

Monday 16 April 2007

In the know

AN INSIDER'S GUIDE TO eBay



Keep password

Place Bid >

Username

Smart shopping

How to buy and sell safely
in the world's biggest
online marketplace



Place Bid



Password



special supplement produced by

THE INDEPENDENT

for

eBay.co.uk



Yes

No

Help

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HISTORY OF EBAY

The history of eBay in a nutshell

eBay is one of Britain's favourite websites, but how did it all begin?



NICK HIGGINS

It all started with a broken laser pointer. Pierre Omidyar, an American computer programmer, came up with the idea of an auction website as a way of buying and selling goods. He was intrigued by the idea that auctions could be used to find "fair market value" and that prices would be set by the buyers and sellers, without the interference of price fixing, cartels or vested interests.

Over the 1995 Labor Day weekend (a US holiday), he created a simple internet program called AuctionWeb that allowed people to buy and sell things via an auction. One of AuctionWeb's first transactions seemed bizarre: a broken laser pointer.

Omidyar emailed the winning bidder, who turned out to be (of all things) someone who wanted to have a go at repairing the laser pointer. From this, Omidyar learned that for every seller there's usually a buyer, no matter what the product is.

Omidyar hosted AuctionWeb on the same server as the website of his consulting firm, Echo Bay. He tried to get the domain name echobay.com but someone beat him to it, so he called the site ebay.com. The name stuck and eBay is now the world's biggest online marketplace.

One key innovation that has helped the site develop and grow is the feedback system, which allows users to rate each other. By reading about other people's experiences, you're able to judge whether a person is trustworthy. Omidyar believed that "people are basically good" and that there would be much more praise than criticism. He was right. About one million feedback ratings are left every day and feedback remains at the core of the eBay trading experience, helping people recognise and thank each other for honest transactions.

The company has grown and its customer base has expanded. It has also added new

services that address new markets, such as business sales and eBay Motors. In addition, it's expanded internationally - eBay.co.uk opened in 1999 - and has acquired other businesses over the years. These include PayPal, which enables people to pay for goods by email, UK-based classifieds site Gumtree, and Skype, an internet phone company.

Unlike most e-commerce websites, eBay doesn't make money by selling goods itself. Instead, it operates a marketplace for people and businesses to sell to one another. It primarily makes money from the fees paid by sellers for listing their goods and from a percentage of the final sale price.

Its combination of scale and open access has led commentators to dub eBay (in a book of the same name) the "perfect store". With 222 million registered users, it's a huge global marketplace and one in which a budding Omidyar can compete on a level playing field with a multinational.

EBAYTASTIC

Some newspapers bring you the week in numbers, here we bring you eBay in numbers. Be prepared to be amazed



1,500 More than 1,500 charities have registered to sell on eBay. Individual sellers can also donate between 10 and 100 per cent of their final sale price to their favourite cause.

222 million eBay has 222 million registered users. If it were a country, it would have the world's fifth largest population, just ahead of Brazil.

15 million eBay.co.uk has more than 15 million customers and more than 10 million individual listings, making it the UK's number one e-commerce site. Brits spend more on eBay purchases than they do on going to the movies. It accounts for 10 per cent of all the time people in the UK spend on the internet. About half of all internet users visit the site at least once a month.

68,000 More than 68,000 people in the UK use eBay as their primary or secondary source of income.

\$4.9m The most expensive thing sold on eBay was a Gulfstream jet for \$4.9 million. A more down-to-earth investment was a decommissioned nuclear bunker, which sold for £14,000. But for something truly bizarre, how about a mammoth's skeleton for £61,000?

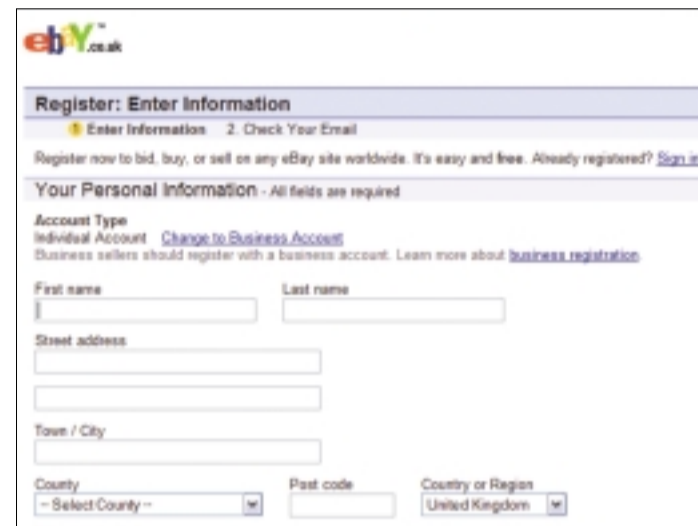
7 seconds In the UK, eBay sells a car every two minutes, a CD every seven seconds, a laptop every two minutes, a piece of women's clothing every five seconds, two toys a minute and one piece of golf equipment a minute.

