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The Insiders Guide  
To eBay Selling  
Strategies That Work!

**DAVID A. GRANT**

# **Winning Bidder**

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to eBay Selling Strategies  
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David A. Grant

Winning Bidder  
Publications

Salem, New Hampshire

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: <i>Introduction</i> .....	2
Chapter Two: <i>Know Thy Competitor</i> .....	7
Chapter Three: <i>Understanding How Bidders Find You</i> .....	18
Chapter Four: <i>Keywords- Just The Facts</i> .....	21
Chapter Five: <i>Mining The Engines</i> .....	31
Chapter Six: <i>Understanding Search Results</i> .....	45
Chapter Seven: <i>Writing Killer Auction Titles</i> .....	51
Chapter Eight: <i>The Process- From Listing To Winning Bidder</i> .....	64
Chapter Nine: <i>Proven Tips, Tricks &amp; Strategies- The Inside Story</i> .....	66

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

If you are anything like me, your inbox has regular visitors all shouting words of hope and inspiration. Promises like, “Get RICH on eBay,” “Earn \$100,000 a year working part time,” and more scream the headlines. Sadly, these are the days of email fraud, scams, identity theft rings and worse.


Sure, almost anyone can list and sell an item on eBay, but is there real money to be made? And how can I get my own piece of the multimillion-dollar auction action? That’s exactly what this book will show you how to do. I’ll work with you, side-by-side, and share real life, practical experience and tips; tips that I have shared with other eBay sellers. No smoke and mirrors, no false promises. I offer simple, practical, real world information that is **PROVEN** to work.

You may already be asking yourself if this is yet another compilation of common sense information that anyone with a PC and Google can find. Nothing could be further from the truth. I’ll share insider, practical information and show you exactly how to apply this information to your eBay business. Valuable to eBay newbies and seasoned auction enthusiasts alike, I’ll show you practical information to jump-start a new business. Well-seasoned auction enthusiasts will find the information I am presenting to be an invaluable asset that can be used to dramatically increase sales of their online businesses.

If your desire is to start an eBay business from scratch for a great second source of income (yes, you too can work from home!), you’ll find tips, tricks,

and anecdotes that have worked wonders for other eBay sellers- both new eBay players and seasoned veterans alike.

You may already be asking yourself what makes this book different from the countless other books on auction success that seem to be proliferating bookstore shelves and the Internet today. First and foremost, this is NOT a “get rich quick” book. In fact, I won’t even tell you what to sell, as this book is not about *what* products or services you should offer. It’s a real life resource of practical tips about *how* to sell. The simple reality is this- running an eBay business requires an investment of time. Invest your time wisely, and you’ll reap handsome rewards. Invest without direction or proper research and prepare for inevitable frustration. Simply put, that’s just the way it is.

 WINNING BIDDER TIP! *Now’s a great time to grab a cup o’ Joe (or tea if that’s your preference) as it’s time to get to know each other a bit better.*

My own personal career path spans almost two decades of sales and marketing experience. From my humble beginnings selling termite treatments door-to-door to working side by side with some of the best marketing talent in corporate America today, I can safely say, “been there, done that” to most aspects of the sales and marketing business. From one-on-one sales presentations sitting around a kitchen table to hopping on a jet to participate at the executive level in the development of national marketing campaigns, initiatives and the development of marketing collateral, my own exposure to the principles that compel people to buy both products and services is vast.

As eBay began to pick up momentum in the late nineties, it became increasingly more difficult to ignore the soft whispers around the corporate

water coolers. “Did you hear that so-and-so quit last week and earns a living on eBay?” Initially met with skepticism, more and more auction success stories made the rounds. Even the most conservative folks began to wonder about what initially appeared to be a passing fad. Yes, it appeared that the auction sites were here to stay. The flow of both legitimate as well as erroneous information about the growing auction phenomena began to permeate the mainstream media outlets as eBay grew.

The early 2000’s saw a very dramatic shift in the eBay seller community as a whole. As the “new economy” crashed and more of the dot-com’s turned into dot-gones, more legitimate businesses began to explore the possibilities of using the auction websites as viable distribution channels. No longer was eBay the home of trading cards and Beanie Babies. And eBay grew. Today, leading companies from most every market have an eBay presence. From the home improvement giant Home Depot, to mega-retailers like Sears, to technology giants like Hewlett-Packard, mainstream corporate America has discovered eBay. Most importantly, this influx of corporate giants into the auction landscape legitimized eBay as a powerful marketing tool. Yes, eBay was here to stay.

