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Marsha Collier

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Jane Hoskyn

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by Marsha Collier, Jane Hoskyn and Steve Hill



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Introduction

Welcome to the third edition of *eBay.co.uk For Dummies*! Shopping and selling on eBay is more than just a smart way to make extra pocket money – it can also be loads of fun, as more than 15 million UK members can tell you. Whether you're just starting out on eBay, or you've done a bit of trading and fancy moving things up a notch, you've come to the right place to find out all you need to know.

Of course, eBay isn't only a UK site. eBay now has more than 250 million users worldwide – that's quite a community. It's a community of buyers who can purchase things they'd never find on the high street, and save serious money while they're at it; and of sellers who clear their attics or forage out wholesale bargains to sell online and gain a few quid. This makes eBay the new international marketplace, and the best part is that eBay is available to anyone who wants to take the time to find out how it works.

And eBay isn't just about fun and making a few extra pounds. How about taking the plunge and starting to build an e-commerce enterprise, using eBay as your starting point? Thousands of people in Britain already make a living, or a significant second income, by selling on eBay. Do you want to join them? This book can get you started.

eBay isn't hard to master, but just as with any tool, if you know the ins and outs, you're ahead of the game. You can get the bargains, and when you sell, you can make the most money. This book is designed to help you understand everything you need to know about buying and selling on eBay, the most successful person-to-person trading community website. You get all the tools you need to get moving at eBay, whether you're new to the Internet or a webaholic. You see how to turn your everyday household clutter into cold, hard cash – and how to look for items that you can sell on eBay. If you're a collector (or you'd like to be), we show you how to work out how much you should spend, how to make clever bids and how to win the auctions. How much money you earn (or spend) depends entirely on how often and how well you conduct your eBay transactions. You decide how frequently you want to run auctions and place bids; we're here to help with the rest by sharing tips we've discovered along the way.

A website as complex as eBay has many nooks and crannies that may confuse the first-time user. Think of this book as a detailed road map that can help you navigate the site, getting as much or as little as you want from it. Just come back to the book whenever you need a question answered.

After you know the nuts and bolts of eBay, you can start buying and selling stuff. We've got a whole load of canny buying and selling strategies that help you get the most out of your auctions. With this book and a little elbow grease, you can join the ranks of the millions of people who use their home computers to make friends, become part of the eBay community and turn a profit.

About This Book

Remember those surprise tests that teachers sprang on you at school? Well, sometimes you may feel like eBay is setting you little tests while you're online. Think of *eBay.co.uk For Dummies* as your book of answers. You don't have to memorise anything – just keep this book handy to help you get through the confusing parts of eBay.

With that in mind, this book is divided into sections to help you find your answers fast. We show you how to:

- ✓ Get online and register to buy and sell on eBay.
- ✓ Find the bits of eBay where you can search for items for sale, set up listings for sale, monitor your transactions and babble on the discussion boards.
- ✓ Bid on and win eBay auctions, and master Buy It Now to make instant purchases.
- ✓ Choose an item to sell, pick the right time for your auction, market it so that loads of bidders see it and make a profit.
- ✓ Communicate well and close transactions without problems, whether you're a buyer or a seller.
- ✓ Become part of a great community of people who like to collect, buy and sell items of just about every type.

And finally . . . don't adjust your eyes. To protect the privacy of eBay users, some screen images (commonly called *screen shots*) in this book blur User IDs to protect the innocent.

Foolish Assumptions

You may have picked up this book because you heard that people are raking in cash by selling stuff on eBay, and you want a piece of the action. Or you heard about the bargains and bizarre items you can find in the world's largest marketplace. If so, this is the right book for you.

Here are some other foolish assumptions we've made about you:

- ✓ You have, or would like to have, access to a computer and an Internet connection so that you can do business on eBay.
- ✓ You have an interest in collecting stuff, selling stuff and buying stuff, and you want to find out more about doing those things online.
- ✓ You want tips and strategies that can save you money when you bid and make you money when you sell.
- ✓ You're concerned about maintaining your privacy and staying away from people who try to ruin everyone's good time with negligent (and sometimes illegal) activity.