3.5 million eBayMotors.co.uk is the UK's busiest car showroom, with 3.5 million unique visitors each month. At any given time, it lists more than 40,000 cars. More than a million cars have been sold on the site since it was launched in 2001.

BUYING TUTORIAL

Buying on eBay made simple

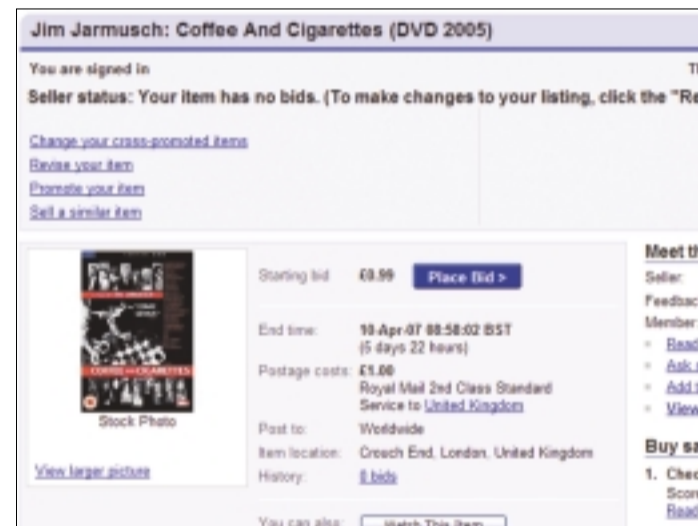
If you want to start shopping on eBay but aren't sure where to begin, this four-step guide covers the essentials



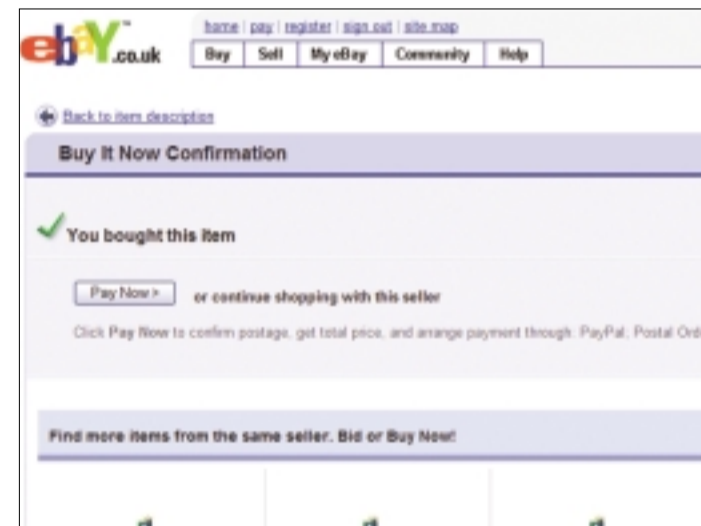
REGISTER
It's free and it'll let you start buying and selling on eBay.co.uk. When you register, you'll need a valid email address. Tip: Choose a password, and eBay will grade your choice on how secure it is.



SEARCH
You can search, or browse by category. Tip: If you search, you can then filter by category. Once you've found an item, check out the current bid. Tip: Read the description carefully and ask questions before you bid.



PLACE A BID
Decide on the most you're prepared to pay (allowing for P&P) and place a bid, then let eBay do the rest. eBay will bid only the amount needed for you to stay the highest bidder, without going over your limit. Tip: Look at the seller's history and opt for ones with at least 98 per cent positive feedback.



PAY
Once you've bought an item, you need to pay for it promptly. Tip: PayPal is a way to pay safely because it offers buyer protection for purchases up to £500. Sign up for PayPal when you sign up for eBay so you're ready to pay (quickly and securely) when you win an auction.



PROTECT YOUR ACCOUNT
Don't let thieves access your computer, keep it secure

Not giving away personal information in emails. Crooks will try to trick you into sending them your details.

Using a secure password that mixes numbers, lower-case letters and capitals. This stops hackers using password-cracking software to break into your account. Change your password regularly and don't use the same password for everything.

Using a modern Web browser, such as Internet Explorer 7 or Firefox 2. You should also download eBay's Toolbar with Account Guard. They're all free and let you know when you're on a fraudulent website.

Protecting your computer against viruses and spyware, which can steal your password and send it to criminals. Get Safe Online has more information on this: go to www.getsafeonline.org.

Monitoring your account and preferences regularly to make sure there are no unauthorised changes or activity. If there are, you can use the Report a Problem button in the Safety Centre to inform eBay staff.

FOUR SCAMS TO AVOID



Scams to watch out for

The last thing you want is for your eBay experience to be marred by fraudsters and crooks, so familiarise yourself with these easy-to-spot con tricks

There are more than 10 million items listed on eBay.co.uk at any one time. The vast majority sell without any problems but, very occasionally, criminals try to rip off honest customers. Just like the real world, there are a few rotten apples in the virtual barrel. Fortunately, their most common tricks are easy to spot.

INSTANT MONEY TRANSFERS
Never use services such as Western Union or MoneyGram International to pay for your eBay purchases. They are great for transferring money to someone you know and trust but not to an anonymous seller who, most likely, will take your cash and never ship the goods.

