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Starting Right with eBay

By Tim Swike

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About the Author

Tim Swike is a very successful eBay Seller. After reaching Power Seller status and reaping substantial rewards from his eBay success, he decided to retire from auctions and concentrate on other business interests.

Much of the information in this guide is from his own hard-won experience.

Follow it carefully and you could save and earn good money for years to come.

Contents

Please Read This First	1
Disclaimer	2
About the Author	4
Contents	5
eBay: The Beginning	9
Income Possibilities	12
What You Need to Know BEFORE You Get Started	15
What to Sell.....	15
Tax and Legal Matters	16
Prepare Yourself	16
Different eBay Auction Types	18
Normal Auctions	18
Reserve Auctions.....	18
Fixed Price ('Buy it Now') Auctions.....	19
Multiple Item ('Dutch') Auctions	19
Staying Out of Trouble.....	21
eBay "Lingo"	24
Words	24
Abbreviations	25
Posting Your First eBay Auction.....	27
<i>Step 1: Open an eBay seller's account</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Step 2: Decide what to sell</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Step 3: Submit your item.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Step 4: Wait for it to sell.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Step 5: Collect payment and post it.....</i>	<i>29</i>

An eBay Seller's Checklist.....	30
What's Your eBay Reputation Worth?	33
Is the eBay Customer Always Right?	36
10 Sure-fire Ways to Kill Your eBay Business.....	39
10 Steps to Successful Selling on eBay.....	41
eBay - Part Time or Full? How to Decide.....	44
How to Use eBay to Grow Your Other Businesses	46
The Supply Side	46
The Sales Side.....	46
The eBay Search Engine.....	49
How to Choose the Right eBay Product Category	52
Title Writing Tips	55
<i>A Few Examples.....</i>	<i>56</i>
Description Writing Tips	58
10 Tips for Increasing Your eBay Response.....	60
Your Rights as an eBay Buyer	63
So How Do I Use My Rights?	64
How Important is Your Buyer's Reputation?	66
How to Check an eBay Seller's Reputation.....	69
How to Check Feedback Ratings.....	69
Understanding the Different eBay Auction Types	72
<i>Normal Auctions</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Reserve Auctions</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Fixed Price ('Buy it Now') Auctions.....</i>	<i>73</i>

<i>Multiple Item ('Dutch') Auctions</i>	73
When to "Buy Now" and When to Bid	75
Buy it Now. - The Advantages.....	75
Buy it Now - The Disadvantages.....	75
eBay Auction Buyer's Tips and Tricks	78
When and How to Withdraw Your eBay Bid	80
Here are eBay's three acceptable reasons for withdrawing a bid.	80
<i>You made a typographical error</i>	80
<i>The item's description changed</i>	80
<i>The seller is uncontactable</i>	80
So How Do I Retract My Bid?	80
<i>Are There Any Consequences?</i>	81
You Won that eBay Auction! Now What Do You Do	83
<i>PayPal</i>	83
<i>Checks and Money Orders</i>	84
<i>Money Transfers and Bank Deposits</i>	84
The eBay Buyer's FAQ	86
<i>Does eBay have a Customer Service Department I Can Phone?</i>	86
<i>eBay Sent Me an Email Saying They're Going to Close My Account. What Should I Do?</i>	87
<i>It Seems Too Good to be True. How Does eBay Make Money?</i>	87
<i>How Safe is eBay?</i>	88
SafeHarbor - eBay's Own Scotland Yard	89
Fraud	90
Using PayPal	92
What is PayPal?	92
<i>Opening a PayPal Account.</i>	92
<i>Paying with PayPal</i>	93

<i>Becoming Verified</i>	93
Tips and Tricks for Using eBay Search	95
When Things Go Wrong: How to Resolve eBay Disputes	98
Before you open a dispute	98
<i>Independent Dispute Mediation</i>	<i>99</i>
eBay Automobile and Computer Scams	101
Automobile Scams	101
Computer Scams	102
How to Beat the Scams	102
Tips for Buying Collectibles on eBay	104
Taking Advantage of "Slow" eBay Auctions	107

eBay: The Beginning

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 it 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?

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 dollar 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 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.

What You Need to Know BEFORE You Get Started

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 kinds 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.

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 section 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 a 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.

Staying Out of Trouble

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, Informational Media Contracts, 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. 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 unauthorized 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.

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 memorize 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 mail, 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 mail 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 gobbledygook 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.

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, check the payment methods you will accept (just PayPal is best for now), and where you will send the item 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!

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 buyers? 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 emails 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?