If you think that the expression *surfing the Web* has something to do with spiders and wetsuits, this book can get you started, but you may want to browse through *The Internet For Dummies*, 10th Edition, by John R Levine, Margaret Levine Young and Carol Baroudi, for a crash course in Internet confidence. The book comes from Wiley, just like the one you're reading now. From time to time (and by astounding coincidence), we mention other titles in the *For Dummies* series that you may find helpful.

How This Book Is Organised

This book has five parts. The parts stand on their own, which means that you can read Chapter 5 after you read Chapter 10 or skip Chapter 3 altogether. Everything is up to you. But if you're new to eBay, at least dip into Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 to get an overview on what eBay is all about and find out how to become a registered user.

If you're already buying and selling on eBay, feel free to jump ahead to get good tips on advanced strategies to win the bargains or make your items fly off the cyber-shelves.

Part 1: Forget the Shops: Getting a Feel for eBay

In this part, we tell you what eBay is and how to use it. We take you through the registration process, help you organise your eBay sales and communication using the My eBay page, and get you comfortable finding your way around the site from the home page.

Part II: Are You Buying What They're Selling?

If you're pretty sure that you want to start making bids on items, this part fills you in on searching, grading an item's value, researching, bidding, winning auctions and buying instantly.

That old cliché 'Let the buyer beware' became a cliché because even today (maybe especially today) it's sound advice. Use our top tips to help you decide when to bid and when to pass.

Part III: Are You Selling What They're Buying?

This part gets you up to speed on how to sell your items on eBay. Think of it as an eBay course in marketing. Here you find important information on how to conduct your auctions, what to do after you sell an item, how to post the item and how to keep track of all the money you make. The tax collectors are only too aware of eBay (they probably use it themselves!). Know the rules so that your friendly local tax officer doesn't invite you over for a sandwich and a little audit.

We also show you how to jazz up your auctions by adding pictures and how to use basic HTML to link your auctions to your own website if you have one. You can make your digital images look like high art with our tips, hints and strategies. We also explore the opportunity that exists for setting up an eBay business and potentially making serious money.

Part IV: Bells and Whistles: Special Features

Here you discover how to handle privacy issues relating to eBay and how you can resolve buying and selling issues with the help of the Safety Centre, eBay's problem-solving HQ. Also included are ways of having fun with the eBay community and using charity auctions to bid on unique items for a good cause. Plus we take a look at eBay Apps for your smartphone so you can buy and sell on the move with your iPhone or HTC Android.

Part V: The Part of Tens

In keeping with a long *For Dummies* tradition, this part is a compendium of short chapters that give you handy references and useful facts. We share more smart tips for buying and selling items, as well as descriptions of our favourite software programs that can help lighten your auction load.

Icons Used in This Book



These are facts that you're really going to want to know. Time is money on eBay. When you see this shortcut or time-saving tip, read the information and think about all the cash you just saved.



Think of this icon as a memo for your brain. If you forget one of these pearls of wisdom that we reveal to you, go back and read it again. If you *still* can't remember it, dog-ear the page, use a highlighter pen or draw a big black circle around it – we don't mind, honest.



Don't feel our pain. We've done things wrong on eBay before and want to save you from our mistakes. These warnings are big and bold so that you take notice and avoid a bad experience. Don't skip these warnings unless you're a masochist.



When you see this icon, you're in for a war story (or a success story) from an eBay veteran. Their tales of brilliant buys, staggering sales and miscellaneous mishaps are a great real-life guide to eBay's fun and perils. You can skip over these anecdotes if you want to, but you may be missing out on some solid gold insight into what not to do on eBay.

What Now?

Like everything else in the world, eBay is evolving constantly. Some of the eBay screens in this book may look slightly different to the ones you see on your home computer monitor. That's just eBay tweaking and changing. Our job is to arm you with everything you need to know to join the eBay community and begin buying or selling or both. If you hit choppy waters, just look up the problem in the table of contents or index in this book. We either help you solve it or let you know where to go on the eBay website for some expert advice.