Criminals would love to get hold of your credit card details

Items bought using these systems are not eligible for the eBay buyer protection scheme.

FOREIGN CHEQUES
Be wary of accepting foreign-currency cheques. They can take weeks or months to clear, even if they're genuine (many aren't). Be especially wary of anyone offering to send you an over-payment by cheque and asking you to use instant money transfer to wire back the excess.

PHISHING
Criminals would love to get hold of your credit card details, bank account information or eBay username and password. They use spoof emails, which look like real messages from eBay or PayPal, to trick you into going to a fake website and entering this kind of information. They also use fake "second-chance offers". Emails sent from eBay will always appear in My Messages, so check this folder if you're not sure. eBay will never ask you to type your username and password into an email: only do this on eBay.co.uk.

GREY MARKET TRANSACTIONS
Buyers and sellers sometimes get emails inviting them to finish the auction early and close the deal privately. Because most bids come towards the end of an auction, sellers are likely to get a lower price if they do this. It's also against the rules. More importantly, buyers and sellers can't use eBay feedback or buyer protection.

10 "START BUYING" TIPS



Dan Wilson, eBay author and expert

- 1. Start off small**
Buy something small and inexpensive from a UK seller to learn the ropes.
- 2. Learn about feedback**
Feedback is the beating heart of eBay. Find out what it's all about.
- 3. Find a friendly seller**
For your first purchases, plump for sellers with superb feedback who can help you.
- 4. Read the description**
Ensure you know what you're buying; examine the photos and description carefully.
- 5. Trust your instincts**
If there's anything you don't like about a particular listing, don't bid.
- 6. Ensure you can pay**
Paying quickly is essential, so make sure you're registered with PayPal.
- 7. Don't forget postage**
Buyers usually pay for postage, on top of the final bid price, so factor this in when bidding.
- 8. If you don't win, BIN**
If you keep losing auctions, don't forget that you can buy many items at a fixed price, without bidding, using "buy it now".
- 9. Leave feedback**
Leaving positive feedback for your seller shows that you're a happy customer. It also increases your chances of getting positive feedback in return and so building up your eBay reputation.
- 10. Do it all again!**
Once you've got your first purchase under your belt, do it again! Soon you'll be hooked.

Dan Wilson
Author of *Make Money on eBay UK*

Card Number

Expiry Date / / **Security Code**

Number of lovers **Date I last cried** / /

Submit

Are you sharing too much when you shop online?

Probably. In fact, you could be taking a risk every time you fill in an online shopping form.

PayPal does not share your financial information with websites you shop with. It's a secure and easy way to pay online.

Use PayPal to pay on hundreds of our featured websites, and you could be in with a chance to win a daily prize of £1,000.

To find out more visit www.paypal.co.uk/grandgiveaway

PayPal

The fast safe way to pay online

*Terms and conditions apply. Open to UK residents only. SEC02

WHERE TO GET HELP

There are lots of ways to find out more about eBay and get help if you need it. Start with eBay's own tutorials on pages.ebay.co.uk/help/ebayexplained. There are step-by-step guides to registering, buying and selling, as well as tours of different eBay features.

You could also read a book, such as *Make Money on eBay UK* by Dan Wilson or *eBay.co.uk for Dummies* by Jane Hoskyn and Marsha Collier, to set you off on the right path.

If you're stuck and need help during a transaction, you have two options: eBay's own Help system and Customer Support. Just click on Help (on the menu at the top of the screen) and you'll find answers to frequently asked questions, as well as a comprehensive database of advice and information.

For security problems, there's eBay's Safety Centre (accessible via the [ebay.co.uk](http://ebay.co.uk/home) home page), which has eBay-specific advice, and Get Safe Online (www.getsafeonline.org), which has information on general internet security. Don't forget the valuable help and

vice you can get from other eBayers. Getting assistance from people who are experienced traders is one of the benefits eBay offers. You can get answers quickly from other buyers and sellers using the Answer Centre, or you can join in longer discussions on the Community Discussion Boards.

You can even join a group of people with similar interests to yours. If you're an avid stamp collector or a retro video games enthusiast, you'll find a group of like-minded eBayers to share tips with. You can access all these forums via hub.ebay.co.uk/community.

There are lots of ways to find out more about eBay and get help if you need it

eBay **BUSINESSES**

That's business sense

As well as individual sellers, eBay thrives on businesses big and small - here are just a few of them

STRESS-FREE SELLING

Trading assistants help people sell their goods on eBay - for a price. They charge commission and a transaction fee, over and above eBay's fees, but they take away all the work. Some specialise in specific areas, others are more general. Some pick things up from your home or office, others operate drop-off depots. In short, they give the seller a stress-free sale.

Trading assistants have to meet certain standards to be listed on eBay's database, including good feedback ratings. As experienced eBayers, they understand the importance of good communication, so there's usually someone to answer phone calls and emails from potential buyers.

Whatever you have to sell on eBay, whether it's a used car or you're clearing out your home, a trading assistant may be the smart way to do it. To find out more, visit pages.ebay.co.uk/tradingassistants/hire-trading-assistant.html.