<b>eBay by the Numbers</b>	
135.5 Million	Number of users worldwide (as of 4/05)
83 Million	Registered users in the US
54 Million	Estimated number of registered users who are "active"
52.2 Million	Registered users outside the US
12 Million	Average number of daily auctions in 2005
2.1 Billion Dollars	<u>eBay's 2003 Total Sales</u>

**Figure 1.1**

As a web developer, graphic designer and writer, I pondered for years how I could capitalize on this phenomenon. I gradually worked up the courage to test the eBay waters in 2001 with my first online auctions. Much to my delight, eBay was not a market for products only. Folks were using eBay to purchase services! This one fact alone points to the dramatic growth and maturity of eBay bidders. While it's relatively easy to return a broken or defective product, just how exactly does a consumer return a service purchased?

Over the next couple of years, my own eBay business grew. Never one to put all my eggs in one basket, I kept the door open with other venues for meeting new clients. Yet, it was hard to ignore the staggering fact that eBay fast became my largest single source of new clients. Over time, I found I was no longer providing service to a local or even regional client base. My customers came to me from around the world. Clients from Great Britain, Scotland, Australia, Pakistan, and more, were finding me amid the millions of other eBay sellers. Did they find me by chance or circumstance? Not hardly. Techniques I'll show you later on will prove that this was not a matter of luck or even fate. There is a clear and calculated methodology that drives clients to me. I will be sharing the exact steps I took- steps you can mirror to achieve the same successes.

Always one to analyze my customers, a clear pattern began to emerge. The demographics of my average client began to shift. No longer was my typical client simply a small business owner or entrepreneur looking for services to brand their respective businesses. Today, my typical new client is an eBay seller- either new to eBay or a seasoned auction professional, either starting an eBay business, or attempting to take an existing business to the proverbial next level. Just like the TV chef Emeril likes to "BAM" his recipe to take it up a notch, I've developed a recipe to "BAM" your eBay business. Included are proven techniques, strategies and resources that already have a well-

established track record of dramatically increasing auction sales. Not auction rhetoric or sales theory, these are practical, time tested and most importantly – proven – strategies that work.

At the very least, I'll show you how to jumpstart your eBay business. If you've already achieved that all-important Power Seller status, a warm congratulation is in order. You already know what it takes to succeed. As a Power Seller, if I could show you how to increase your auction traffic by 25%, 50% or more, would you be interested? Sure you would! EBay sellers, large and small, are already using my practical approach. Sellers using these techniques are generating millions of dollars in aggregate sales.

As many of us have heard, “minds are like parachutes, they function best when open.” It's time to grab your parachute, hold on, and let's jump!

## C H A P T E R T W O

### KNOW THY COMPETITOR

An important point to restate is this: this book is about *how* to sell more on eBay and not about *what* to sell. Product fads come and go. Consumers have very short attention spans. Though favored products change, what remains unchanged is the process of *how* people buy. By best understanding the *how* of the buying process, you then become the Keeper of Timeless information. Never underestimate the true and absolute power that Keepers of this knowledge possess. Your understanding of exactly how consumers find products and services, and what compels them to buy is your proverbial “ace in the hole.”

Nothing pays higher dividends than research. Most folks have a good feel for what they want to sell. Taking this concept one step further, many new eBay sellers initially start by selling products or services in the very industries they have worked in. It’s human nature, you know. We like to stick with what we are familiar with.

Even though you may “think” you know your competition in the traditional sense, eBay is a vast, worldwide behemoth unlike any other marketplace. Experienced auction sellers know this. The traditional types of marketing techniques and initiatives used by most businesses change dramatically when it comes to eBay. Later in this book, I’ll get into significant detail about how consumers search on eBay.



**WINNING BIDDER ACTION ITEM!** *You'll want a single place to compile the marketing information you collect along the way. For some of you, an old fashioned spiral-bound notebook will do the trick. Others will favor opening a new document in their word processing application of choice. Whatever your preferences, make a tangible commitment to your future success by taking copious notes along the way. Trust me on this one, as we have a lot of ground to cover. You'll thank me later.*

When you're ready to begin, plan on allocating about an hour of your time for preliminary research. It is critical that you make this a time that you can work without interruption. Many of the eBay sellers I work with every day are younger parents looking for a second source of income. Worth noting, I've seen many of these same types of folks move on to full time self-employment. It's not uncommon for me to be engaged in dialogue with clients while listening to a crying baby or toddler in the background. Personally, I find it endearing, as I know from personal experience the joys of not having a commute to work. Times with little ones up and about, needing occasional attention, and even a hug are NOT the times to schedule your research time. If you were studying for the Bar exam or other important test, you would most likely create a time when you can work without interruption. Planning the roadmap for your own future is no less important. Early risers may want to block off time before the kids wake up. Most folks, however, will wait until evening. Whatever your preference, it's helpful to set an appointment with yourself. Most importantly, don't leave yourself standing at the altar. Keep your appointment!

