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Winning Bidder

**The Insiders Guide to eBay Selling
Strategies That Work!**

**Best Match- What eBay
Won't Tell You!**

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how to:**

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eBay Sales**
- ★ **Understand
Best Match!**
- ★ **Determine How
Bidders Buy**

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Book I've ever read! 5 Stars!"*

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Sell More On



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Certified eBay Store Designer

Winning Bidder

The Insiders Guide
to eBay Selling Strategies
That Work!

David A. Grant

Winning Bidder
Publications
Salem, New Hampshire

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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.

eBay by the Numbers	
200 Million ++	Number of users worldwide
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
7.6 BILLION Dollars	eBay's 2007 Total Sales

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!

T H R E E

UNDERSTANDING HOW BIDDERS FIND YOU

Get comfortable. We are going to spend a lot of time on this topic. As one of my clients shared with me recently, “You can build a perfect mousetrap, but if the guy next door doesn’t know about it, it’s useless.” We’ve spent a lot of time going over the dynamics of “why” folks buy. Folks buy because it “feels right” to make the purchase. This buying state is created by many of the attributes we’ve covered in the last chapter.

Suppose then, that we have created the “buy it now” state. The table has been set. We now need to make sure our guests show up for dinner! The challenge of putting products in front of a consumer ready to purchase is a challenge as old as time itself. In fact, this may be the world's second oldest profession.

Today’s marketplace is truly global in nature. In recent years, I’ve seen my service coverage area expand from purely local clients to a growing worldwide footprint spanning many continents and quite literally dozens of countries. I still marvel at how small the Internet has made the global marketplace. I had a recent client tell me that my services were of a higher quality than anything he could find locally. He made the choice to work with my company- over a thousand miles away. I have long since found that lunch dates and handshakes no longer measure friendships. I know many folks who are near and dear to me that I will, in all probability, never meet face to face. The Internet has made it easier for a client from the UK to conduct business with me here in the States than to find a local service provider. From the standpoint of those looking for products and services, it’s a great opportunity as choices abound like never before.

The very fact that consumers have such a sweeping range of choices-international, regional, and local, makes it increasingly difficult for many businesses. Exactly how are they expected to rise above the sometimes hundreds of legitimate competitors and into the eyes, mind and yes- wallets of today's increasingly savvy consumers?

This is a great time to share a real-life story about one of my clients. Kevin was working at a feverish pace to get his business off the ground. Huge on both drive and passion, what he lacked was the knowledge of exactly how to put his products in front of consumers. His reproduction wartime propaganda poster business was a hit to folks who, more often than not, stumbled across his business by accident. One of my fondest memories involved a call placed to my office one morning. "David, I am now the NUMBER ONE match on Google when I search under my company name," he proclaimed proudly. I need to share that, even today, I am occasionally guilty of speaking first and thinking second. Without any forethought, I asked Kevin how many folks he expected would actually be searching under his company name. *The ensuing silence was deafening.*

You see, Kevin very well understood the importance of a high position on the radar screen of potential customers. He well understood that his company name needed exposure to his target audience. What he didn't factor in, however, was *how* his potential clients would go about searching for his products. Business owners repeat this same oversight day in and day out every day. They only *perceive* that they know how consumers will find their business. These mistaken perceptions are based on feelings and conjecture and not on hard data.

An in-depth understanding of EXACTLY how today's consumers search for the types of products and services you offer is singularly the most important factor to your success. Develop an accurate understanding of how

consumers find you and you are well on your way to success. Fail to understand the dynamics of how folks will find you, and you can quickly join the ranks of those whose businesses have fallen by the wayside. We can add another factor into the “how” of how folks find you. Search techniques will change over time. The way consumers search today has changed dramatically when compared to even two years ago. The latest emerging search data shows that an increasing percentage of consumers are now using the Internet to search for local service providers. This speaks directly to the growing Internet search skills of today’s consumers.

One of my primary objectives is to share meaningful information with you, the reader, in clear, easy to understand English. I will avoid “geek-speak” whenever possible. Secondly, my intent is to pass on information that won’t be outdated in a year or two. I will delve very deep into providing information to help you in identifying and understanding the *process* of how exactly consumers find services or products. As you become familiar with the process, the information I present becomes timeless in that understanding the process will be valuable information this year, next year and beyond. There is the need, however, to get into a fair degree of detail that may seem a bit “techie”. No worries, however, as I am unwavering in my commitment to presenting the type of information critical to your success in easy to understand, and more importantly- easy to apply terms!

KEYWORDS- JUST THE FACTS

Consumers today have a veritable wellspring of places to search. There are the Big Gun search engines like Google and Yahoo. The past year saw a very dramatic increase in folks using specialty search engines like Ask.com. We can't discount venues like MSN, AOL Search and the growing number of middle market search engines out in cyberspace. A very common mindset I see with regularity is what I call Google-Vision.

A very common misconception insists that if a site is not well ranked on the "Big G," its chances of success are minimal. While most folks have heard of the Nielsen Ratings for television, few have heard of the Nielsen Net Ratings program. Just like television shows are ranked on market share, Nielsen now tracks information on where folks go while they surf online. Before you get alarmed that there are folks watching your every click (we'll get into that later), it's important to note that the Nielsen Net Rating program is a program with folks signing up as paid participants.


I have been a member of the Nielsen Net Rating community for many years. In fact, they pay for this participation. Did I mention that data has a tangible value? Twice yearly, Nielson sends me a \$50.00 check. It's not a get rich scheme, but given the option, I'll sacrifice a bit of my privacy for what amounts to a free dinner out a couple of times a year.

In addition to watching individual sites that folks frequent, Nielsen also watches the search engines closely. I referenced the importance of validating information earlier. This is just one of the tools out there that supplies accurate, up to date information.

The most recent results of search engine market share (current at the time of this writing) showed Google as being the number one engine. Google is the clear leader with over 58% market share. The last year has seen Yahoo fall below 30%.

Where's the surprise there? Of interest to us as watchers of how folks search is something that will surprise most folks. Yes, Google has 58% of the current search engine market wrapped up. The math is simple: 42% of all web searchers are not using Google. My mom, a retired math teacher will be proud of me for this one. The conclusion- there are more folks searching "off-Google." Yes, at 58% market share, it's an engine to be reckoned with, but success on Google alone is not a true measure of success on the engines any longer.

You may already be asking yourself why I am providing so much detail about search engines. The best reason first- the more you understand the "how" of the overall search process, the higher the probability that you can apply that specific information to your eBay auctions. We'll get into a lot more detail about how to do that later on. Remember this- long gone are the days of simply asking a friend or pulling out the Yellow Pages for information about a product or service provider.

 **WINNING BIDDER FACTIOD!** *Internet users do not significantly alter their method or searching dependent on what search engine they choose.*

A consumer will query Google the same way they will query the eBay search feature when looking for a product or service. A consumer looking to buy "Jeep accessories" will use the same search criteria on eBay as he would on Google. Worth repeating- the dynamics of how consumers search remains

relatively unchanged irrespective of where the search is conducted. By learning how folks search on the engines, we can capitalize on that information, as it is a direct reflection of how folks search on eBay!