What's Your eBay Reputation 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 behavior. 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 rumors 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.

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 emphasize 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.

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!

Mail the item 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.

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.

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 dreams, 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.

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 gives 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.

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 realize 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 favorites in their browser.

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 categorized. They don't often actually do this, but it's not worth the risk - especially since breaking any rules can cause them to penalize 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.

Title Writing Tips

Trying to be helpful so 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.

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 it 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.

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 illegal 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.

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 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 and 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 luck 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 checks.

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.

Your Rights as an eBay Buyer

When you buy things on eBay, you pay the seller before they send you anything. This means that you, as a buyer, are vulnerable to all sorts of problems. You might not get the items you have paid for, or they might be damaged or faulty.

Luckily, you have two very important rights when you buy on eBay.

The Right to Receive Your Item. Maybe the seller never sent the item, or maybe it got lost in the post. Whatever happened, you paid for the item. If it doesn't arrive in the post as described, you have the right to a replacement or a refund, whether it's the seller's fault or not.

The fact that you bought something on eBay doesn't mean that you don't have the exact same rights that you would have if you bought it in a shop (these rights are pretty much the same all over the world). Plus, under eBay's rules, the seller isn't allowed to change their mind about selling you the item: once the auction ends, it becomes a contract - you must buy and they must sell, or face eBay's penalties.

The Right for Your Item to Be as Described in the Auction. Sometimes sellers don't wrap items properly, and so they get broken. Occasionally they write descriptions that are misleading or just plain wrong to begin with, leaving out vital details that would have caused you to change your mind about buying.

If this happens to you, you again have the right to a replacement or a refund.

So How Do I Use My Rights?

First, you should take it up with the seller - most will be responsive, as they do not want to have their reputation damaged when an upset buyer leaves negative feedback for all their future buyers to see.

If that doesn't work, report them to eBay. While eBay don't have many people handling complaints, they do have a relatively effective set of automatic processes to handle common problems buyers and sellers have with one another.

Finally, if that doesn't work, then you should seek advice from consumer groups in your country, and as a last resort from the police.

You should never have to get this far though, problems on eBay that can't be resolved easily are extremely rare.

Don't Be Too Quick. Remember not to get too annoyed and be unfair to the seller: nice sellers have agreed to give me refunds for undelivered items, only for me to find out a few weeks later that they were being held for me at the post office! Always try your best to communicate and think of everything that might have gone wrong: eBay works best when buyers and sellers sort out their problems together, instead of reporting each other to the authorities straight away. More often than not receiving what they paid for,

buyers have an altogether different problem; they knew what they were paying for, but didn't realize that what they were paying for was overpriced, low quality or a scam.

How Important is Your Buyer's Reputation?

Your reputation as a buyer (or 'feedback rating') is the most important thing people see when they deal with you on eBay. It is on the basis of this little number that they will decide whether they can trust you or not.

Each time you buy or sell something on eBay, people can leave feedback for you, and you can leave feedback for them. This feedback can be positive, negative, or neutral, along with a comment.

Your feedback rating is worked out using a very simple sum, the number of positive feedback comments people have left for you, minus the number of negative ones.

This means that someone with a feedback rating of 28, for example, might have 30 positive ratings and 2 negative ones.

If you are a considerate buyer, then you should find that positive feedback will just appear next to your username, without you needing to do anything.

If you want to help it along, though, there are a few things you can do.

Always leave feedback for others: People will feel an obligation to leave feedback for you if you leave it for them (eBay will send you an email after each transaction to offer you the opportunity).

Take the time to write a positive comment about sellers who do what they should and the chances are they'll do the same for you.

Pay promptly: Sellers love nothing more than to be paid promptly - paying as soon as the auction ends saves the seller all sorts of worry, especially if you pay by credit card or another electronic method. You will often find that your positive feedback appears within a few minutes of you paying if you pay as soon as the auction ends.

Don't be a difficult customer: Understand that your seller might take a day or so to respond to you, and perhaps a few days to send your item - harassing them is nasty and unnecessary, and won't get you good feedback. Build relationships.

If a seller sells a lot of a certain kind of thing you like, buy from them a few more times. They will be very happy to find a regular customer, and will go out of their way to leave positive feedback like 'a joy to deal with as ever'. Also, they might offer you a few special deals!

Sellers won't generally be reluctant to sell to buyers without much of a reputation, simply because it is the buyer who takes most of the risk in a transaction. It is worth remembering, however, that transactions where you are the seller and where you are the buyer are counted towards the same feedback total - so if you ever want to start selling, being a good buyer is especially worthwhile.