Trading assistants understand the importance of answering questions from potential buyers

**THINK LATERALLY**

Zutti is typical of another type of eBay business - the clicks-and-mortar company. The Oldham retailer has two clothes shops but gets 25 per cent of its income from eBay sales. Company director Zack

Hughes says that the big attraction of an eBay store is "practically zero overheads". That doesn't mean they abandon customer service, though. Hughes has made their eBay shop easier to use and believes it's important to over com-

municate with customers about the status of their orders: "We get a lot of repeat customers". The company sells mainstream brands; each season's stock gets a clear run in their retail stores, but any stock that doesn't sell goes straight onto

eBay. Here, they can sell items close to their cost price, though only certain, leftover items are available. They're not trying to turn a profit but rather cut a loss on end-of-line items. It's a good deal for customers and a good deal for Zutti.



eBay entrepreneurs Chris Smith and Neil Hawkins

GIVE UP THE DAY JOB

Chris Smith and Neil Hawkins both managed large high street stores until they chucked in their high-flying careers and became full-time eBayers. One day, two years ago, they went out with £30 in their pockets to see if they could turn a profit on eBay. They bought some shavers and made a £100 profit that same evening. Since then, their company, Wirax, has completed more than 3,500 sales. They now have their own warehouse and are looking to hire someone to help with the workload. In fact, Smith and Hawkins are just two of the 68,000 people who make a living on eBay in the UK.

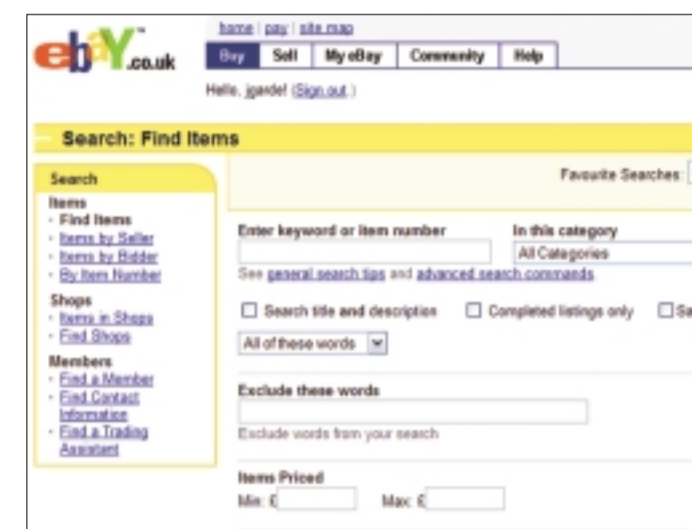
The secret of their success? Good customer service. Frustrated with big-company attitudes to their customers, they vowed to do "whatever it took to satisfy the customer". The people who buy from them agree. They haven't had a single negative feedback rating because they're prepared to go that extra mile. In one case, a courier damaged a mirror in transit, so they drove 120 miles from their warehouse in Wolverhampton to the customer's home in Liverpool to deliver a replacement.

As with comedy, profits on eBay depend on timing. Wirax buys discounted air-conditioning units in November and sells them in the summer for a profit. Smith ensures that auctions end on a Sunday night because, he says, people would rather watch eBay than *Heartbeat*. "eBay's great but it's not easy," he explains. "It's not a nine-to-five job because the questions come in 24/7."

SELLING TUTORIAL

Selling on eBay made simple

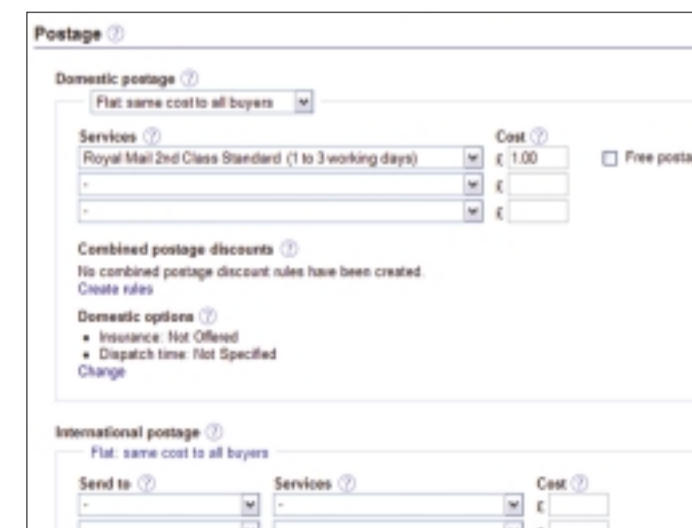
If you're a first-time seller, follow this step-by-step guide to listing items on eBay and then read our top tips for keeping your PayPal account information secure

**RESEARCH**

See what similar items have gone for by browsing completed listings on eBay. Tip: Check the category and description of items like yours.