So, how exactly is a businessperson supposed to find out the exact search habits of her clients? The answer to this question can be found by looking at the changes in the search engine marketplace that have occurred over the last decade. For us to effectively look forward to success, we must first delve deep into the past. Walk with me, if you will. Let's stroll back- back to the last century. Back to the deep and distant primordial past of the Internet. Back to 1995.

During the late 1990's, there was but a single dominating force in the search engine arena. In fact, many consumers of that age thought there was but a single search engine. Its name? AltaVista. Born in 1995, AltaVista helped legitimize the Internet as a venue for consumers to easily find products. Millions of consumers stopped by AltaVista on a daily basis to find information. As the folks that were managing AltaVista at the time came to fast realize, an ever-increasing percentage of their daily traffic was consumer based. They came, they searched, and they shopped. Wise to this, AltaVista added its own shopping search in the late 90's to cater to the wishes of consumers. Shortly thereafter appeared the first Sponsored Links. Also known as paid advertising, sponsored links were advertisements that appeared when specific words were typed into the search field. Search AltaVista in the late 1990's for Beanie Babies (there I go again) and amid the search matches might be paid advertisements linking to the Beanie Baby Superstores of that fated age. Seemingly overnight, people were using the Internet to find just about anything. Yes, eBay was still the best source worldwide for Beanie Babies, but major changes were in the air. The age of search engine dominance by a single search portal was about to change.

The late 1990's was an amazingly exciting time in the technology marketplace. Dot.Com millionaires and gazillionaires, many of them not yet old enough to shave, were springing up like dandelions in the spring. With the NASDAQ hovering at unprecedented levels, the "new economy" was in full swing. As the Internet grew, so followed the percentage of US households with Internet access. These newly wired consumers wanted content. Internet marketers, large and small alike, were only too happy to start adding content. As the sheer volume of pages online grew, the importance of quality search engine services grew along with it. With AltaVista answering the call of millions of web searchers every day, people started to watch... and plan.

Do you remember your first time? I was 36 years old and working for a high tech Dot.com in central New Hampshire. Parked comfortably in front of my monitor, I was approached by a senior member of our support staff. With his pocket protector positioned like a badge of honor, he asked me a question that changed my life. "Wanna see something cool?" It was late in the day and a "something cool" distraction had a welcome sound to it. He proceeded to introduce me to the newest rage in the geek-world at that time. Yes, it was my first time. My search engine loyalty and innocence was about to change. I had just Googled.

Unlike the link filled main page of AltaVista, here was a sleek white page, still mostly unchanged to this day, with a single search box. Simple in its elegance and huge on delivering quality search results my undying loyalty to AltaVista melted like a spring snowfall.

You may again be pondering about all the attention to search engines. Understanding the dynamics about how bidders search has its roots in how folks search in the engines. Background information about the growth and evolution of the search engines is critical to many of the concepts I will be presenting. For anyone serious about success on eBay, or in any web-based

business, learning should be a lifelong process. If I can leave you with an understanding of how you can apply this to your auction presence, I will have indeed succeeded in contributing to your success.

As history has well shown, I was not the only one to jump ship and migrate over to Google. As word spread, Internet users by the millions switched to Google. The primary reason was simple: Google delivered quality results. As a rule, most people take the engines for granted. In reality, the search engine marketplace is very competitive. Like many traditional businesses, the search engines deliver a product. Their product is the overall integrity of their respective search matches. The engine that delivers the best product is rewarded with larger market share. It's simple economics. We don't even need to factor in a price point, as today's engines are free for consumer use. To Google's credit, their commitment to producing the highest quality search results catapulted them into the public limelight with astronomical growth.

Had the new economy continued, with money flowing like a rushing New Hampshire river, you probably would not be reading this today. As we rounded the bend into the new millennium, it became clear that the bubble had burst. Gone were the days of "spend first, explain later." Headlines screamed of corporate bankruptcies and layoffs. Job losses were measured in hundreds of thousands and revenues lost in millions. No longer was funding being thrown at the engines by hopeful investors rolling the dice for even more money. Desperately, the engines, large and small alike, searched for a way to generate revenue. It was quickly proven that consumers would not pay to search. That left only one option. A revenue model emerged where businesses could pay for exposure on the engines. Search engines were allowing businesses the opportunity to advertise on their websites. Yes, times had changed. It was not a question of lack of integrity by the engines. After all, most of the paid advertisements were noted as such with terms like Sponsored

Link, Paid Advertisement and the like. Nor was it an attempt to alter perceived search results. History has already proven that consumers would favor the engines with the best product. As such, diluting the integrity of search matches was not really an option. In a word, this was survival.

As one of my restated goals is to present meaningful information to eBay sellers, let's look at exactly how you, as a seller, can use this information to grow your eBay business.

The paid advertising on the engines took many forms. For a time, banner advertising was popular. As consumers continued to become more Internet Savvy, banners were recognized for what they were- web-based commercials. While CTR's (click through rates) of banner ads started at 2%-3%- a number similar to the reply rate on traditional direct mail campaigns, their CTR's plummeted to well under one half of one percent as they faded into the white noise of web page content. Google spawned a series of pastel boxes on their main page and the term "sponsored link" was now appearing on most all of the larger as well as middle market search engines.

What the vast majority of web surfers still are not aware of is this: the engines are watching you. And they are taking notes. No, this is not a flyer into the realm of the paranormal. Nor am I personally paranoid. The engines have long made it a practice to keep track of *how* folks search. Sound familiar? Almost without exception, most every search conducted on-line is logged by the search engines. They know the exact phrase you searched for. They know who your Internet Service Provider is. They know the date, time and geographic location the search originated from. If you are a poor speller and typed your search incorrectly, they know that too! They know what you typed last week, last month, and even last year.

Not only do the engines watch what you are searching for, they also take notes! Over time, they have built monumental databases that keep track of exactly what consumers are searching for, as well as the exact search terms they are using from the comfort of home or office. If you Google today to look for a source of ink for the DeskJet sitting on your desk, chances are you typed in a phrase like, “ink toner” or “toner cartridge.” If you search like me, you may have added that all-important qualifying third word and searched under “cheap ink cartridge”. At least one of you is now smiling, as this is one of the most popular qualifying words used today. These things I know as I have long since made it a habit to watch those that watch.

Regardless of how you enter your search request, you can rest assured that the search engine you used has made a note of what you searched for, as well as the exact terminology you used for your search. Over time, clear patterns began to emerge showing EXACTLY how consumers looked for products or services. As referenced earlier, the dynamics of how consumers search are almost identical irrespective of where they look. People will search in almost the exact same manner on Google as they will peruse eBay for deals. Let’s not miss the importance of this point. *By understanding how consumers search on the engines, you then have knowledge of how they search on eBay.* We can thank the engines for allowing the general public access to this critical data.