On eBay, people pay far more attention to sellers' ratings than they do to buyers' - most sellers can't be bothered to check their buyers' feedback, while bad feedback on a seller can (and should) be a deal breaker.

When you are buying, then, you need to worry more about the seller's reputation than you do about your own.

How to Check an eBay Seller's Reputation

When you buy something from an eBay seller, you are giving them your money and hoping that you will get something in return.

However many guarantees of safety eBay might make to you, nothing is certain: if you just give your money to scammers all the time without doing any checks then the chances are you won't get all of that money back. That's why you should always check the seller's reputation, or 'feedback rating'. This is a quick and easy-to-read summary of their history as an eBay seller, which gives you some idea of whether or not you should trust them with your money.

Buying anything is a calculated risk: you want to minimise that risk.

How to Check Feedback Ratings

On each item's description page, there is a box in the top-right hand corner about the seller, with the title 'Seller information'. This contains the seller's name, their feedback score, and their positive feedback percentage, as well as any stars they have earned.

Different colored stars are given to eBay sellers depending on their rating, in this sequence: yellow, blue, turquoise, purple, red, green, shooting yellow, shooting turquoise, shooting purple, shooting red. Anyone with a 'shooting' star is an experienced eBay member who you should be able to trust.

If you click on the seller's name, you can get to a more detailed view of their reputation - their 'member profile' page. This page shows the total number of people who gave them a positive or negative rating, as well as a breakdown by time. You can also see a complete history of all the comments that have ever been left about them, with the most recent first.

What to Look For. You might assume that anyone with a very high number can be trusted, but that isn't always true. It is more important to look at their positive feedback percentage - and you should really consider anything below 99% to be a red flag and investigate further.

Take a look through the first visible page with the most recent transactions: are there any negative comments? What do they say?

Take others' experiences into account, as they could happen to you if you deal with this person.

Be careful not to punish sellers unfairly, however, if they did bad things in their past on eBay but have improved since. You should look at the breakdown by time and ignore any negative feedback that was left a long time ago.

Equally, though, you should sit up and pay attention if a seller seems to have been left an out-of-character amount of bad feedback in the last month or so.

Now that you know who to trust, it is worth learning a little more about how the different kinds of auctions work, so that

you don't accidentally slip up and make yourself and your feedback page look bad.

Understanding 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.

There are many people who don't like the idea that their item might sell for a far lower price than they intend. Equally, there are people who have hundreds of the same item and don't want to sell them individually.

This email gives you an overview of the different kinds of auctions and how to spot them.

Normal Auctions

These are the bread-and-butter of eBay, the auctions everyone knows: you bid, others outbid you, you outbid them, 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 you will be told if your bid has not met the reserve price set by the seller. If no-one is willing to meet this price, then the auction is cancelled, and the seller keeps the item.

You can spot these auctions by looking out for 'Reserve not met' or 'Reserve met' written next to the current bid on an item's description page.

Fixed Price ('Buy it Now') Auctions

Buy it Now auctions can work in one of two ways. A seller might add a Buy it Now button to a normal auction, meaning that you 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 a fixed price.

Recently, eBay added a twist to fixed price auctions: the '**best offer**'. This means that you can negotiate a price to someone who offers their items using Buy it Now, which could be a great way to get a bargain on things that don't seem to be selling.

Fixed price auctions are easy to spot, as they have a little 'Buy it Now' logo either next to or instead of the current number of bids on the search listings page.

Multiple Item ('Dutch') Auctions

These are auctions where a seller is selling 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 they say how many they have, and offer them at a fixed price. You can enter how many you want and then just click Buy it Now to get them.

After all this, you might find yourself facing a dilemma; when you have the option, should you bid, or should you just use Buy it Now and save yourself the hassle?

When to "Buy Now" and When to Bid

You will often find yourself facing the choice of whether to pay a fixed price or keep on bidding. This choice might be presented to you in a single auction, or you might be choosing between different auctions of the different types.

So should you use that 'Buy it Now' button or keep on trying to outbid everyone else? It's all a question of weighing up the advantages and disadvantages.

Buy it Now. - The Advantages

When you use Buy it Now, you know the asking price and you can take some time to decide whether to pay it or not - you can even negotiate. You don't need to keep your eye on the auction, or get caught up in the last-minute bidding frenzy that is now inevitable on any popular item.

Not only that, but the seller will be happy to get a fixed price for their item, and they're likely to be nicer to you than usual. Some sellers can be a little resentful when they feel that you got a little too much of a bargain on their item.