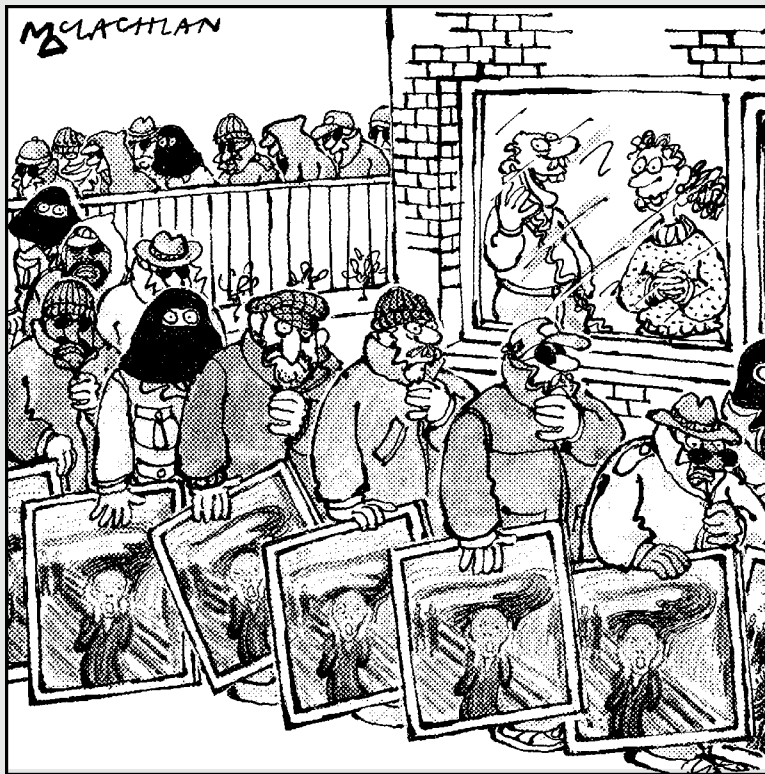
Although eBay makes its complex site as easy to navigate as possible, you may still need to refer back to this book for help. Don't get frustrated if you have to keep reviewing topics before you feel completely comfortable trading on eBay.

Feedback, Please

Communication makes the world go round, and we'd love to hear from you. Contact us at talk2marsha@coolebaytools.com and jane@janehoskyn.co.uk. We can't answer every email, but we do read them all. Marsha answers the best questions in her free monthly www.coolebaytools.com newsletter.

Part I

Forget the Shops: Getting a Feel for eBay



*'We only started our eBay business,
webuyoldmasters.co.uk, this morning and
the response has been amazing.'*

In this part . . .

New technology can be intimidating for anyone. You want to have a look at eBay, maybe buy something, but eBay feels huge and overwhelming and you're not sure where to start. What you want is someone to point out the most useful tools you need to get around, help you find out how eBay works and start showing you how to do your own buying and selling. That's what we do in Part I.

In this part, we give you the information you want to know about how eBay works and what it offers its members. Find out how to become a registered user, explore the eBay home page, and customise your very own private My eBay page. You can also find out about the all-important feedback profile that follows every eBay user around like a shadow.

Chapter 1

Why eBay Is a Great Place to Buy and Sell

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding out about eBay
 - ▶ Getting the lowdown on types of auctions and buying formats
 - ▶ Using features and fun stuff
 - ▶ Getting the inside track on digital cameras and scanners
-

eBay has emerged as *the* marketplace for the twenty-first century. The founders had a very clever idea back in 1995 (read about some eBay history in the ‘eBay’s humble beginnings’ sidebar, later in this chapter), and over a decade later the world is obsessed with shopping and selling online. eBay is a safe and fun place to shop for everything from collectables to clothing, all from the comfort of your home.

eBay is now also a marketplace for new merchandise. It’s no longer just the destination for obscure collectables and old china patterns. These days you can buy new and useful items, such as alarm systems, fancy electric toothbrushes, designer clothing, cars, homes, villas in Portugal – more or less anything you can think of.