The best way to present this information is to use one of my own service offerings as an example. Though my services include web site design, eBay store design, search engine optimizations and more, my number one entry-level service is my business logo design service. Worth noting- it is also my most popular selling item on eBay today.

When folks search, irrespective of where they search (sound familiar?), the information they enter into the search box, whether on a Yahoo search or an eBay search, is called the “search term.” Not to be confused with keywords, the “search terms” represent exactly what an Internet user types in to a search

field. Included in the search terms are keywords. An easy way to understand this is to think of keywords as an ingredient of the search terms. Pretty much a quintessential “no-brainer,” we are again referring to the exact text that folks search for. Included in the search terms are industry specific keywords and phrases. Let’s take it to another level. Search terms fall into four categories:

--Global Search Terms. This refers to the broad-based search terms with very little restrictions or qualifiers in the terms. In the example I’ll be using, the global search term would be *logo*.

--Tier Two Search Terms. This is generally a slight refinement of the global term or terms. Tier two search terms are generally two words. Again, keeping to our example, a tier two search term would be *logo design*.

--Tier Three Search Terms. As Internet users become more savvy at getting the information they need, an increasing number of folks now add a third word as a qualifier. The benefit to doing this is that it cuts down on irrelevant matches and delivers a more targeted list of matches. A common tier three search phrase in my industry is *business logo design*.

--All The Rest. In an effort to adhere to the K.I.S.S. rule (Keep it simple, seller) we can aggregate all search terms that don’t fit into any of the above categories into this one. We’ll call this the catchall category!



WINNING BIDDER TIP! *As we are going to delve into one of the most important topics we will be covering, now is probably a good time to refresh your coffee!*

The important point to note here is this: the more we refine a search term, the more targeted the consumer. While a consumer searching for the term “logo” might be in the market for anything from logo design software to information about taking a logo design class, it’s a pretty safe bet that the person searching under “business logo design” is in need of services. Simply put, the more targeted the phrase, the higher the probability that a searcher needs what you sell. Call me old-fashioned, but I like the thought of stacking the deck in my favor!

F I V E

MINING THE ENGINES

Let's get back to the search engine databases and get into more detail about how you can find out exactly what your potential clients are searching for and exactly how you can use this specific information to drive more traffic to your eBay auctions.

The two most widely used search engines at the time of this printing are Google and Yahoo. We've gone into a fair degree of detail about the types of search phrases are out there. A little know fact is that both of the engines allow public access to their vast databases. Though there are many keyword analyzer software applications and services you can subscribe to, three words prevail- Save Your Money! We are going to take an in-depth look at how to mine keyword data from these giants on the search engine world. A bit of a preview is in order. Once we have walked through the process of pulling your pertinent keywords from the engines, the next step is to best understand how to use this vital information. That information will follow in later chapters.

Let's look at Yahoo first. As the engines continued to evolve though the late 90's, a number of third party companies came into being with an interesting specialty. These organizations worked in partnership with the search engines to provided sponsored link content to both larger as well as middle market search engines alike. One of the largest paid content providers to appear at this time was a company called Overture. Overture provided paid listings to a number of search engines including Yahoo. This gave Yahoo an immediate revenue stream at a time when cash flow was critical. Yahoo liked Overture. In fact, Yahoo liked Overture so much that they bought the company! In the time it has taken you to read nothing more than this one sentence, thousands of searches are being conducted on Yahoo. Tens of thousands or search results are being viewed. And yes, Sponsored Links are being displayed worldwide. Keep in mind; it's always 8:00PM somewhere.

Given their choice, the engines would rather you pay for traffic than get it for free. As such, they want you to see results from paid advertising. For you to get results from paid advertising, you need access to data. I tell my children to “make healthy choices”. The engines have done the same. By allowing you, me, pretty much anyone access to their databases, paid advertising can be based on actual, not theoretical keyword selection. If those companies that are willing to buy traffic see decent results, they will continue to pay. It’s an endless loop. A decent return on advertising investment means more sales means more money to continue to pay the engines for sponsored links. Simply put, it is in the best interest of the search engines to point businesses will to spend for ranking in the right direction. They have an inherent interest in making this information available to all.

As one of my objectives is to provide easy access to information, I won’t be providing a click-by-click path to access the search engines database. The link to access the Google database is:

<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>

Copy this link onto your browser address bar and you can now access one of the largest keyword and search phrase databases created since the dawn of humanity. You’ll see that this page is simply and aptly titled Keyword Tool. This is the window into the search habits of your customers. You will now be able to see exactly what search phrases folks are using to search for your products and services. Go on; take it for a quick spin. I’ll wait. Try a couple of terms for your industry that you think would be global search terms. A wise sage once said, “it’s not the data, it’s the tale the data tells that counts.” We’ll get into some interesting information about how to use this data shortly. It’s a pretty safe bet you be surprised with the direction we are about to move in.

At first glance, most folks are apt to think that global search terms are best. This is a very easy trap to fall into. In fact, it is the most common mistake that folks make. In most every industry, however, thinking that the real value is in the most sought after terms is a mistake of gargantuan proportion. Think back to the search terms we covered earlier. The more targeted the term, the more targeted the traffic. As such, global search terms are nothing more than our starting point.

For the sake of continuity, we will continue the examples of search terms used in my own services. I will now walk step-by-step through the best way to interpret this information and apply it to your eBay auctions. Figure 5.1 shows the Overture search results for the term *logo design*.

Searches done in August 2005	
Count	Search Term
104620	design logo
7524	design free logo
6313	design logo orlando
5540	company design logo
5203	business design logo
3382	design graphic logo
2744	custom design logo
2476	corporate design logo
1540	design logo software
1522	design logo online
1337	design logo professional
1093	design logo own
1061	design logo toronto
975	design logo uk
918	church design logo
894	design logo sample
882	design logo web
803	design free logo software
791	corporate design identity logo
666	design logo studio
618	company design free logo
615	design firm logo
602	design logo sports
569	design logo site web

Figure 5.1

In the web world, there is an age old adage...*“it’s not the data, it’s the tale the data tells that matters.”* Nowhere is this more evident than in the analysis of keyword data. Let’s take some time to go over exactly how to analyze the keyword list in figure 5.1.

As this figure represents an exact screen shot from keyword search results, it’s important to become familiar with the format used to present this critical data. Worth repeating- it is by understanding exactly how folks search that is

your key to driving traffic to your auctions, irrespective of industry. As it's not "all about me," I'll be using a second example from an entirely different industry.

Back to the analysis. You'll note that the search results lead off with a blue header and a date. This represents the time range used to calculate the search term traffic. In our case, we are looking at numbers from August of 2005. The data represents a one-month snapshot of searches conducted within the Overture network. As a rule, I always think in terms of annual numbers. To use the data from the search we are referencing, keyword search results show that an Internet user used the term "design logo" 104,620 times in August of 2005. To assign an annual number to this, simply multiply by 12. As my mom was a math teacher for decades, I am about to make her proud. Simply put, over 1.2 million searches are completed within the overture network annually for this phrase. This is typical of what most industries will show for their global search phrases. Though the actual numbers will vary dramatically by industry, there are generally one or two terms that fall into the "global search term" category.