Buy it Now - The Disadvantages

You will almost certainly pay more for the item, especially with more expensive items.

Also, it takes some of the fun out of eBay. Aren't you there for an auction, after all? If you want to pay a fixed price then there are thousands of online stores you could be visiting. It's

like pressing 'collect' instead of 'gamble' on a fruit machine: it's the boring option.

But then, maybe that's what you want.

These rules are relatively constant; there are few times when using Buy it Now would allow you to get something cheaper, or when bidding would be an easier way to do it. In the end, as with so many things in life, it's a simple question of price vs. convenience, and it's up to you.

There are those times, though, when the strategic use of the Buy it Now button can be a useful tool to help you outwit your competition. If the current bid is almost as high as the Buy it Now price, then why bid higher and keep the contest going? Clicking that button is a no-brainer.

The same goes for times when a seller has, for some reason, set the Buy it Now price only slightly higher than their starting price for bids. Why bother to go through all the hassle of bidding?

You might also find that there are times when you should leave the Buy it Now button as a last resort. It can be a useful way of ending last-minute contests with a decisive 'this is mine' gesture.

In fact, there are all sorts of tricks you can use on eBay, if you want to get ahead of the game.

Remember that most buyers on eBay are casual, and don't know what they're doing. A little knowledge can go a long way in getting you an advantage.

eBay Auction Buyer's Tips and Tricks

eBay isn't just an auction and a marketplace. Often it can feel quite a lot like a game. Like any game, you can get ahead if you think strategically, using your head to outwit the other buyers and get the best price.

Here are a few things you can try.

Shop in the Summer. This is simple, but effective. Summer is the quiet season on eBay - almost everything sells for less. While everyone else is out enjoying the sun, invest a little time to find some real bargains.

Beat Them by a Few Cents. Outbid people by a few cents instead of a few dollars - if they don't check back before the auction ends, then you will be the winner.

To avoid people using this tactic on you, though, always bid strange, hard-to-guess amounts instead of round numbers.

Play Dirty. If you know when the auction ends, you can get in there at the very last second and outbid your rivals. The chances are that they won't have the time to sit in front of the auction waiting for it to end - as a rule, he who stays wins.

If someone else does retaliate at the end of the auction, though, try not to get carried away in those last few seconds and end up paying too much!

Take Risks. This is a strategy for the braver eBay buyer. All of the advice you will see for eBay beginners tells you to buy

items that have good pictures, clear descriptions, trustworthy sellers and all the rest.

If you're brave, why not take a risk and do the exact opposite?

Many buyers won't want that item from the seller with a feedback rating of 5, no picture and a one-line description. If you take a calculated risk and bid anyway, you might be able to make a tiny bid and win by default.

There are people on eBay who make their living from winning auctions like these, taking good pictures of the item, writing a good description and then reselling it at a huge profit.

Be careful, though. Do this for long enough, and you will inevitably lose your money at some point. It's especially unwise to try it with very high-value items.

Avoid Bidding Wars. There are few things on eBay that are so rare that you'll only see them once and never again. There are usually quite a few sellers who have an item.

What's more, they will generally have more than one to sell, even if they haven't listed them all at once.

Always check your seller's history to see whether they sell your item all the time - and if they do, then wait for the next one instead of bidding to the skies.

Now, there may come a time in your eBay life when you realize that you've screwed up your bid, and you wish there was an 'undo' button.

When and How to Withdraw Your eBay Bid

eBay are a little strict about letting you withdraw your bid. They call it a 'bid retraction', and have a stringent set of conditions that you must meet before you are allowed to do it.

Here are eBay's three acceptable reasons for withdrawing a bid.

You made a typographical error

This means that you accidentally typed the wrong amount into the bid box, bidding a far higher price than you meant to.

This can be scary; imagine bidding \$100 and accidentally adding an extra '0'! You are entirely allowed to withdraw your bid in this situation, and bid again if you want to.

The item's description changed

If you bid on something and then the seller updates the description, you have the right to withdraw your bid. It wouldn't be fair, after all, to force you to take something that you now realize you don't want.

The seller is uncontactable

If emails to the seller bounce and they don't answer their phone, then the auction obviously can't continue, and you can cancel it.

So How Do I Retract My Bid?

eBay hide away the bid retraction form a bit, because they don't like people using it. You can find it by going here:

<http://cgi1.ebay.com/aw-cgi/eBayISAPI.dll?RetractBidShow>.