There are a few important points to keep in mind: Rome was not built in a day. Learning all the nuances and all that is unique to the auction marketplace takes time. Exactly how much time is determined by both your market as well

as how quickly you learn. You can rest easy, though; this is not brain surgery. One of my primary goals here is to present critical information in an easy to apply format, and save you from spinning your tires.

When I started my own business, I made a commitment to my own future success very early on. Quite simply, I made it a point to take one small step forward every day, without exception. Some days, my “step” was nothing more than spending five minutes conducting a bit of online research. On other days, I’d invest an hour or more of my time in learning. In retrospect, this approach was singularly the most important concept that helped me. Early on, after my head hit the pillow after a long day, my eyes would pop open in horror with the realization I had not taken a small step that day. My commitment was unwavering (and I was already starting to earn secondary income) so I’d leap out of bed to find a small task to do.


The amount of time spent is not as important as getting into the habit of moving forward on a daily basis. In my own case, days added up to weeks, weeks to months, and the months added up to years. Great things have happened along the way. I opened more and more web-based companies, added more and more services, and started seeing a TANGIBLE financial reward for my invested time. More importantly, I am having fun! Growing a business is an empowering experience. The joy is truly in the journey.

Let’s come up for air for a moment, shall we? It’s time for that all-important progress check. You’ve already made some very important, potentially life-changing decisions. You’ve decided to venture into an auction business for the first time, or are looking to grow an existing auction business. This one fact alone is not to be overlooked in its significance. Next up - the very fact that you are now reading these words shows that you are open to doing your homework and learning new concepts. This fact alone sets you miles above folks who push headstrong into a venture without the forethought


of research. Attributes like these are common to those who see a good measure of success along the way. You are to be congratulated.

That being said, it's time to get into specific details about exactly how to conduct your first scheduled competitive market research. I am assuming you've scheduled your first research appointment and are now sitting quietly in front of your PC or laptop. As the main eBay window opens and the butterflies stir inside you, it's important to get "in the mood". No, not that mood. This is, after all, a family friendly book!

As you sit in front of your monitor, take a deep breath. Exhale. Do it again. Clear your mind. There is a critical point to all of this. It is imperative that you adopt the mindset that you are NOT looking at your competition. Imagine yourself as a *consumer* looking for the types of products and/or services that you intend to offer. The importance of adopting and maintaining this mindset cannot be overstated. You'll want to search as a *consumer*, not a *competitor*. Though I'll get into much more detail about keywords and exactly how people search later in this book, search using the types of terms that you would expect other *consumers* like you to use. Think of the terms that an eBay seller may use to drive traffic to an auction. In most markets, the search results yield a varied mix of matches. Matches will range from individual seller auctions to a number of "commercial" seller auctions rounding out the mix.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *Most legitimate eBay sellers will have an eBay storefront. To quickly find some of the larger players in your marketplace, click on the eBay Stores link on the left hand main page navigation section. You'll then have the option to search through stores by keywords. Though very few consumers will ever search through eBay like this, you can find some of the bigger players in pretty short notice. eBay will then display search matches with the highest inventory stores leading up the list.*

As you start to browse through your search matches, two reminders are in order. Repeatedly remind yourself that you are a *consumer* looking for a product or service. Most savvy business folks will start looking at auctions with a competitive eye from the get-go. Fight the urge! Next up, stay focused on EXACTLY where your eye tracks on both the main search page as well as individual auctions. What catches your eye? Was it a color? Did a particular gallery image catch your eye? (*Note: Gallery images are the thumbnail images on the main search screen.*) Take a moment now to make a note of whatever caught your eye. Did you remember who you are? Yes, good answer. You are a consumer! Contrary to what logic tells you, price is not always the compelling reason for traffic to your auctions. Buying is an emotional process, and logic takes a back seat.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *Don't fall into the price pit. Though understanding that an effective overall pricing strategy is important, emotion drives clicks. I've seen many auction sellers decide that poor auction performance is price related. They lower and lower prices and shake their heads befuddled that their auctions close with no bidders. They fail to realize that there is an underlying flaw in content presentation.*

In the case of my own eBay presences, a full 85% or more sell their services at a lower cost point than I do - yet I stay amazingly busy. I am currently one of the top-rated graphic designers WORLDWIDE on eBay based on my feedback rating. If folks bought only on price, I'd probably need a part time job!