Have a look around your house. Nice toaster. Unusual clock. Natty microwave. Not to mention all the other fab stuff you own. All these household appliances and collectables are lovely to own, but when was the last time your toaster turned a profit? When you connect to eBay, your PC or Mac magically turns into a money machine. Just visit eBay and marvel at all the items that are only a few mouse clicks away from being bought and sold.

In this chapter, we tell you what eBay is and how it works. eBay is the perfect alternative to spending hours wandering through antique shops or car boot sales looking for the perfect thingamyjig. It can also be your personal shopper for presents and day-to-day items. Not only can you buy and sell stuff in the privacy of your home, but you can also meet people who share your interests. The people who use the eBay site are a friendly crowd, and you can very quickly be buying, selling, swapping stories and trading advice with the best of them.

What Is eBay and How Does It Work?

The Internet is spawning all kinds of new businesses (known as *e-commerce* to City types), and eBay is one of its few superstars. The reason is simple: it's the place where buyers and sellers can meet, do business, share stories and tips, and have a laugh.

eBay doesn't sell a thing. Instead, the site does what all good hosts do: it creates a comfy environment that brings people with common interests together. You can think of eBay as you think of the person who set you up on your last blind date – except the results are often a lot better. Your match-making friend doesn't perform a marriage ceremony but does get you in the same room with your potential soul-mate. eBay puts buyers and sellers in a virtual shop and lets them conduct their business safely within the rules that it has established.

All you need to do to join eBay is fill in a few online forms and click. Congratulations – you're a member, with no big fees or secret handshakes. After you register, you can buy and sell anything that falls within the eBay rules and regulations. (Chapter 2 eases you through the registration process.)

The eBay home page, shown in Figure 1-1, is your first step to finding all the smart things you can see and do at eBay. You can conduct searches, find out what's happening and get an instant link to the My eBay page, which helps you keep track of every auction item you have up for sale or are bidding on. You can read more about the eBay home page in Chapter 3 and find out more about My eBay in Chapter 4.

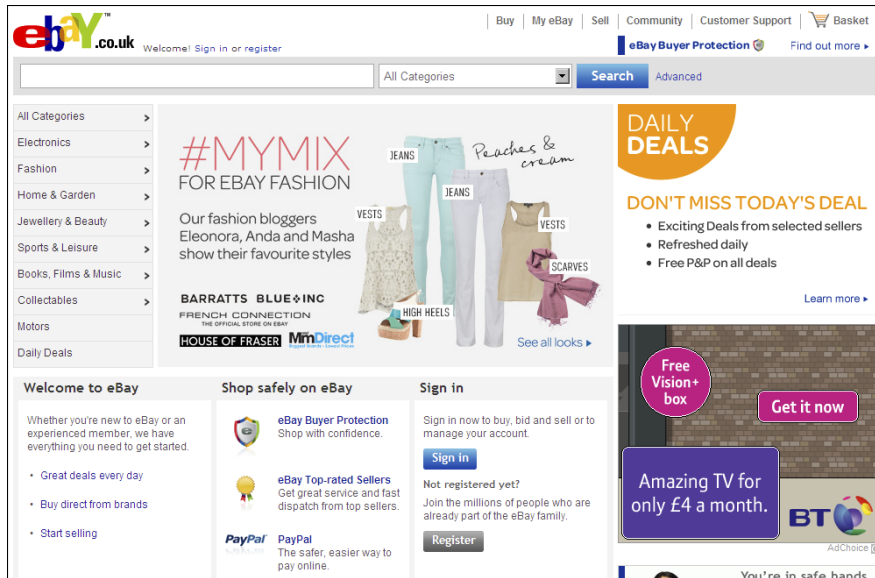
eBay's humble beginnings

The long-standing urban myth says that eBay all started with a Pez dispenser. But as romantic as the story is (of the young man who designed the site for his fiancée to trade Pez dispensers), it sadly was public relations spin. The founder, Pierre Omidyar, had the right vision at the right time, and the first item he sold on the site was a broken laser pointer. As the days went by, new people were drawn to the site from Internet chatter. The site eventually grew to the point where it began to strain Pierre's Internet Service Provider (ISP). The ISP charged him

more, so he started charging a small listing fee for sellers, just to break even. Legend has it that the day Pierre clocked up \$10,000 in fees he gave up his day job. (We hope that's not apocryphal too!)

eBay was born in September 1995. The name eBay is taken from California's Echo Bay, the name Pierre originally wanted for his company. But another company had taken that name, so he shortened the name to eBay – and the rest, as they say, is history.