Now all you need is the item number from your auction, and this can be found on the item description page's top right corner. If you can't see it on the page, look in your browser's title bar, and in any emails eBay have sent you about your bid on the item.

Choose one of the three allowed reasons, click 'retract bid', and you're done.

Are There Any Consequences?

Well yes, there are. The more unethical among you might have considered that you could just cancel bids anytime you feel like it by saying that you accidentally entered the wrong amount. eBay are one step ahead of you. Each time you retract a bid, it is counted on your feedback page for all to see - and anyone with a lot of retracted bids looks more than a little shady.

eBay also say that abusing the bid retraction feature could get you banned.

So is there a way to retract your bid without facing a penalty? There is if your seller is nice, and most are. Sellers can cancel bids on their auctions at any time, and if you email them with a half-decent excuse then most will be more than happy to do this for you. After all, it's not in their interest for their item to go to someone who won't like it, as you might leave negative feedback.

Of course, retracting your bid should still be a rare thing, you won't win auctions that way!

If you've followed us this far, the chances are you've won an auction by now, or you're close - but you might be a little puzzled about what to do next.

You Won that eBay Auction! Now What Do You Do

It's a heady feeling when you win your first eBay auction, a mixture of happiness and perhaps just a little fear.

After all, there seems to be so much to do before you can actually get your item. What do you do next?

The simple answer is you send payment to the seller, as quickly as possible. The quicker you pay, the more your seller will like you, and the sooner your item will arrive.

But how you go about it? That all depends on how you plan to pay.

PayPal

PayPal is one of the most popular options for paying on eBay, to the point where eBay decided to buy the company. It allows instant electronic payment across the Internet. Money goes instantly from your credit or debit card to the seller's PayPal account, where they can either use it for Internet purchases or transfer it out to their bank.

eBay offer incentives for using PayPal, and almost all sellers now accept it. Its instant nature makes sellers very happy, and means that they can have your item packed and sent and leave you some positive feedback within a few hours of the auction ending.

When paying by PayPal, you will be covered by PayPal's own insurances and guarantees, as well as any that your card might have.

Checks and Money Orders

This is payment the old-fashioned way, and will lead to a long wait to your item. You need to post the check or money order, then the seller has to take it to the bank and get it cleared, and only then do they send the item.

The only reason to use this method is if either you or the seller distrusts electronic payment methods. If you're willing to go to the trouble with these sellers, though, you might get an item very cheaply, as most buyers just can't be bothered.

When you pay by check or money order, make sure to print the eBay order confirmation page (it will be emailed to you) and put it in the envelope with your payment. Underline or circle key information like your mailing address and the item number.

Finally, remember to be patient. Keep in contact with the seller, as it really can take a month or two before everything falls into place and your item turns up.

Money Transfers and Bank Deposits

Some sellers may ask you to pay them using a wire service like Western Union, or simply give you a bank account number and ask you to pay money into it. Unless you really trust the seller, this is generally a bad idea - these methods are hard to trace and you're unlikely to get any money back if anything goes wrong.

Paying in cash, it hardly needs to be said, is an even worse idea.

The eBay Buyer's FAQ

So you have a question? Has something gone very wrong and you don't know what to do? Well, fair enough. Here are the questions that I hear all the time from buyers.

Does eBay have a Customer Service Department I Can Phone?

eBay are notoriously hard to contact, should you ever need to - it sometimes seems like they expect the site to run itself.

You can email them, as long as you don't have your heart set on a coherent response. Go to:

http://pages.ebay.com/help/contact_us/_base/index.html.

You might have better luck in a 'live help' webchat here:

<http://pages.ebay.com/help/basics/n-livehelp.html>.

Only eBay Power Sellers (sellers with a very high feedback rating) get to phone customer service. If you really want to try your luck, type 'ebay [your country] phone number' into a search engine and you'll probably find something.

Unfortunately, the chances are you'll have gone to all that trouble for the privilege of leaving an answer phone message. It might seem cruel, but imagine the number of people who would call eBay every day with the silliest questions if they gave out their phone number everywhere.

Its Wild West nature is, in a way, part of its charm.

eBay Sent Me an Email Saying They're Going to Close My Account. What Should I Do?

This email asks for your password, right? It's a scam, an attempt to frighten you, make you give up your details and then steal your account. eBay will never ask for your password or any other account details by email. eBay say that you should only ever enter your password on pages that whose addresses start with <http://signin.ebay.com/>. They even offer a special 'Account Guard' as part of their toolbar, which lets you check that you're not giving your password to a fake site. You can read more here:

http://pages.ebay.com/toolbar/accountguard_1.html.