As you continue to move forward with your research, make a note of the specific auctions that appeal to you. Taking it a step further, within the individual auctions that appeal to you, what are the elements of that auction

that catch your eye? Is it a photograph? How about a layout style? Is it the type of descriptive text that appeals to you? Make a note of it and write it down.

Of equal importance, be aware of auctions that you would NOT bid on. Again, it's time to ask yourself a lot of questions: What about a specific auction tells you not to buy? Are the fonts mismatched? Does the layout look like a child made it? Are there typographical errors? No images or worse yet-poor images? Take plentiful notes here as well. If there is something in an auction that makes you want to "steer clear", you are probably not alone. If you take a moment to look at your list of auction "no-no's," you'll probably see that pricing does not appear on your list. If it does, it's probably pretty low on the list. Again, folks do not place price in the paramount spot!


Moving forward, it's important to schedule more than one "Consumer Research Session." Depending on your state of mind, the time of day, phases of the moon, and more, different sessions will yield slightly different results. You will, however, start to see a commonality across multiple sellers with varied inventory items. The message emerging will tell you clearly "this is a seller I may patronize." Of equal, if not more importance, you'll see a clear pattern emerge for those sellers whose actions you will never bid on. This is the ultimate goal for this type of research. Your objective is to clearly define those auction attributes that would compel you to buy as a consumer as well as the attributes that tell you to stay well away from a seller. This is the proverbial brass ring here, as you want to apply as many of the desirable attributes as possible. It goes without saying that you want to avoid the pitfalls of those auctions that you marked as those to avoid.

Though varied market by market, in all probability, the sellers who you would consider all have some similar attributes.

**-- High Positive Feedback!** eBay is great at leveling the playing field with its feedback system. Given two identical auctions - identical in every way except the feedback, most bidders will choose the seller with the highest feedback. This is not always the case, however. I'll get into more detail later about the difference between feedback quality vs. feedback quantity. Let's take a moment to look at a "where would you bid" scenario. Seller One has a feedback rating of 215 positives, while seller two only has 75 positives. Again, keep in mind that our hypothetical example involves two IDENTICAL auctions. Most bidders would initially be drawn to the higher feedback seller. Imagine though that the higher feedback seller has three to four negatives in the last two months. Where would your bid then go? Exactly. Most folks would use the lower feedback seller. Just like auction price is not a deal breaker, high feedback alone does not guarantee success.

**--Quality Images.** As the Internet is very much a visual medium, attention to items that enhance auctions is critical. In referencing quality images, more is being alluded to than just product pictures. Quality auction imagery can add instant eye appeal to most any auction. A well-defined company logo or identity, quality product images, and well-placed companion graphics can really pull an auction together and give the "feel" of a highly proficient seller.

**--Focused Seller.** You've found a seller through your consumer research. You've looked at the auction and it's passed your own internal qualifications as a possible provider. Most eBay visitors will then click through to the sellers' store. Much to your surprise, though you wanted to buy discount vitamins, the sellers' store is more focused on comic book sales. (Yes, scenarios like this are played out every day!) Though you had a warm and fuzzy feeling about the seller, your confidence crashed when you landed on his store. As a rule, the most successful eBay sellers stay market focused, selling products and associated products that are of interest to the same type of consumer.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *If your product/service offering is varied and the demographics of your clients are wide, you may want to consider opening two (or more) eBay stores. eBay allows this practice. The small extra costs incurred by running a second storefront are well offset by increased sales overall. Keep the comic books in one store and the vitamins in the other. Your clients will reward you with more orders in BOTH stores!*


In my own life, I have learned the importance of avoiding negativity like the plague. Negative thoughts and emotions are like dark clouds on a sunny day. They ruin more picnics than most of us will ever imagine. It is important, however, that we pick apart some of the less than bid-able auctions to learn what not to do. In an effort to put a positive spin on this, let's thank the Keepers of the Undesirable Auctions for all they show us. They have become, though indirectly, our best teachers. For that, they should be thanked. What are some of the most common reasons folks skip a particular auction?