The most common mistake folks make in selecting search terms today is to jump right to the top of the list. Reaching for the brass ring, folks become blinded by the inherent challenges of selecting the grand daddy of phrases off their lists. This is true irrespective of whether the list is generated via one of the free keyword selectors like the keyword tool, or by one of the keyword software applications that folks are investing in these days. As so many businesses look to reach for the prime search phrases, we see the entire industries that become cluttered by folks looking for traffic based on the top keywords. In reality, they are doing us all a favor. The reason is simple-competition! Yes, the laws of supply and demand apply to the Internet and keyword usage. This leaves us in the absolutely delightful position of being

able to sit back, review the lists for our respective industries, and relax so we can then cherry-pick some decent tier two and three search phrases.

Though I categorized search phrases into a few defined categories, let's look at the number of searches on the list above. We won't be looking at the phrases for a moment- rather we will be looking at where to find the best keywords. Did I mention that we could roll this type of information directly into your auction titles to maximize traffic? Much more on that later!

If we look at the way the numbers break from the list on figure 5.1, we'll see the top, predominant phrase with over 100,000 searches. As we scroll downward through the list, you'll see a larger block of tier two phrases that see between 2,500 and 7,500 searches in August of 2005. We then drop down to a diminishing list. As is the case in many industries, the drop between the top phrase and number two phrase is dramatic. In the case of this example, we drop from over one hundred thousand to under ten thousand in just one step.

It is in the center block of phrases that we will always devote most of our attention. Hidden in this list are keyword diamonds just waiting to be mined! As they are overlooked by most, it is here that we will find our best choice of search phrases.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *This same type of keyword analysis is used for Pay Per Click programs as well. If you are looking to drive traffic to a companion website, or even to your auctions, the best value in keywords is in the tier two range. As pricing for paid advertising via PPC programs is determined by how competitive the search phrases is, you'll not be paying the top-dollar premium that is being paid by the less informed.*

If we take some time to look at the phrases that fall into the 2,500-7,500 searches category, an interesting pattern emerges. Though occasionally we see search terms with a geographic qualifier (in our list you'll see Orlando Logo Design), some very clear choices start to emerge for the top picks.

Our goals are twofold. First, we are attempting to define keywords that drive truly targeted traffic to our auctions. Keeping this in mind, we can immediately disqualify search phrases like "logo design software" as well as any search phrases referencing the word "free". It's a pretty safe bet that none of use are really looking to give away our products/services! Next up, we are looking to minimize competitive pressures on our keywords.

Though most of what we have discussed thus far relates to the identification of the search phrases your clients are using today, this same data is invaluable in choosing keywords for many of the Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising options available today. Whether you are looking at Google Adwords, a presence of Yahoo via Overture participation, or participating in eBay Keywords advertising (www.eBayKeywords.com), the same basics we have discussed apply.

By selecting well-qualified tier two and tier three keywords, you are eliminating the vast majority of your competitors. The mindset is simple. Though you will find a few other sellers who understand this concept, the lion's share of all sellers will ALWAYS look to the most popular, global search phrases to list by. This is not simply a hypothesis. It is a mentality I have seen in hundreds of sellers. By selecting tier two phases, and working them into keyword-rich titles (more on that later) your competitive pressures drop dramatically. Let's look at some real numbers, shall we?

Auction Listing Search Results	
Term	Matches
Logo Design	314
Business Logo Design	31
Company Logo Design	11
Corporate Logo Design	3

Figure 5.1

Here's where it gets fun! The vast majority of sellers in my marketplace will show up under a global search. A bidder who has the potential to be a new client of mine must each through hundreds of listings. We've already seen exactly how to find the search terms your clients are using. If we analyze the numbers here just a bit, you'll see something truly amazing.

By choosing well qualified, proven tier two search phrases in our auction titles, we effectively eliminate over 90% of our competitors from the search matches. The example above shows that some of our search phrases actually eliminate 99% off competitive listings. Think about that for a moment. For a moment, image that you have the ONLY store on the street and all passers-by are looking to buy exactly what you sell. Conceptually, this is exactly what happens when you eliminate competitors by refining search criteria.

Keep in mind that this is not a hypothetical scenario. Together we have walked through the process of identifying actual search phrases and verified those exact phrases by crosschecking the largest search databases available worldwide. The final validation comes up with the number of matches in the eBay search. Nothing is left to chance!

Lest I be accused of using data pertinent to my own industry, let's look at completely unrelated industry. Let's shop for auto parts! Figure 5.2 below shows searches completed in October 2005 under the term "auto parts." Worth noting, in defining the list of search terms I am going to use for auction listings, I generally start my search using a global search term. By starting a search in this manor, a good list of tier two and three search phrases is generated by the Overture online keyword selector tool.

Searches done in October 2005	
Count	Search Term
902074	auto part
133274	used auto part
32453	foreign car part
15210	classic car part
10312	car truck part
9698	car part chicago
8977	car part houston
8823	car part los angeles
8244	performance car part
7399	car part detroit
7231	car part washington dc
6996	car part dallas
5626	honda car part
5174	car part seattle
5033	car part phoenix
4953	car part minneapolis
4782	car part philadelphia
4638	aftermarket car part
4293	import car part
4177	car part new york
4167	car part orange county
4107	car part oakland
4010	custom car part
3730	car part san jose california
3539	car part wholesale
3532	car part nassau
3520	car part boston
3500	car part kansas city
3498	old car part
3496	car part denver
3496	car part fort worth
3407	car part san diego
3375	car part austin

Figure 5.2

Using the same techniques we have utilized in the first example, a few things immediately become clear.

The *global search term* used in this example is “auto parts.” Keeping in mind that the numbers above represent a one-month snapshot of search activity, we can see that almost 11 MILLION searches are conducted on the global search term alone. As we have discussed repeatedly, most all folks looking to identify quality search terms will stop there. No so with the methodology we have outlined!

Running an eye over this list, another fact jumps out that is also overlooked by all but the most diligent of businesspeople. In the list above, there is also a very strong emergence of location specific search phrases. If your business is one that offers products and services to a smaller geo-centric area, this could be good news indeed. There has been a measurable and consistent trend since 2004 that bears noting. Prior to 2004, the way in which most consumers gathered information was as predictable as tomorrow’s sunrise. Folks looking for information about local service providers used the big yellow book. That same community of searchers then jumped on line to look for service providers that did not require a local presence.

Starting in 2004, search term analysis started showing a change in how folks were gathering information. At that time, city and state names started, though infrequently at first, began to show up on lists like the ones we have generated. Month by month, there has been a consistent increase in the number of industry specific searches that now have a local or regional component. In my own case, though I offer services internationally, I use this local component in my own optimizations. Yes, I offer website design services internationally. So searches that include “Dallas website design”, “Boston Website Design”, “Lo Angeles Website Design” are all pertinent to my service offering.