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT FORMAT**

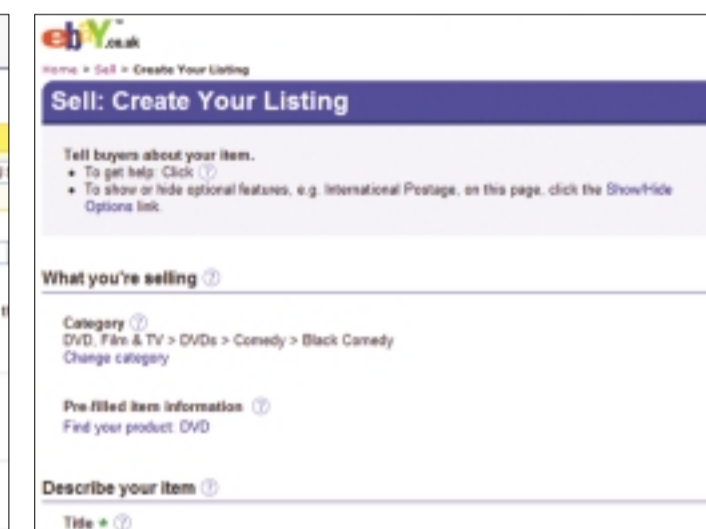
Tips: Most bids happen in the last few hours of an auction, so choose your times and dates carefully. Setting a reserve price confuses many buyers. A low starting price creates more interest in your item.

**POSTAGE AND PACKAGING**

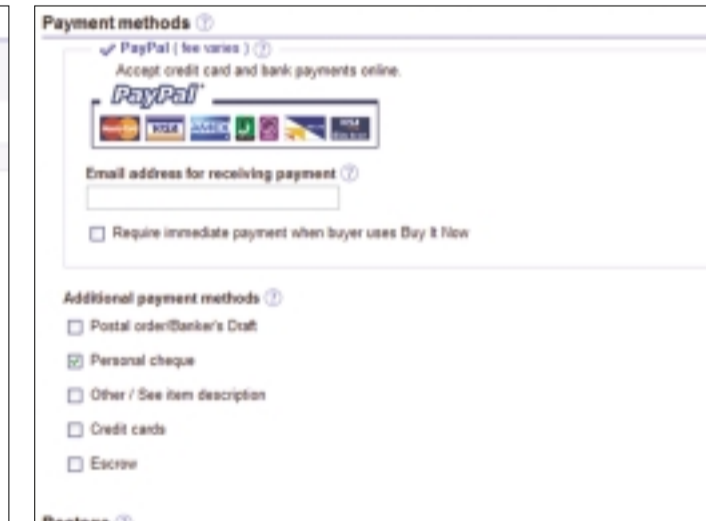
Buyers want to know all their costs upfront, so ensure you've got the P&P right. Tip: Say in your listing if you don't want to ship abroad.

LEAVE FEEDBACK

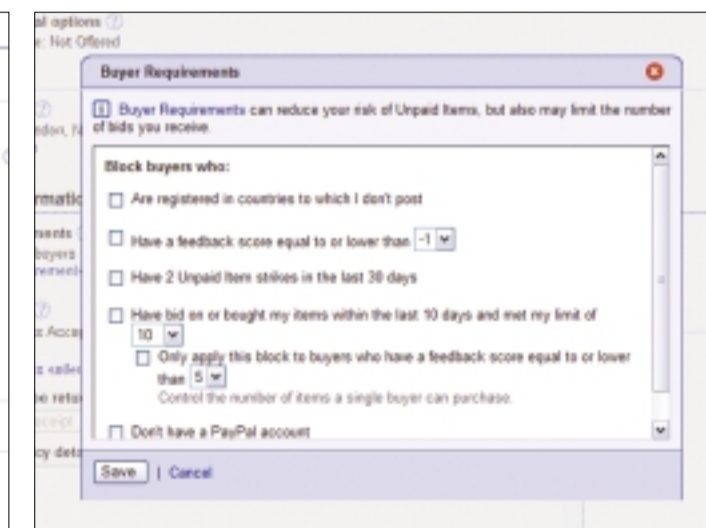
Once a sale has been completed, make sure you leave feedback for your buyer and encourage them to do the same for you. Tip: Lots of positive feedback may mean that you can charge higher prices for your items and that you'll attract more customers in future.

**LIST YOUR ITEM**

Pick the right category, give lots of details and use good photos. Tip: Put yourself in a buyer's shoes. What do they want to know about your item?

**PAYMENT**

Buyers want a safe and easy way to pay, and prefer sellers who accept PayPal. PayPal also means you're paid faster and there's less risk of bouncing cheques. Tip: Be clear about your payment terms.

**SET BUYER REQUIREMENTS**

You can stop certain people bidding on your items using Buyer Requirements. Tip: This can reduce the chance of a sale going wrong.

