to Offer Manager'. Enter an item's number to offer Anything points on that item.

How Does it Work?

You choose how many points per dollar you want to offer to your buyers when they pay you with PayPal. Each point costs you 1c, and is worth 1c to the buyer – eBay don't take anything out along the way.

For example, if you sell an item worth \$500, and you offer 2 points per dollar, then the seller will receive 1000 eBay Anything points – the equivalent of \$10. You only pay for the points when the buyer actually receives them, and you can offer points on as many or as few listings as you like.

Each listing you add will get a big banner below the description, saying "X Anything Points per dollar of the final price for buyers who pay with PayPal". Buyers can click it for more information on the scheme.

Why Would You Want To?

Really, most sellers who offer points are doing it to get around a condition of their contract with their supplier. Many sellers only get access to goods at wholesale prices provided they don't list them for sale below the manufacturer's MAP, or minimum advertised price. The points allow them to offer the items at the MAP and then give their buyer money back in the form of points. It's a bit like a virtual rebate.

The eBay Anything points scheme is good for you and for eBay, as it encourages buyers to use PayPal instead of more cumbersome payment methods. eBay are keen to promote PayPal, and obviously thought this would be a good way of doing it – not to mention that it keeps buyers coming back, to spend their points. You will also get to be listed on the ‘Earn Points from eBay Sellers’ page, which is here:
<http://anythingpoints.ebay.com/earn.html>.

Here’s another advantage for you: if you buy things from sellers who offer Anything points, you can then use those points to pay your own seller fees. Another seller gets to pay your fees for you! All you need to do is go to My eBay, then Account Management, click the Pay button, and then choose the option to use your Anything points to pay.

If you’re going to offer points, then you want your auction to end for as much as you can possibly get – let the buyer pay for their own points! All you’ll need is our next email, all about strategies for when to start and end your auction.

eBay Auction Starting and Ending Day Strategies.

It's usually when auctions are about to end that they get half their bids – sometimes they even get their only bids. If you want your item to sell for a good price, then, it makes no sense to let it finish on a day and time when no-one's going to be around to care.

Selling to Business.

If you're selling business equipment and have mostly business customers, you should really aim to have your auctions finishing between 9am and 5pm on weekdays. It is worth, however, trying to avoid mornings and avoiding the 'lead-in' and 'lead-out' that takes place on Monday and Friday themselves.

Selling to Home.

If most of your sales are to private customers having it shipped to their own home, then you want your auctions to finish when these kind of customers will be around. Unfortunately, these times are the opposite of what they are for the business customers. The ideal time to catch a home customer is on a Sunday evening.

List for Durations.

In order to get your listings to end on a particular day, you can simply change the duration of your auctions depending on what day it is. For example, if you mostly sell to home customers and the day today is Thursday, then your auction needs to run for either 3 or 10 days to hit a Sunday. If you sell more to business and the day today is Friday, then:

a 1 day auction would be bad (finishing on Saturday),
3 days would be alright (Monday),
5 days would be good (Wednesday),
7 days would be good (another Friday),
and 10 days would be alright (Monday again).

You could draw up a little timetable of when you should and shouldn't be listing depending on the days of the week – make it red, amber and green, traffic light style, and stick it on your wall.

Schedule Listings.

Of course, if that all sounds like too much trouble then there is an easier – if more expensive – way of doing things. Simply use any of the many tools that let you schedule listings (almost all listing programs and sites do) – you can set the start date for any day and time you feel like.

Be aware that you might have to pay a few cents per listing for this if you do it through eBay. With some software, you may also need to leave your computer on all the time, so the software can start the auctions when it's supposed to. The advantage of this method, however, is that there will be no per-listing fee, since the auctions were scheduled through your computer and not through eBay.

If it's the home market you're after, then you might not have realised what one of the most powerful things to sell on eBay is. I'll give you a clue: it's not consumer electronics, or media products. It's what eBay is famous for. Check out the next email for more.

Tips for Selling Collectibles on eBay.

Yes, collectibles! Collectibles are where eBay started, and they're still one of its biggest areas – however much they might want you to believe they're not. eBay's most hardcore and long-time users are almost all collectors of something or other – it is quite common to post what you think is a mundane item, only to have collectors suddenly go to war over it because it is somehow linked to something they collect.