Figure 1-1:
The eBay
home page,
your starting
point for
bargains
and for
making
some
serious
cash.



All about Auctions

How much someone is willing to spend to buy an item determines its value. That's what makes auctions exciting. eBay offers several kinds of auctions, but for the most part, they all work the same way. An *auction* is a unique sales event where you don't know the exact value of the item for sale. As a result, an element of surprise is involved – not only for the bidder (who may end up with a tasty bargain) but also for the seller (who may end up making a killing). Here's how an auction works from the perspective of a seller and a bidder:

- ✓ **Seller:** A seller pays a fee, fills in an online form, and sets up the auction, listing the *minimum bid* he's willing to accept for the item. Think of an auctioneer at Sotheby's saying, 'The bidding for this diamond necklace starts at \$5,000.' You may want to bid \$4,000, but the auctioneer won't accept that bid. Sellers can also set a *reserve price*, sort of a financial safety net that protects them from losing money on the deal. We explain how these things work later in this section.
- ✓ **Bidder:** Bidders in auctions battle it out over a period of time (the minimum is a day, but most eBay auctions last a week or 10 days) until one comes out victorious. Usually, the highest bidder wins. The tricky thing about taking part in an auction (and the most exciting part) is that no one knows the final price an item goes for until the last second of the auction.

Charity auctions: All for a good cause

An *eBay for Charity* auction is a fundraising auction where the proceeds go to a selected charity. Most people don't wake up in the morning wanting to own a seven-foot quilt signed by Terry Wogan, but one-of-a-kind items like that are often auctioned off in charity auctions. (In fact, someone did want that quilt badly enough to buy it for a lot of money on eBay.) Charity auctions are run like most other eBay auctions, but because they're immensely popular, bidding

can be fierce, and the prices can go sky-high. Many celebrities use eBay to help out their favourite charities, and sometimes you can get your hands on unique memorabilia as well as helping a good cause – it's a win-win situation for everyone. If you fancy doing your bit to help and gain some instant karma while you're at it, why not donate some or all your profits from your auction sales to charity? You can read more about charity in Chapter 19.

eBay auctions

Unlike 'traditional' live auctions that end with the familiar phrase 'Going, going, gone!' the clock controls eBay auctions. The seller pays a fee and lists the item on the site for a pre-determined length of time; the highest bidder when the clock runs out takes home the prize.

Private (shhh-it's-a-secret) auctions

Some sellers choose to hold private auctions because they know that some bidders may be embarrassed to be seen bidding on a pair of kinky boots in front of the rest of the eBay community. Others may go the private route because they're selling very valuable items and don't want to disclose their bidder's financial status.

Private auctions are run like the typical timed auctions except that each bidder's identity is kept secret. At the end of the auction, eBay provides contact info to the seller and to the high bidder, and that's it.

You can send email questions to the seller in a private auction, although you can't check out your competition because the auction item page shows the current bid price but not the high bidder's User ID.

Multiple Item (Dutch) auctions

Multiple Item or Dutch auctions have nothing to do with clogs, Edam cheese, or halving the bill on a date. A *Multiple Item* auction allows a seller to put multiple, identical items up for sale. Instead of holding 100 separate auctions for 100 pairs of clogs, for example, a seller can sell them all in one listing. As a buyer, you can elect to bid for 1, 3 or all 100 pairs. But unless you're running an alternative Euro-boutique (or know a giant centipede who needs all those clogs), you probably want to bid on just one pair. For more on Multiple Item auctions, see Chapter 7.