Back to the list we have generated above, search terms like “custom car part,” “import car part” and “performance car part” lead the list of high quality

search terms. Let's look at how these terms respond to a search of current eBay auctions!

Auction Listing Search Results	
Term	Matches
Auto Parts	888,416
Custom car part	7,255
Performance car part	5738
Import car part	375


Consistent with what we have seen with search terms from our first example, careful, calculated identification of quality *tier two search terms* and *tier three search terms* can and does eliminate over 99% of competitive pressure on your auctions. This is one case where stacking the deck in your favor provides amazing results. I am able to also pull from my own experience in working with hundreds of other eBay sellers. In all my years in conducting search term analysis, the results are always the same. Every industry I have researched has a few global search terms that are overused by the vast majority of sellers. For those who dig a bit deeper, there is a veritable wellspring of confirmed search phrases that will drive bidders to your auctions.

By a show of hands, can I see who wants to also save money? Good! As I suspected, we are all on the same page. The law of supply and demand as defined by Economics 101 also comes into play in the auction arena. Simply put, higher demand equals higher cost. Most all of the paid advertising options available to sellers today have cost per clicks that can vary widely even within the same industry. The reason is simple. Google, Overture, and even our

friends at eBay Keywords all use a similar cost model. The key component is simple. The more “in demand” a search phrase is, the higher the cost per click. To look at a practical application of this using the examples we have used thus far, a cost per click campaign with eBay keywords shows some interesting results.

Ebay Keywords Cost Per Click	
Term	Cost Per Click
Car Parts	\$1.06
Auto Parts	\$.42
Performance car part	\$.10
Import car part	\$.10

The process is simply more amazing by the minute! Not only can you, as a seller, eliminate Over 90% of your competition by choosing your search phrases wisely, but you can also do it at a savings of over 90% per click if you are choosing to participate in a Paid Ad program! How amazing is this? Keep in mind that understanding how Internet users search is a skill that transcends more than just driving traffic to your eBay auctions.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *Just as Google allows the surfing public access to their database to query search terms, Yahoo allows access to a similar search field. To access the Yahoo search term database, go to:*
<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>
Though both Google and Yahoo/Overture market these pages as keyword selectors, they are actually online utilities designed to allow access to the volumous databases of search terms used over the years.

You may again be wondering why so much time is being devoted to understanding search engines, search engine history, and understanding exactly how folks search on the web today. If you're not asking questions like these by now, it's probably a good idea to put down this book and move on to a different career. I suspect by now, however, that you are already chomping at the bit to put this newfound methodology to work for you. This is a great time to move on to our next chapter. In Chapter Six, we start to bring together all this new information and get into the specific details of the best way to apply this information to dramatically increase your auction traffic.


UNDERSTANDING SEARCH RESULTS

Learning the art of writing effective auction titles is singularly the most important task to master for anyone looking to succeed on eBay today. Its importance cannot be overstated. It is critical to understand how searching on eBay dramatically differs from searching on the engines. The largest single difference is not in how Internet users search. We've covered already the fact that folks use the same methodology in searching irrespective of where the search is conducted. This is the primary reason we have delved into such a high degree of detail about the dynamics of how folks search and the identification of the exact search terms used by Internet users.

The critical point here is what is displayed as a direct result of a search query. Let's look at exactly what happens when a search is conducted on eBay versus what happens when that exact same search occurs on eBay.

Search Engines- Hey, what the heck is an algorithm? When consumers search for a particular product or service online, the first step is to input the search term into that all-important search field. When that same consumer hits the "search" button, the search engines search through the millions upon millions of web pages that make up today's Internet and deliver results to you in .0013 second, right? Wrong! Nothing could be further from the truth. Most folks today, even many who count themselves as tech-savvy, are under the mistaken impression that the search results delivered by their search engine of choice are results generated by a quick down and dirty scouring of the Internet.

Earlier we discussed in detail the real facts surrounding how the engines keep track of how consumers search and how those same engines are forever adding to vast databases of consumer search patterns. In addition to building vast databases of search terms used by their patrons, the engines are quietly building even larger databases. These databases consist of individual web pages. All day, every day, the engines are on the prowl- constantly looking for new and updated content to add to their databases. They employ vast armies of secret agents out there- always lurking, ever watching, hunting and yes- searching. Automated programs called spiders are constantly scouring the web.

 **WINNING BIDDER DEFINITION!** *Web Spider- A web Spider (also known as a web bot) is a program which browses the World Wide Web in a methodical, automated manner. Web spiders are mainly used to create a copy of all the visited pages for later processing by a search engine that will index the downloaded pages to provide fast searches. A web crawler is one type of bot, or software agent. In general, it starts with a list of URLs to visit. As it visits these URLs, it identifies all the hyperlinks in the page and adds them to the list of URLs to visit, recursively browsing the Web according to a set of policies.*

If you already have a website, chances are you have already had two types of visitors to your site- the “human” visitor who find you via a wide variety of methods and the search engine spiders who are always poking around under the hood of your website.


When a search engine spider finds your website for the first time, or comes back for a repeat visit, they send a report back to the home office. Of course, I am using these terms to parody how the engines work, but the concept is the

same. Over time, the engines have visited billions of web pages and have built veritable vaults that are chock full of web pages. This brings us full-circle back to what happens when a consumer like you or I conducts a search on one of the engines. When a search is conducted, the engines are actually searching through their own databases, and not the Internet as most folks think. When Google delivers 1.6 million matches in under a second, it is actually showing results from web pages stored in its own giant database. This is just part of what allows the larger search engines to deliver the sheer volume of search matches in such a miniscule amount of time. They never have to look beyond their own front door.

Though this book is not really about search engine dynamics and functionality, understanding how the engines work and how search results are delivered both on and off eBay are critical to your own eBay successes.

The pages that search engines deliver in response to a search query are commonly called “search results” pages. A vast industry has been built upon making promises; many of them false, about helping companies achieve top search engine rankings. The point pertinent to us is this: the search engines use a very complex formula to effectively rank websites. This formula is called an algorithm. With no human contact at all, the engines use this formula- complete with variables that change almost daily, to decide who gets the number one slot, the number two slot, the number 1,000 slot and more. The search engines look at the “big picture” looking at the visible content on websites, content like text, keyword density, and page headlines. They also look “under the hood” for attributes that most human visitors never see (except us geeks). The engines make note of meta-tags, alt-image tags, and other factors that bore most self-respecting folks to pieces. The critical point here is that there is no one single factor you can manipulate to make your website appear. The glorious news is that this is not the case on eBay. This is life-changing news indeed!