**--No Images.** Can you imagine going to the cinema and just listening? Eye appeal adds so much to the auction experience. Text only auctions are about as much fun to watch as drying paint!

**--Typographical Errors.** We all make mistakes. Erasers are not on pencils by chance. What I am referencing here is the auction with multiple spelling errors, poor grammar, and little, if any, punctuation. If a seller can't take care of details like this, what does that say about his overall commitment to quality? Thanks, but no thanks.

**--S L O W   L O A D   A U C T I O N S** – The pendulum occasionally swings the other way. Larger single images or multiple smaller images drag

page load times to unacceptable levels. The net result: bidders simply click away, never to return again.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *As over 70% of all eBay users connect to the Internet with a dial-up connection, fast loading auctions are critical to your success. Total auction files need to be under 200kb in size. Bigger is not always better!*

**--Competition Bashing.** Would everyone who's reading this who likes a bully, please raise your hand? Well, except for the guy in the third row, no hands went up. Don't worry; we'll get him the help he needs! Nothing is more unflattering than a seller who bashes competitors in the first few lines of text. Yes, I see auctions like this every week. Though eBay is a worldwide phenomenon, I live in America. Healthy competition keeps the playing field level. I will get into much more detail about the importance of "playing well with others" much later, but suffice to say, speak no ill in your auctions. Sellers who engage in this type of business practice will have an eBay shelf life that is less than the time it will take you to read this book. Rest easy, however as they will be quickly replaced by other "short shelf-life" sellers. Such is the nature of eBay. In the final equation, it will be the feedback system that is the tell all. Hold your head high and move forward with integrity and your buyers will reward you handsomely with both orders and positive feedback.

**-- Overpriced Auctions.** This may sound contrary to many of the earlier points I made about pricing not being the prime factor in an auction purchase. Though it is not a prime factor, we do need to look at an effective overall pricing strategy.

In my case, my own auctions are priced about 25%-35% above eBay averages for my services. Yes, I follow my own advice and watch competitors closely. As my own auctions have a good overall “buy feel” to them, coupled with the overall “quality” of my feedback, my customers will happily pay an extra 25%-35% to receive a quality of service that is double that of other sellers. My feedback tells potential new customers what level of service they can expect. Though my price is higher, I deliver the best overall VALUE on eBay today. Keep in mind that price is only one ingredient in the Value Equation. If, however, my pricing were 2-3 times what other eBay sellers were charging in my industry, even if the overall value was there, I would not see enough traffic to my auctions to justify my hefty prices.

**--Scattered Content Presentation.** Does the seller use four styles of fonts? Are images placed willy-nilly in the auction? Do you feel like you are reading a ransom note? Has the seller included the quintessential Kiss of Death- Clip Art? Yes, presentation of content is critical. A word to the wise- keep your text copy short, feature rich, and always lead with the chin-meaning place your top features in the top section of your auctions!

Lets take some time to review some of the critical points we have covered so far. Worth noting, we'll do this same exercise on occasion in the future. It's always best to review before moving on to our next section.

Effective research does indeed pay handsome dividends. Multi-million dollar corporations don't spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars in consumer buying and focus group research without just cause. They also know that by understanding buying habits of consumers, and applying that knowledge to their marketing initiatives, they will recoup their costs many times over. They realize the importance of understanding how consumers “feel” about their products. By applying the information their research generates to their marketing initiatives, they increase sales. In a much

smaller realm, we are following the exact same process- research, understand & apply.

As very few of us have a hundred grand kicking around to fund our own focus groups and commission consumer research, it is imperative not to gloss over the importance of understanding the “why” of consumer buying in your specific marketplace.

Most business owners and entrepreneurs are an ego-driven lot. I make this comment with a huge fondness for these individuals. Driven by passion and plans for impending successes and riches, the biggest challenge can be found in finding a chink in the armor their egos build. Rest assured, some who read this book are already saying, “I already know why my customers will buy from me.” While that may be true, in part, let’s look at the buying process from an objective standpoint.

The more detail you know about “why” a client would choose you over a competitor, the higher the probability you can use this knowledge to your advantage (and financial success). If you still think you know all there is to know about your clients, read on. In the next chapter, I’ll share a bit about Kevin’s story. He “thought” he knew about the buying traits of his clients. A bit of research showed how far off base he really was. With a bit of direction and guidance, his auction sales doubled- almost overnight!

**To order your complete copy of *Winning Bidder, the Insiders Guide to eBay Selling Strategies that work*, visit [www.WinningBidder.net](http://www.WinningBidder.net)**