PAYPAL SAFETY TIPS

Nine out of 10 eBay listings let buyers pay with PayPal (a subsidiary of eBay). PayPal offers protection for buyers and sellers and ensures that sellers get paid quickly. "It's the smart way to pay online," says Geoff Iddison, chief executive officer of PayPal UK. However, buyers and sellers should use their common sense, too, and follow these tips:

- 1. Check your account**
Always log in and verify a payment before posting items.
- 2. Ignore spoof emails**
Watch out for non-specific greetings, such as "Dear PayPal user", odd-looking addresses, misspellings and bad grammar.
- 3. Beware a false sense of urgency**
Fraudsters will say such things as "Your account is about to be terminated" or "An unauthorised transaction has taken place". They're trying to trick you into reacting without thinking.
- 4. Don't click on links in emails**
It's better to type PayPal's address into the browser yourself. When in doubt, open a new browser window so you're sure you're entering your PayPal password on the real PayPal site.
- 5. Bin emails that look like websites**
PayPal will never ask you for personal information in an email.
- 6. Beware deceptive website addresses**
Only enter your PayPal password on PayPal pages. These begin with <https://www.paypal.com/>. If you see an @ in the middle of a URL, there's a good chance that this is a spoof address. Legitimate companies use a domain name such as <https://www.company.com>.



7. Upgrade to a safe browser
Microsoft's Internet Explorer 7, for example, includes several tools to protect you against phishing and identity theft.

8. Avoid email attachments
PayPal will never email you an attachment or a software update to install on your computer. If you get one of these and you have doubts about it, forward it to spoof@paypal.com.

RUNNING A BUSINESS ON eBay

Let eBay help build up your business

If you've got more than a few things to sell, why not use eBay to make some serious money?

For many people, eBay is more than a way to clear their attic or buy a new car, it's their shop front and livelihood. When eBay.co.uk opened in 1999, most of the businesses on it were run by individuals. There are still tens of thousands of these entrepreneurs on eBay, who are enjoying the benefits of running a business with low start-up costs.

In recent years, new types of eBay businesses have emerged. Some companies find eBay a smart way to sell excess inventory and end-of-line stock. Other companies use eBay to gauge the buzz around a new product. T-Mobile, for example, recently trialled some of its new mobiles on eBay before they reached the shops.

Many businesses have surplus stock, and eBay can reach a worldwide market of more than 200 million people. It can also extend smaller companies' geographical reach and let them trade 24/7. Adding an eBay store to an existing retail one provides extra revenue at little extra cost.

Another new type of eBay business is trading assistants. These guys pick up liquidated stock, government surplus and private goods and sell them on eBay in return for a cut of the sale price. They handle the listing, customer queries, picking, packing and posting for the seller. They are interesting businesses in their own right and provide a route to market for people who wouldn't otherwise consider selling on eBay, a route that's hassle-free.



NICK HIGGINS

TOP 10 TIPS FOR EBAY BUSINESSES



1. Research, research, research
Understand the market for your products. What sells? When? For how much? What do your competitors do?

2. It's a business, stupid
New eBay businesses still need to think about practicalities. Remember such things

as funding, business plans, marketing, PR, book-keeping and legal requirements. HM Revenue & Customs is not an optional club.

3. Be flexible

People look on eBay for value for money, so you need to be realistic about your prices. Experiment with pricing strategies, auction vs fixed price, reserves (best to avoid these as they confuse buyers) and auction length.

4. The customer is king/queen

Your feedback rating is everything. A sole trader can out compete a multinational on customer service on eBay. Over communicate and go that extra mile to solve problems.

5. Know your responsibilities

Businesses on eBay need to have clear policies about things like returns. You also need to understand eBay's listing rules, and regulations such as the Distance Selling Directive.

6. Keep up

eBay is always changing and so is the market - the more expert you are, the better you will do.

eBay is always changing and so is the market - the more expert you are, the better you will do.



are, the better you will do. If you're a Power Seller, you get an eBay account manager who can help keep you abreast of the latest developments on the site.

7. Photos and descriptions matter

Taking photos with a high-quality camera and proper lighting, and posting lots of good pictures can have a direct effect on the sale price. So can well-written headlines and descriptions. Think like a buyer - what do they need to know?

8. Use the right software

Special software, such as Selling Manager Pro and Turbo Lister, make stock management, listings and communication easier.

9. Buy right

You make your profit when you buy, not when you sell. Don't overpay for your stock.

10. Have fun

Running a business on eBay can be hard work. Take it seriously, but remember to enjoy it, too, especially when the bids roll in.

INSIDE TRUST & SAFETY

Putting safety first

We talk to Garreth Griffith, head of Trust & Safety at eBay.co.uk

A bad experience on eBay can be frustrating and sometimes costly. Inside eBay, the 2,000-strong worldwide Trust & Safety team works around the clock to stop fraudsters making people's lives a misery. "We've always worked hard on this," says Garreth Griffith, head of Trust & Safety at eBay.co.uk, "though we accept that, in the past, we haven't been very forthcoming about what we've been working on." The company is working harder than ever to combat criminals and is now being more open about how it's doing this.

At eBay.co.uk, there's a team dedicated to preventing phishing, the scam in which criminals trick website users into disclosing their passwords in fake emails or websites.

"If you receive a suspicious email purporting to be from us, then send it to spoof@ebay.co.uk and we'll quickly confirm whether it's genuine or not," says Griffith. "We take immediate action against spoofs. In the rare cases in which a customer's account is taken over, it is usually eBay that informs them first."

eBay typically shuts down 80 per cent of fake sites within 24 hours. And they discover more than 90 per cent of hijacked user accounts before they're used fraudulently, leading to more than 185 arrests last year.