It Seems Too Good to be True. How Does eBay Make Money?

For you, the buyer, eBay is free. Sellers, though, pay all sorts of fees: a listing fee for each item they list, a final value fee (a percentage of what the item sold for). They can they pay optional fees for extra services, including Buy it Now, extra pictures, reserve prices, highlighting the auction, putting it in bold, listing it first in search results or even putting it on the front page.

You can see a full list of fees at

<http://pages.ebay.com/help/sell/fees.html>.

It's obviously worth it to the sellers, though, or they wouldn't carry on using eBay. The system is quite efficient, and basically forces both eBay and the sellers to keep their profit

margins as low as possible - otherwise prices will simply go too high and the buyers will stop buying.

How Safe is eBay?

All of eBay's safety services for buyers and sellers are in one place, called 'SafeHarbor'. SafeHarbor handles fraud prevention and investigation, helps with dispute resolution and keeps rule-breakers in check.

SafeHarbor - eBay's Own Scotland Yard

SafeHarbor are the eBay police department. If you break the rules, commit fraud or try to buy something you're not supposed to, they'll be after you.

When You Don't Pay. This is the most common rule buyers break - it's all too easy to just change your mind and try to get out of the auction.

eBay regards every auction as a contract, and will punish you if you don't go through with your end of the deal. If you decide not to pay then expect to get a few nasty warning emails from eBay threatening you with banning if you do it again.

Not to mention, of course, that you'll get a big negative 'DID NOT PAY' feedback comment from the seller.

So There Are Things You Can't Buy on eBay? Yes, there are: more things than you'd expect. It makes sense that you can't buy firearms, for example, but you also can't buy fireworks - eBay are worried about the risks of sending them in the post.

Laws in many countries mean that you can't buy alcohol or tobacco.

You can't buy illegal or prescription drugs, stocks and shares, or lottery tickets.

No underwear, either.

You can't buy any little pet puppies or kittens, as animals are banned.

If items infringe on copyright, like pirate CDs or software, then they're not allowed either.

eBay's policy is controversial, not least because it is somewhat random in its enforcement - and there have been accusations that they're more responsive to the copyright concerns of big businesses than to auctions for items that might actually be dangerous.

If they do decide to go after you or the seller, though, they will cancel the auction and may also suspend your accounts.

Fraud

eBay runs remarkably well considering how unregulated it is, but there are still fraudsters. If you are a victim of fraud - for example, you pay for an item that never turns up - then **SafeHarbor** will investigate for you. eBay's standard purchase protection will give you up to \$200 back if your claim is successful.

Be aware, though, that this can take a few months. In addition, if you paid by PayPal, then they can usually reverse the transaction relatively easily and get you more (if not all) of your money back.

This is another reason why many buyers prefer to use PayPal.

Some sellers are a little scared of the effectiveness of the refund system, as they can send out items in good faith only to find that their buyer was fraudulent and the transaction has been reversed.

If you're worried about fraud, as a buyer, you should always use PayPal.

Using PayPal

PayPal and eBay were made for each other - and now that eBay own PayPal, using them together is getting even easier.

What is PayPal?

People with PayPal accounts can send money to each other securely online. You can deposit money in a PayPal account from a bank account or a credit card, and withdraw money to your bank account. It is the most common way of paying on eBay, as well as being in widespread use on the rest of the Internet.

Opening a PayPal Account.

It's very easy to get a PayPal account. Just go to www.paypal.com and click the 'Sign Up' link.

As a **buyer**, you should get a Personal account - you can always upgrade later if you decide to start selling.

Then all you need to do is enter your address, phone number and email address, and create a password, and two secret questions. You'll be emailed a confirmation, and then you're done!

If you want to deposit money into the account now, then you need to register a credit or debit card or your bank details, and if you want to withdraw money then you need to register your bank details.

There's no need to do anything like that just yet, though.

Paying with PayPal

Paying with PayPal is very simple. When you win an auction and click 'Pay Now', you'll be given a list of payment methods the seller accepts.

You should always check what the seller accepts before you bid, as there are still some sellers who won't take PayPal. If the seller does accept PayPal, it will already be chosen for you on the payment page.

Now you just need to press 'Next', type in your PayPal username and password and confirm the amount you want to pay.

The first time you pay with PayPal you will need to enter the details of your card or bank account, but after that it will remember for you.

Becoming Verified

You might have noticed that there is a limit to how much money you can send or withdraw using PayPal before you need to be verified.