In much the same method that the search engines build a goliath of a searchable database, so does eBay build its own database. While the engines have a database built of individual web pages, eBay's database consists primarily of current as well as recently closed auctions. Just like the engines provide easy access to millions of individual web pages, eBay provides the same easy access to millions of auctions. Using the same search methods used on the search engines, consumers by the millions come to eBay to search.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *While most searches on the engines are geared toward providing information to consumers, folks come to eBay to shop! Never forget that the mindset of an eBay searcher is dramatically different than a traditional web surfer. On eBay, visitors log on, search and most importantly- they SPEND!*


Let's again review for just a moment to review some of the most important points we've covered so far. Already covered in specific detail is exactly how to find the exact search terms that consumers use to search for products and services. We've also covered in-depth the methodology you can apply to your specific business to determine the exact search phrases your clients are using. We've also devoted more than just a bit of time to cover a brief synopsis of how the engines respond to search queries. Simply put- you should now have a basic understanding of the dynamics of how consumers search and where to get this vital information. We've also devoted time to learn what happens "behind the scenes" as the engines decide on where to place a site on the list of search results.

Now it's time to take a look at how eBay unique in exactly how it displays search results. Join me, if you will, to accept the Keys to the Kingdom. With a traditional search engine query, it is the engines that determine what sites are included in the list of search matches and the engines that decide the exact

order that the search matches are listed in. The searcher has virtually no input in what the engines display. Not so with eBay! But we'll get into more detail about that later. Let's look first at precisely how eBay delivers and displays search results.

While the search engines use hundreds of different criteria to determine which sites will appear in response to a consumers search, eBay used to use just one. Yes, until early 2008, eBay practiced the quintessential "keep it simple" rule. In the days before Best Match, a single factor determined what pages will appear based on a consumer looking for a product or service to purchase.

Though individual auctions have images, text descriptions, meta tags, and virtually all the elements of traditional web pages, eBay looked at ONLY the auction title that the eBay seller creates as the sole basis for displaying its search results. Think about this fact for a moment. You, as an eBay seller, had 100% control of the exact data that ebay used exclusively. And who says there wasn't a Santa Claus? A single line of text could catapult your auctions into the limelight. Conversely, ineffective auction titles would all but guarantee your auction was infrequently (or never) seen by the very consumers who are looking for you.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *If it ain't found, it won't sell. The critical first step in the eBay sales cycle is to have your auction found by a seller who is ready to buy. Simply put- if your auction isn't found, you have as much chance of selling as you have in seeing snow in July. Pretty simple concept.*

eBay delivered its search results based solely on the matching of keywords and search phrases in the auction title. Nothing else mattered. Though eBay

searchers could then decide on the order of listing display by options like price and time of auction closing, you had 100% control of having your auctions included in the list of matches.

When eBay launched Best Match in 2008, everything changed on the “search results landscape. Rather than having a single factor (keywords in the auction title) determine that your auctions were displayed, eBay’s Best Match marked the FIRST TIME in eBay history that a true algorithmic approach is used to display search results. Simply put, eBay went underground.

There is much speculation about what factors eBay is now using to offer top search status to its listings. eBay has been very open about the importance of a high Detailed Seller Rating – also known as a DSR score. In fact, when Best Match was first introduced, eBay touted the a DSR score was all that mattered. In recent published information by eBay, eBay is now stating that the DRS score “and other factors” are used to rank listings. Very much like the search engines use a formula to effectively decide the order that search matches are presented to an Internet user, eBay now can decide what order to display searches. I am going on the record in predicting a new market for “eBay Listing Optimization” will emerge over the next year. Again, if you can’t be found, you can’t sell. The vague language used by eBay in defining “other factors”, shows that Best Match is still a work in progress.

To quote an eBay executive directly, "eBay will optimize Best Match on a very localized way. Best Match will be different across different queries, different categories, different countries - even potentially different buyers! It will depend on both long term and short term trends and behaviors. If done correctly, Best Match should always be optimizing itself to show the items that the buyer is most likely to buy."

Internet users inherently follow the path of fewest clicks. Couple this to the fact that the new default presentation of eBay search matches in now Best Match, and sellers, even power sellers with high feedback have good reason for concern.

As always, the real magic starts with making sure that your auctions are included in as wide a range of search matches as possible. I am going to show you a precise methodology to help you cast as wide and all-inclusive a net as possible across eBay. The goals remain simple. We are looking to drive as much targeted traffic as possible to your auctions. At the same time, we are going to clear as much of the competition off the list of search matches as possible. This is not hypothetical conjecture at this point. As with all information provided, we are about to get into the specifics of how this is done. Though the single line of text in your auction title may sound on the surface like a small point, mastering the art of effective auction title creation can drive volumes of targeted traffic to your auctions. Though eBay ultimately decides the order of search listings, it is still a well-drafted auction title that gets you on the search results list! This one point alone is so critical to your auction success that I've devoted an entire chapter to this. Read on- and learn!

SEVEN

Writing Killer Auction Titles- The Secret to Your eBay Success

We've already stopped a number of times to review where we are in the process of learning how to drive higher volumes of targeted traffic to your auctions. This is no time to break from our longstanding tradition. As all successful auctions start with a bidder actually finding your auctions, the development of auction titles the highest possible exposure, covering the widest range of predetermined search phrases is critical to your success. In fact, you're the very foundations of your success on eBay begin with understanding the concepts presented here and subsequent implementation of the techniques we've covered. Understanding and using these techniques can make an average ebay seller into a high volume seller a very short time. For those who have already achieved eBay's Power seller status, using the techniques here quite literally double your auction traffic. As most seasoned sellers know that part of attaining a measure of success on eBay is understanding that sales is a bit of a numbers game, this should come as very good news indeed. Again, to restate the way search orders are presented by eBay- 1) your listing tile, well drafted and keyword rich, ensures that you are on the list of search matches. 2) eBay's new Best Match algorithm determines how high on the list your listings now appear.

In very much the same manor that I've used real-life examples for the selection of your keywords, I'll be using a similar process to walk you through the development of killer auction titles.

By now, you've already taken some time to review the auctions of your competitors, have a good understanding of the search phases you need to integrate and are ready to tackle the application of this newfound knowledge. Lets go back to the original example of consumers searching for graphics services.



Figure 7.1

At first glance, there's not much of the surface that appears to differentiate between the two titles. Both give the view the feel for what type of service is offered. Title one even has a compelling "call to action" directly asking the visitor to take the next step. Let's dig deeper, however. Allot deeper! We've covered the basics in terms of developing a search phrase list specific to your business. By now, you should have developed a list of search phases based not on what you "think" bidders are searching for, but based on what the hard data, as confirmed through the search engine database queries, shows as exact and literal text search terms that your clients are using. No longer are we living in the land of assumptions and guesses. All of our processes are based on confirmed data. This takes virtually ALL guesswork out of the process.

Our primary goal now is the development of auction titles that cover as many as the documented search terms that your customers are using, and to do this within a single line of text. Get ready as we are going to through out all

the rules of grammar. Our goal is now to cast a keyword net as widely and broadly as possible.