In a similar vein, eBay is cracking down on sellers who don't live up to the standards expected by its community of users. There's a difference between a sloppy seller - someone, say, who forgets to post something because they're busy - and a crook. Serious offenders will be kicked out: more than 1,200 users were suspended last month alone.

"So much trust and safety on the site depends on the eBay community," explains Griffith. Every day, members help each other overcome difficulties. The famous feedback system is key and changes to it mean that buyers and sellers are now more informed than ever before. Buyers can rate sellers on how communicative they were, whether the items were described accurately, whether the shipping price was fair and how quickly the goods were shipped.

The new system gives a lot more detail and should encourage the right kind of behaviour from sellers, day in, day out. To support this, the site has introduced a facility at the bottom of each listing that enables people to report items that breach eBay policy.

Says Griffith: "We don't operate within conventional boundaries; we can't if we want to tackle a global challenge." He reveals how his team has been involved in closing down fake eBay websites hosted in remote parts of Eastern Europe, how

the company is working with internet service providers to stop spoof emails reaching users in the first place (by digitally signing all its emails) and, on a more basic level, how eBay will intervene when users choose a weak password, something that could lead to them being a victim of fraud (see *Diary of an eBay novice* on page 11).

Fraud is a problem worldwide and eBay's challenges appear no greater than any other global internet business. "Whilst it is encouraging to see how much better we are getting at spotting suspicious activity on the site and how quickly we are then able to stop it, we know that, for some users, we need to do more and we need to do it quicker," admits Griffith.

Understandably, some users blame eBay when something goes wrong. Griffith straightens in his chair when asked whether, as it's grown, eBay has changed for the better or worse. He replies: "eBay has evolved and come of age and, with this, comes the responsibility to ensure the site is always safe for our millions of users."

He continues: "With millions of listings on the site, there's no denying that it's an ongoing challenge, although our success as a company is a reflection of the fact that the vast majority of our transactions happen safely and successfully."



eBay.co.uk's head of Trust & Safety, Garreth Griffith

Four ways for you to stay even safer on eBay.

- 1. Pay safely-**
Pay with PayPal. It's fast, easy and secure.
- 2. Know your seller-**
Research your seller by checking their feedback.
- 3. Download the eBay Toolbar with Account Guard-**
It helps you protect your eBay account information.
- 4. Do Your homework-**
Find out more safety tips at www.ebay.co.uk/safetycentre.

ebay.co.uk



WHEN THINGS GO WRONG



Don't get mad when you're unhappy with a sale, get help

When things go wrong

If you encounter a problem on eBay, there's a very good chance you can resolve it. By following the advice in this guide and the eBay Safety Centre (www.ebay.co.uk/safetycentre), you should avoid any problems. However, if something does go wrong when you're buying or selling on eBay, you're not alone. Help is at hand.

If your item doesn't arrive, or it's not what you expected or not as described, your first step is to contact the seller. Explain your concern calmly and see what they say. Most issues can be resolved amicably.

If your item doesn't arrive, or it's not what you expected or not as described, your first step is to contact the seller. Explain your concern calmly

When you're buying, look for sellers with a no-quibble returns policy and ones who offer refunds. If your item doesn't arrive, remember that things sometimes get lost and delayed in the post.

"It happens much more than people think," says Dan Wilson, author and eBay expert. "Contact the seller and ask them when it was sent."

As a rule, going in, all guns blazing, and leaving negative feedback without trying to resolve the problem is counterproductive. However, if you can't resolve it with the seller, you can use the eBay dispute resolution process to try and

find you a satisfactory solution. If you paid with PayPal and the item is significantly not as described and cost less than £500, you can get a refund if the item's covered by PayPal

When you're buying, look for sellers with a no-quibble returns policy and ones who offer refunds

buyer protection. You can also contact eBay and PayPal customer support for help. Once all these options have been exhausted, consider leaving negative feedback: it could be a warning to other buyers.

If you're a seller, communication is also crucial to solving problems. For example, you should contact a buyer who hasn't paid. In most cases, says Wilson, the buyer will simply have forgotten to pay and will be grateful for the reminder. Make it easy for buyers to pay you and you'll avoid the vast majority of delays: PayPal is essential, especially for overseas buyers. If your buyer still doesn't pay up, you can file a complaint and claim a refund on your final value fees.

The best way to solve a problem is to avoid it altogether, so make time to read the tips in the eBay Safety Centre. Paying safely is the key and that means being able to get your money back if you encounter a problem. Using a safe payment method, such as PayPal, means that whatever happens, your money's safe.

BUYING AND SELLING CARS



NICK HIGGINS

Drive away a bargain today

Buying or selling a car on eBay may seem a bit daunting, but it's a simple and straightforward way to move yourself up a gear

More than one million cars have been sold on eBayMotors.co.uk in the last six years and it's now the most visited automotive website in the UK. However, selling their car on the site still scares some people. Their fear is misplaced, according to Jody Ford of eBayMotors.co.uk. The process is no different to selling a camera or dress on eBay, he says, and it can be less hassle than selling through classified ads. You may also get a higher price than you expected.