Verification has two steps. First, PayPal deposit some very small amounts of money in your bank account and you need to tell them how much they deposited.

Second, they need to phone you to confirm your address and phone number.

Once you've done that, all the limits on your account will be lifted.

Log in at [paypal.com](https://www.paypal.com) and click on '**Get Verified**' for more information.

Tips and Tricks for Using eBay Search

If you know what you're doing, you can quickly find what you're looking for on eBay. Here are a few golden 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 - the chances are that fewer people will find these items, and so they will be cheaper.

Get a thesaurus: You should try to search for all the different words that someone might use to describe your 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 because you want to buy that CD, you should click the 'CDs' category to just look at results in that category.

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 realize 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.

When Things Go Wrong: How to Resolve eBay Disputes

eBay has quite an intricate and long-winded dispute resolution procedure. As an example, let's go through what you would do if you paid for an item but didn't receive it from the seller.

Before you open a dispute

Give the seller a chance to send the item before you get ahead of yourself and open a dispute. If you're concerned about how long the item is taking to arrive, the first thing you should do is send a polite email to the seller saying that you haven't received it and asking whether they have posted it.

You should also check your own email address in eBay's options, to make sure that the seller can reply to you.

As a last resort before opening a dispute, you should try to call the seller on the number eBay has for them. You might have to pay long-distance charges for the call, but that's better than dragging the auction through mediation for months.

Step 1 - You open an Item Not Received dispute: You can do this here:

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

All you need to do is enter the item number and say that you did not receive the item.

Step 2 - eBay contacts the seller: eBay sends the seller an email that tells them that you've said you didn't receive the item.

They can then choose to tell you one of three things: that your payment hasn't cleared yet, that the item is in the post, or that they'll give you your money back.

The seller can also tell eBay that they would like to send you a message.

Step 3 - You talk to the seller: You try to work out what's happened directly with the seller, sending messages back and forward. Hopefully they'll agree to give you a refund for the sake of their feedback, or your item will turn up in the post during this time.

Step 4 - Closing the dispute: After 30 days (or 10 days if the seller didn't respond), you have two options to close the dispute: either you were satisfied or you weren't. If you weren't satisfied, then you can claim under eBay's purchase protection program for up to \$200.

Independent Dispute Mediation

If you don't want to go through eBay's own process, and especially if the auction was for a high-value item, then you can use a third-party mediator. eBay recommend

SquareTrade, at www.squaretrade.com, who provide mediation to many websites where there are buyers and sellers.

They will contact the seller on your behalf and then mediate as you negotiate what to do from there. Sellers who are committed to going through SquareTrade's mediation for any

disputes can sign up to display the 'SquareTrade seal' on their auctions.

This gives their buyers \$250 fraud protection, and shows that their identity has been independently verified so they are who they say they are.

When your sellers aren't in such good standing, though, you need to be careful to avoid being a victim of fraud.

eBay Automobile and Computer Scams

There aren't that many scammers on eBay - but the ones there are tend to be greedy. This means that they will always try to pull their scams on high-value items like cars and computers, so that they can make a lot of money quickly.

Since buyers generally buy these items very rarely, they may not know about the various scams out there.

Automobile Scams

With cars, you will generally find that scammers try to get you to send them money in advance, for whatever reason.

For some reason, some people aren't all that reluctant to pay 50% or 25% of the money before delivery using a relatively insecure payment method, especially on a car.

They reason that the seller will obviously deliver it, as they'll want the other half of the money. But there never was a car!

Pictures of cars aren't hard to find, and the experienced scammers will have a whole library of pictures of different cars.

The seller just got your \$5,000 for nothing, and you can leave them all the negative feedback you like. They'll just go and open another eBay account and find their next sucker.

While it's not an outright scam, what you might find is that the car does turn up, but simply doesn't live up to the description

- it has been oversold, in the tradition of used car dealers through the ages.

If this happens to you then you should open an eBay dispute and say your item was not as described - you might get a partial refund.

Computer Scams

If you bid in a computer auction but don't win, the seller might email you to ask whether you would like to buy a computer the same as the one they just sold through their own website.

This is a bad idea!

You have no guarantee that the item will ever arrive, and you haven't just given them your money - you've given them your credit card details too.

There are sellers with nothing but positive feedback who use this scam often - and since you won't be able to leave them any feedback on the transaction, their reputation will stay that way.

If you complain to eBay that you bought an item outside the site and got scammed, they will tell you to get lost and not do it again.