Our next step is to analyze exactly what confirmed search phrases are covered in our first two sample titles.

Title One

[Amazing Logo Design Services- Save Here! +++++](#)

Figure 7.2

Now comes the critical step of analyzing all possible search terms-both singular and plural- one word or several. We run an eye over the title looking for all possible search phrase options. If we take a moment to look at all possible search phrases that can be culled from this title, our list looks like this:

Title One Search Phrase Coverage
Logo Service
Logo Design Service
Logo Services
Logo Design

Figure 7.3

Let's now take a look at the difference a well-developed auction title can make. Keep in mind that at first glance, there was not a great difference in both title one and title two. Sure, even the untrained eye might see a bit of a difference. As we have covered all of the basic concepts already, you may even expect to see twice the search phrase coverage. Here's where the ebay "rubber meets the road" as auction title two will see 500% more search term exposure as the first title. How, you ask?

Here are our search phrase lists that are all embedded in title two:

Title Two Search Phrase Coverage
Logo Design
Logo Designs
Custom Logo Design
Custom Logo Designs
Graphic Design
Graphic Designs
Custom Web Design
Custom Web Designs
Graphics Design
Custom Graphics Design
Web Design
Web Designs
Custom Graphic Design
Custom Web Design
Custom Website
Website Design
Web Site Design
Custom Website Design
Custom Web Site Design
Custom Web Site


Figure 7.4

Successful eBay sellers well know that it's all a numbers game. The more traffic you can drive to an auction, the higher the probability that the auction will close with a winning bidder and the Cha-Ching of money in your pocket. There is a widely understood concept in marketing called *conversion*. Conversions are generally discussed in terms or rates or ratios. I'll try not to get too geeky here, I promise! Conversion ratios relate to everything from

Pay-Per-Click programs to in-depth analysis of website traffic. For successful eBay sellers who understand this concept, conversion in this context simply means how many visitors to an auction does it take to make a sale. Using purely hypothetical numbers, if it takes 100 visitors on average for an auction to close, the conversion rate for this auction is 100:1. Every time we drive another block of 100 visitors to this theoretical auction, a sale is made. As every market and product within that market will have its own unique conversion rates, we will use only general numbers to illustrate these concepts.

Take another look at the dramatic difference in keyword coverage in the first two examples we have used. The first auction title covers a scant four targeted search phrases, while title two casts a net over an amazing 15 phrases! Which auction do you think will close faster? To look at this from the standpoint of a statistician, title two will drive 500% more traffic than auction one. The numbers are truly staggering. Unlike other traffic models like Pay-Per-Click, there is no additional expense for this additional traffic.

It's important to keep in mind that writing killer auction title is a skill that takes time to develop. It won't happen overnight. You'll need an in-depth knowledge of search phrases unique to your industry. If you're anything like me, you also need to learn to let go of perfectionism as well developed auction titles can be clunky and cumbersome to the eye. Keep in mind that good grammar is a sure sign of poorly written auction titles. Over time, as you continue to conduct your competitive research, you will not only hone your skills, but you'll be able to cast a trained eye over your competitors and see exactly who understands this critical concept.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP-** This is a great time for you to take a new look at auctions specific to your market. I suggest you look only at the auction titles that appear. You'll see in very short notice who understands this process.

Always one to present data from differing markets, let use an entirely different example!



Figure 7.5

At first glance, the titles don't seem that different. Both have the type of verbiage we have come to expect with eBay auction titles. Both titles tell you a bit about the product. Both titles will also draw traffic based on the global search terms. You know me well enough by now. We never stop on the surface. Time to dig- and dig deep. Using the same technique we used in our first auction title example, let's see what the data really shows!

Title One Search Phrase Coverage
Jeep Liberty
Liberty Floor Mats
Jeep Floor Mats

Figure 7.6

We had decent search term exposure for our global search terms (*remember those?*) We've even got a couple of tier two phrases that we can use to drive additional traffic. Though appearing reasonably qualifies on the surface, if I was a teacher, I would give this title a C-. Let's take a look at the difference a few words can make.

Title Two Search Phrase Coverage
Jeep Liberty
Liberty Floor Mats
Liberty Floor Mat
Jeep Accessories
Custom Jeep Accessories
Custom Floor Mats
Liberty Custom Accessories
Jeep Liberty Accessories
Liberty Accessories

Figure 7.7


The numbers are again staggering. We have gone from three global search terms in our first example to an adrenaline filled nine search phrases in the second title. Our search term reach has increased by 300%. As we covered earlier, much of your success on eBay is determined by understanding how much of a numbers game the auctions really are- then capitalizing on this to “play the numbers” in your favor.

Looking again at our second example, it is worth noting that if you are selling nothing more than an extra set of floor mats, auction title development of this type won’t really help you. But if you are running an online parts and accessories store on eBay, then your mind is probably already reeling with thought of all the additional traffic this type of title development will drive. In fact, if you are anything like me, you are already planning on what to do with your riches! Yes, we are all hopeless idealists at heart!

Looking at our last auction title examples, the word FREE may have caught your eye. Many eBay sellers, even the most experienced, think that the word “FREE” will work wonders in driving additional traffic. Nothing could


be further from the truth. Though it's well known that power words like "free" and "save" are proven as very persuasive in traditional advertising, eBay shoppers rarely use these terms in their searching. Think for a moment about how you search. When was the last time you used the word "free" in an eBay search. I thought so. The emerging data regarding the buying habits of eBay shoppers points to the simple fact that eBay buyers expect to pay shipping charges.

Most eBay sellers have given more than a bit of passing thought to using shipping as a way to generate more profit per sale, there is a very specific method to use that will save you the pains of negative feedback and also allow you to realize some profit from your shipping charges. In reviewing the feedback of others over the years, I see with regularity feedback by winning bidders who think a seller has scammed them. The feedback almost always has the same theme to it.

 *Great item- too bad the seller charged me \$9.00 shipping for a \$2.00 shipping cost. Buyers beware. ;-(*

Even if the seller clearly stated that shipping costs were a flat rate \$9.00, the buyer was the recipient of a package clearly marked \$2.00 shipping charges stamped by the USPS. We all know that Uncle Sam doesn't lie! All along, I have stressed looking at the entire purchasing cycle through the eyes and mind of the bidder. Just like we put ourselves in the bidders shoes when we conducted our keyword research, it's vital to keep ourselves in the bidders shoes every step along the way- from initial search query to final delivery of the order. Ask yourself this simple question- how would you feel? So, what is the best solution?

Very simple! An effective method used by savvy eBay sellers is to use a standard multiplier (usually around 25%) to mark up shipping costs. When listing an item, make a very clear notation in each auction that you are charging a shipping & handling charge. The imperative word here is *handling!* It's important to give a bit of thought to the total cost of shipping an order. Many folks overlook the soft-dollar costs of doing business. Items like the cost of your packaging material, fuel used to get to an from your shipping point, whether it be FedEx or the Post Office, and other not-so-visible costs are all incurred by you. As a business owner, it is perfectly acceptable to pass this cost on. Keep in mind that the 25% figure is a general guideline only. If you sell a breakable product that requires additional packing material, you are free to charge accordingly. Just make sure you tell your clients why you are charging a bit more.