Collectors are the people on eBay who really do pay top-dollar for things that seem like junk to you and I – not to mention to the people you'll be getting your stock from! That's why you can make so much profit on collectibles. Here are a few tips.

Go to people's homes. People's homes are full of things that someone out there collects – they are the best and cheapest source of collectibles out there. Sure, you might find something if you hang around at enough garage sales, but you'd have competition. Getting invited to people's homes to look around should be a dream for you, and one you're doing your best to make a reality.

Buy on other auction sites. You'll be surprised how much money you can make if you buy the collectibles that people sell on smaller auction sites like Yahoo Auctions, and then list it on eBay. These sellers will often be perfectly knowledgeable about their item, but simply getting a lower price because they serve a smaller marketplace. Sometimes you can almost double your money.

List in non-collectible categories. If your collectible doesn't have a category of its own under 'collectibles', you might prefer to list it in a category that has something to do with the item but nothing to do with collecting. What you will often find is that people browsing a category for their favourite thing will pay more for your collectible than actual collectors would.

Do lots of research. Never list something you think might be valuable without searching and searching to dig up every piece of information you can on it. Everything you find out is likely to be useful when you come to list it.

List every tiny, tiny detail. Remember that collectors really care about the most seemingly insignificant things. An item from one year can be worth thousands while the one from the year before is near-worthless, or an item that is one shade of a colour can be worth far more than one of a subtly different shade. It's not worth puzzling over and it's not worth trying to pass your items off as something they're not – just make sure you put absolutely everything you know in the description.

When you are listing items that require close research and description down to the tiniest detail, however, don't be tempted to steal someone else's work! Whatever you do, don't take another seller's description and try to pass it off as your own, as this could have all sorts of consequences for you. Our next email gives you a guide to eBay's policy on 'description theft'.

Understanding eBay's "Description Theft" Policy.

When a seller writes an original description of an item or takes an original picture, they own the copyright on their work. This happens without any requirement for them to register or even to want the copyright – that's just the way copyright works. What that means is that it's actually illegal to copy another seller's description or pictures.

eBay's Policy.

eBay refers to the practice of copying another seller's listing and using it in your own auction as 'description theft'. It is against their listing policies, and ignorance of the rules is no defence.

What Could Happen?

If your 'theft' is discovered, then your listing will be ended and all bids will be cancelled. Do it more than once and your account could get suspended, and you're subject to the usual eBay punishments: you could lose PowerSeller privileges, or your auctions could be ended, leaving you with a stack of eBay fees.

Is it Likely?

It's only likely that eBay will investigate description theft and go after you if the seller whose description you took actually takes the time to report you. When you're competing with that seller directly, though, don't be surprised if they do turn you in – after all, you're their competitor!

Think of how you'd feel if someone was re-using a description that you took the time to research and fine-tune for the most sales – and not only that, but they were using it against you, to list competing items. That's why other sellers don't want their descriptions taken.

But I Don't Like Writing Descriptions.

Instead of taking another seller's descriptions, you can use the stock descriptions that eBay have on file for many items, especially things like CDs, DVDs and books. Simply enter the item's unique ID number (an ISBN for a book, for example), and the listing will be created for you. If you can't

find any unique ID, then you can also search by name to find a matching item.

Once you've found your item, you'll get a listing with all the technical details on the item, and often a stock picture, too. This is called 'pre-filled item information', and eBay licence it from big databases on your behalf.

It really is worth taking the time to write your own descriptions, though, as many people will be listing items using the pre-filled information. Remember that if you sell the same things often then you can re-use your own descriptions as many times as you want. You can keep your own database, re-using the ones that get high prices and re-writing the ones that don't. Writing descriptions is the biggest way that you have control over your auctions.

It's easy to keep discovering new things about eBay, isn't it? So many of the rules and functions are completely hidden away that sometimes it feels like unravelling one big mystery – and, for me at least, that's a big part of the fun. In the next email, we'll take a look at how to make more money with eBay's affiliate program.

How to Make More Money with eBay's Affiliate Program.

If you've been on the web for a while, the chances are that at some time or other you will have taken part in an affiliate program. They generally work by giving you a URL to send people to their site that contains your affiliate number, and then giving you a small amount for each person who comes in using your link and signs up or buys something.

eBay's affiliate program follows this basic formula, but with a few twists.