The site isn't only for bargain motors - there are currently more than 100 Rolls-Royces and Bentleys listed - and the most expensive car ever sold on eBayMotors in Europe was a Ferrari Enzo, which went for more than half a million pounds. Having said that, most of the listings are for "normal" cars, just like you'd see at any second-hand car dealership.

To make things easier, when you enter your car's registration number into eBayMotors.co.uk, the site automatically fills in all your car's details: engine size, colour, model, year and so on. Another benefit of selling on the site is that the price is fixed

when the sale is made, so you don't have to deal with haggling or the dreaded "or nearest offer". This applies whether you auction the car or sell it at a fixed price through "buy it now". Ford has the following tips for sellers using the site:

- You can put a reserve price on to make sure the car doesn't sell below a minimum price, but set it realistically. Conversely, a starting price of £1 can attract attention early on.
- You should research the prices that similar cars have gone for on eBay Motors, so your expectations are at the right level.
- As with other eBay auctions, the main action takes place in the last hour or two, so don't be despondent if the bidding is slow to begin with. If you can set the auction up so the final bidding frenzy takes place on a weekend, this will give people a chance to do a test drive and then bid when they have time on their hands.
- The most important thing is to get the photographs and description right. Don't be tempted to gloss over minor scratches and dents. In fact, the more detailed and specific your description, the more likely buyers are to trust you.

Honest, upfront details will save questions and potential hiccups later.

- It's the same with the photos. Don't just put one picture up, put up a dozen. Include pictures of spare keys, the logbook, mileometer, V5, MOT and, of course, the exterior and interior. Detail sells.

When it comes to buying, it's the same story but from the other side of the table. Look for cars that are described and photographed in detail. Read the listings very carefully and ask questions if something isn't clear. Don't bid more than the car is worth to you. And, above all, make sure you do a test drive before you buy.

As to whether you should trust the seller, Ford explains: "We recommend that you check out the seller's feedback rating and read what previous buyers have said about their reliability, product quality and level of service."

"Much of it is gut instinct and you should always use your common sense. If the deal looks too good to be true, it probably is."

"However, with an average of 3.5 million visitors a month and tens of thousands of listings on eBay Motors, there's always another car and another buyer out there."

EBAY BEGINNER'S DIARY

Diary of an eBay novice

By Susan Bracken



I'm not some dizzy woman but - I have to be honest - I don't read instructions. This is why I'm now the proud owner of a children's fancy-dress police uniform. How did this happen? I'm an actor and producer in C Company (www.ccompany.cc). We're putting on a new play, *One Night Stand*, at the Hen & Chickens Theatre in North London in April. A friend of mine challenged me to find some costumes and props for the play on eBay - in just five days.

I'm a complete eBay novice: I only signed up on the Monday and my mission was to find what I needed and buy it by the Friday. I've been rehearsing every day and dealing with the production side of the play in the evenings, so the thought of buying costumes online (and cheaply) was appealing.

First things first, I needed something that could pass as a policeman's uniform. Let me tell you, searching for uniforms on eBay is an eye-opener. Either you get children's fancy-dress costumes or, shall we say, bedroom fun.

I didn't realise how quickly things moved on eBay. Minutes later, someone had swooped in and bought it from under my nose

I finally found something that looked like a policeman's outfit. This had a "buy it now" button and an auction price. I quickly decided on the auction format and put in a bid. I didn't realise how quickly things moved on eBay. Minutes later, someone had swooped in and bought it from

under my nose using "buy it now". Now I know what it means, I'll be sure to use this button next time!

Needless to say, I was in a hurry to buy the next uniform I came across. It looked great in the picture, so I bought it. Oops. I should have read the description. It turned out to be a party outfit for kids. It's never going to fit Zak Rowlands, the actor who plays the policeman. Why didn't I just read the item description?

Signing up to eBay was straightforward until I had to choose a password. Password security is obviously important to them, because when I put in the password I use for everything (I know this isn't smart), they said it wasn't acceptable (they have this gauge or "password-o-meter" that measures password strength). This was a bit annoying because I had to come up with another one, but it was refreshing to see a company forcing me to be more responsible with my online security. So now I have two passwords and a child's policeman's uniform.

This doesn't mean I haven't learned anything. It's been an education. For example, I discovered a lot about searching. I thought that if I made the searches as narrow as possible, this would get the best result. However, when I searched for "policeman's helmet", I got precious little. When I went back and searched for "police", I found lots more. And it was easy to use the other menus to refine the search. The "send it to a friend" feature was brilliant. I was able to email things I'd seen to my director and production designers, which meant instant feedback.

I feel like I was in the Stone Age before, but now I know that's eBay's really cool. I've got my eye on a real policeman's helmet and badge. I'm also looking at some furniture cubes to dress the set. I need to get some more props, too. A smart briefcase would be good for one of the characters, but I'm going to read the descriptions carefully this time. Best of all, it should be sorted out in plenty of time for the show.