How to Beat the Scams

There are lots of ways to beat the scams. First, whenever you buy anything expensive, be sure to check your seller's reputation thoroughly. Make sure they have sold items of a

similar high value before, and haven't just sold a string of \$10 items to get their feedback rating artificially high.

If you want to be even more cautious, insist that the money is placed in an escrow service (eBay recommend escrow.com - don't use any other service unless you're sure of it).

To be honest, it's generally quite a bad idea to use eBay to buy things like cars and computers to begin with - you can get them anywhere, and the discounts aren't that big any more.

It's better to use eBay for those rare, special things that you can't find anywhere else.

Tips for Buying Collectibles on eBay

Buying collectibles is one of the most enjoyable things to do on eBay, simply because you can find so many things that you just can't get anywhere else.

Here are a few tips to help you on your way.

Find your Category. You'll probably find that all the items you're after are listed in a single category. Add this category to your browser's Favorites, and keep coming back.

Look for Mistakes. If you collect something, the chances are you know a lot about it. This can be your opportunity to make a mint from a seller's mistake. They might not realize that they have a rare version of an item, or they might have left off the key information that makes it valuable. If you're willing to email the seller and ask them a few questions about the item to confirm that it is what you think it is, then you should be able to buy items like these.

You can then resell them at a big profit, if that's what you want to do.

Don't Always Believe Descriptions. If you find something you haven't heard of, and the description calls it 'rare', don't assume that it actually is. Far too many sellers just put 'rare' into all of their descriptions - the chances are that the item is common and has just been described wrongly. Don't bid unless you know what you're buying.

Stalk Other Users. When you collect something, you'll probably notice that there are four or five sellers who seem to come up with consistently good items - and the same buyers buying them. Add their user pages to your Favorites, and check back often to see what they've got - or what they're bidding on - that you might be interested in.

Don't Get Too Attached to an Auction. There are millions of items being listed every day on eBay - whatever you want, it'll come around again, and if you don't get it there are plenty more things to buy.

This is similar to the golden rule of negotiating: always be prepared to walk away.

If you can't walk away, then expect to pay over the odds. There are few things so rare that another seller won't have one to sell.

Go and bid in a lower-priced auction, instead of getting into a bidding war in one that is already expensive.

Beware of the Postage. If you collect lots of small things with a relatively low value, you might end up paying as much for postage as you do for each item. You should take these costs into consideration when you make your bid.

Another good strategy is to always buy a few things at once from the same buyer, as they will almost always offer you a discount on the postage. When you're bidding, you might

notice that some auctions go more slowly than others, going days at a time without any new bids

Taking Advantage of "Slow" eBay Auctions

Some auctions get hundreds of bids, but some go much more slowly, getting only a few bids or even none at all for days. Auctions are generally much slower during the summer months than they are in the winter - and sales on eBay are slowing each year, as more sellers than buyers sign up, hoping to get rich quick.

There are a number of ways that you can take advantage of slower auctions to get the best price.

Wait to Bid. If you bid, then everyone can see you're interested - and that might make them interested too. Leaving the item alone for as long as you can bear will make it look less popular, and keep the price down so you can come in at the last minute and get a bargain.

Make an Offer. If the seller is selling an item using 'Buy it Now' and it still hasn't sold when the auction is about to end, use eBay's 'Best Offer' service to make them an offer on it. The chances are they've listed the item two or three times before, and they'll be so annoyed at the prospect of re-listing it yet again that they'll accept your offer just to get rid of the thing.

Conspire with Other Buyers. You might not have thought of this, but if there are two auctions for the same item and only you and one other buyer are bidding, why not get together and work out a 'you take this one and I'll take that one' deal?

This avoids you raising the price on both auctions just to get one each. If you make a few friends, you can even work together on auctions long-term, taking it in turns to bid.

Be Snobbish. Send the seller emails asking questions about the condition of the item, and making it very clear that you are a discerning buyer and will only accept things of the highest quality. This will make them feel better about selling you their item for less.

Don't Feel Guilty. There really are too many sellers on eBay now, to the point where you can get common items at very low prices. Long-term, this will probably force those sellers out of business, but that's the way a market works - it's supply and demand.

Buy in Bulk. When auctions are slow, many sellers will have had the same stock for a long time. If you offer to take ten things off their hands all at once then you can almost name your price - the chances are that they'll fall over themselves to give you a good deal. If you come back again and buy another ten items then they'll love you even more.

The longer you spend on eBay, the more experienced you'll become - and the greater the chances are that you'll stumble across an auction for something very odd, and quite unexpected.

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