It pays a lot. Each user who follows your link to eBay, signs up and then bids on anything within 30 days will earn you \$20. Most affiliate programs will only give you something like 10% of the user's first purchase. What's more, for each existing eBay user who clicks through from your site and then places a bid or buys something, you'll get 10c.

You can be your own affiliate. If you just link to your own auctions with your affiliate link number from your own website, then you're getting money without sending buyers to anyone except yourself. There aren't many affiliate programs that can say that.

So Where Do I Sign Up?

You can visit eBay's affiliate program at <http://affiliates.ebay.com/>. Once you're there, just click 'Join the Program'. You will then be required to sign up for Commission Junction, which is free.

How Can I Get People to Click the Links?

eBay suggest a number of 'business models' for their affiliates. Before people can click your affiliate links, they need to be at your website. There are two ways to get them there using a search engine, which eBay refer to as 'natural' and 'paid' search.

Natural search: This is when someone finds your website in a search engine's normal results, either because something you wrote is relevant to them or you used SEO (search engine optimisation) techniques. Be careful not to use any dodgy methods to get a high search engine ranking, though, or eBay might come after you and keep your affiliate money.

Paid search: This strategy involves paying for traffic to your website or directly to eBay, by buying ads on search engines. If you go for this option, it's actually worth placing ads on the less popular search engines instead of the big ones: they'll have similar click-through rates as a percentage, but the cost typically won't be anywhere near as high.

Content: What you can do is just have a normal website, with articles on a variety of subjects and perhaps a community forum. Run the website for pleasure, but place the occasional eBay affiliate link there.

Newsletters: Don't ignore the potential of putting your affiliate ID in each time you send out a newsletter. You can get 10c for every bid it generates with no extra work, which could be enough for the email to pay for itself, whether it leads to any sales or not.

Sadly, our time together is nearly at an end, but there is one thing that I have left to show you. It's called the featured gallery, and it could help your sales. Look out for the next email!

How to Use eBay's "Featured Gallery" Section.

The 'featured gallery' is a little-known and little-used eBay feature, but that's part of its power: it is far more used by buyers than it is by sellers, which means you can pick up some new buyers by advertising there.

Basically, the featured gallery works a lot like 'Featured Plus' for normal listings, which shows your item before all the other results. Buying a 'Featured Gallery' listing shows your listing at the top when someone chooses to use the picture gallery instead of the list view.

Which Picture Gallery?

Exactly – you've probably got no idea what I'm talking about, since it's such a little-used and well-hidden feature. Try doing a search for an item. Do you see just above the results, where you can choose between 'List View' and 'Picture Gallery' (it's next to the options for sorting the results)? Click 'Picture Gallery'. A whole new world opens up before your eyes!

This feature is there for buyers who prefer to work visually instead of by title – and there are a surprising number of them, especially if your items are being sold for their visual appeal.

What Happens When I'm Featured?

Becoming featured in the gallery means that your item will be displayed above the other items in the picture gallery when any search there includes your item in the results. You might think this useless, considering how few people ever look at the picture gallery – but for the people who do look, you'll be right up there. You'll stand out even more, in fact, since so few sellers buy the featured gallery listings.

Not only that, but your picture will appear almost twice the size of the normal gallery listings below it. Your picture will be taking up a big part of the users' screen as soon as they get their results, and they can't avoid seeing it! For users with smaller screens, your picture could take up as much as a third of their display area.

Consider it targeted advertising towards buyers who prefer to work visually – if you want to attract that kind of buyer, you'll do well from the featured

gallery. If you sell art then this will be absolutely ideal for you, especially for large, striking pieces. There are independent artists out there who've gone from no sales to bidding wars just by getting featured in the gallery.

So How Do I Get a Featured Gallery Listing?

Just tick the option when you're going through the Sell Your Item process. It costs \$19.95 per item, so it's only really worth using on auctions where you think you'll make more than that back in the extra bids.

By now, I hope your business is well and truly off the ground, and expanding every month – if you're putting in the time, working hard and working smart, then it should be getting there. Unfortunately, though, this is the last email you will receive from us. Use your new eBay knowledge well, never give up, and good luck in everything you do.

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