A seller can't conduct a Multiple Item auction as a private auction.

Buying It Now at eBay

You don't have to bid in an auction on eBay to buy something. If you've found something you want to buy – something you *must* have and you don't want to wait for an auction to end – you've a good chance of finding one on eBay to buy immediately. Of course, using Buy It Now (BIN in eBay speak) doesn't have the thrill of an auction, but buying an item for a fraction of the retail price without leaving your chair or waiting for an auction to end has its own warm and fuzzy kind of excitement. If you seek this kind of instant gratification on eBay, look for the Buy It Now icon in the lists of items for sale. You can also visit the eBay shops, where you find loads of Buy It Now items lined up for the taking. For more on how Buy It Now sales work, check out Chapter 6.

Visiting eBay Shops is as easy as clicking the eBay Shops link from the home page. Thousands of eBay sellers have set up shops, with much of the merchandise available to Buy It Now. Here you can buy anything from socks to jewellery to sports memorabilia – or even a kitchen sink!

Sellers who open an eBay shop have to meet a certain level of experience on eBay, and when you buy from eBay Shops, you're protected by the same fraud protection policy that covers you in eBay auctions. Figure 1-2 shows the eBay Shops home page.

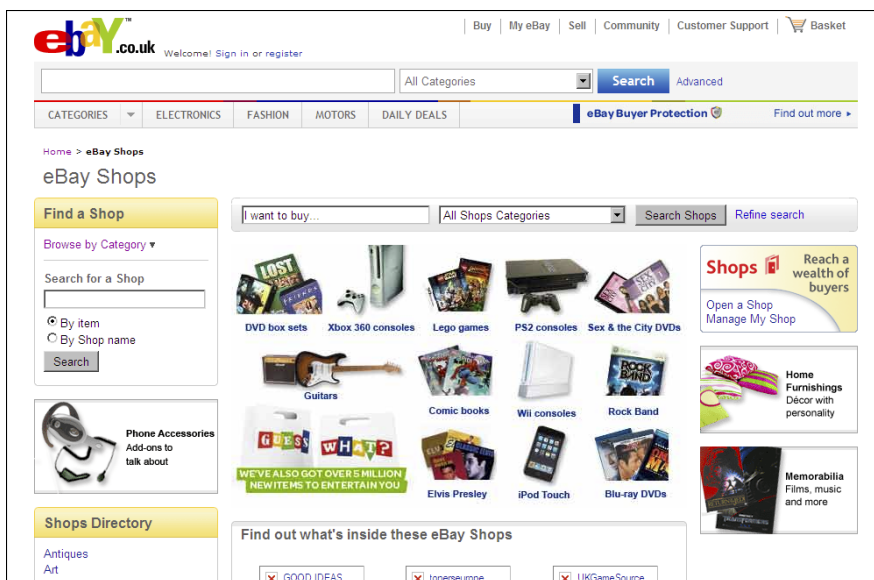


Figure 1-2:
From the
eBay Shops
home page,
you can
find almost
anything.

So You Want to Sell Stuff

If you're a seller, creating a listing page at eBay is as simple as filling in an online form. You type in the name of your item and a short description, add a crisp digital picture, set your price and *voilà* – your auction begins. (Okay, things are a tad more involved than that, but not much.) eBay charges a small fee (depending on the start price and the category) for the privilege of listing your item. When you list your item, millions of people (eBay has more than 250 million registered users) from all over the world can have a gander at it and place bids. With a bit of luck, a bidding war may break out and drive the bids up high enough for you to turn a nice profit. After the sale, you deal directly with the buyer, who sends you the payment through a payment service such as PayPal or through the post. Then you send the buyer the item. Abracadabra – you just turned your item (unwanted clutter, perhaps) into cash.

To get info on deciding what to sell, leaf through Chapter 9; to find out how to set up an auction, jump to Chapter 10; and to get the inside word on advanced selling, visit Chapter 14. When you want to get really serious about your selling, see Chapter 15.