 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *Nothing speaks louder than sincerity. Sincerity spoken softly will be heard over any hype, promotions and high-energy sales pitches! A short notes can build a huge level of confidence. "At XYZ Collectables, we want your package to arrive safely to your home. We use only premium packaging materials. Sure-it costs a bit more, but our customers are always pleased when their orders arrive in perfect condition!" Who wouldn't want to buy from a seller committed to a worry-free delivery?*

Very early on, we discussed the tendency of consumers to bid based on how the *feel* about a particular auction. How can you not feel good about a seller who wants your order to arrive safely?

Sure, there are bound to be a few orders that you might just break even with your shipping costs, but an overall shipping strategy like this is fair for all. The winning bidders are left feeling that they weren't gouged on shipping

costs, your positive feedback is not compromised, and lastly, but not most importantly in this case, a shipping strategy like this does indeed add profit to your bottom line. This is the epitome of a win-win!

Let's take a moment to again compare eBay search results with search results displayed by the traditional search engines like Google and Yahoo. Top rankings on the engines can occur in only one of two ways. You have the option of buying a top slot with the larger engines by participating in the various pay-per-click campaigns. Though there are still values to be found in the PPC marketplace, competitive pressures are continuing to drive up costs per click. More and more folks are becoming tired of the "on again, off again" successes with traditional search engine optimization. Though you are guaranteed a top placement with this type of advertising, there is still an associated hard-dollar cost. When folks click, you pay. It's not called PAY-Per-Click for nothing!

As we mentioned, the second method of exposure on the larger and middle market search engines is to have your website fine-tuned for top search engine rankings. Though top ranking on the engines can do wonders for any online business, the ever changing search engine algorithms means that you will require the ongoing services on a professional optimization service. Just like the cost associated per click with Pay-Per-Click advertising, there is also an associated cost with this type of service as well. In fact, many folks monitor traffic to their sites and simply divide the volume of traffic by the monthly cost of ongoing optimization. Do you know what this equation yields? Yes, the Cost-Per-Click!

I still marvel at how eBay has leveled the proverbial playing field for most all folks looking to participate in the online auction phenomena. With the exception of some banner placements allocated for eBay's preferred partners,

virtually all eBayers- large and small alike, are afforded the exact level of exposure.

If you run a small company, and are looking to crack a marketplace dominated by larger players, you have the exact same level of exposure afforded to the “big guys.” There simply is no other global marketplace with a similar level of opportunity.

If you look at your cost per click (CPC) on an eBay auction, there is virtually NO associated extra cost you incur by driving extra traffic to your auctions. Understanding how eBay delivers results and the specific search phrases your clients are using, and then rolling that information into your new killer auction titles will go far in driving a level of traffic attainable with traditional, non-optimized titles alone.

A critical point to bring up at this time is that search phrases can and will change over time. Just like individual tastes change over time, industry specific keywords will change as well. Business life on-line is exciting, complex and ever changing. I’ve watched the influx of many newer search phrases in my own industry over the last six months. Needless to say, these search phrases have already made it into my action titles. In the last year, there has also been a dramatic rise in region-specific search phrases. By this, I am referring to search terms that regionally or locally qualify a product/service provider. Search phrases like *New Hampshire web design* are now appearing when I conduct my own ongoing search term research. In addition to the global emergence of geographic search term qualifiers, new phrases will continue to emerge. Such is the nature of the on-line world today.

My recommendation is to schedule a search term review every three months. You’ve already seen how easy it is to conduct keyword research through the back door access to the search engine databases. By blocking off

what amounts to approximately an hour of your time every few months, you are then best positioned to identify and respond to changes in your industry. To take this concept a step further, if you are among the first to identify new consumer search phrases, and subsequently implement this knowledge with the rewriting of your auction titles, you then dramatically reduce your competitive pressures on eBay. Look at it this way- would you rather be included in search results that yield 10 matches or 1000 matches? Of course, lower search matches mean higher clicks on your auctions. You can expect savvy sellers to follow your lead, but never has there been a more compelling argument to lead and not to follow.

We are fortunate indeed. Never since the dawn of time have the types of technology advances gone from initial concept to mainstream acceptance in a shorter time. Today's consumers are not longer relegated to shopping within convenient travel distance from home. The Internet has opened up a worldwide marketplace that even the smallest of businesses can participate in. eBay is now playing a critical role in introducing today's consumer to a wealth on new businesses to patronize. Initially viewed as simply a place to bid on odds-and-ends, Beanie Babies and the like, eBay is now viewed by an ever-increasing share of consumers as a legitimate global marketplace. Interesting, as Internet fraud becomes more widespread, there has been a legitimate and understandable point brought up by many web savvy consumers. Simply put, how can you be sure that a business website you find is a legitimate business and not a venue for someone to steal critical information like your credit card data?

In the eBay community, you have immediate access to very specific information about a merchant. In a few simple clicks, you can see how long that member has participated on eBay and read through a veritable laundry list of testimonials in the feedback section. Sure, a fraudster may be able to find a few folks to leave bogus positive feedback, but an eBay merchant with many years offering service and feedback measured in hundreds, or even thousands

presents a level of risk significantly lower than a random purchase from an unknown web merchant. The glorious news is that you are part of this phenomenon. By taking the time to read this far, you have shown by the very nature of your actions that you are embracing all that eBay has to offer and are still looking for ways to either create or further your own eBay success story.

EIGHT

The Process- From Listing to Winning Bidder

The final chapters of this book are going to be devoted to a final review of the entire process from initial listing to the completion of an auction by a winning bidder. Also covered will be a few invaluable tips to help aid in your eBay success.

It's again time to touch on the most critical bullet items in the process. First and foremost, we have identified that we cannot, under any circumstances, move forward with hunches or suspicions about how *we think* eBay bidders find our auctions. By trusting gut instincts, without first verifying the actual searches being conducted, we are doomed to mediocrity at best. More than likely, however, this type of listing strategy will lead to an unsuccessful eBay experience. I have had the wonderful experience of working directly with hundreds of eBay sellers. A diverse lot, most are hugely passionate, sometimes overly idealistic, and have one common trait. To date, I've not met a single eBay seller who want to earn "*a buck or two*" on eBay. Most of the eBay sellers I have met along the way are looking to build a full time on-line

business. Many others are looking to add a second, significant source of income to their lives. Without exception, all are lured by the promise of eBay's global potential. Working on hunches alone is akin to driving with your eyes closed. The law of averages shows that eventually you can and will drive off the road.

Next up, we know that you will need to climb into the minds of your clients. To see things from the perspective of a customer, and not the merchant. Just what is an eBay merchant to do? Yes- research, research, and more research. Understanding what compels an auction visitor to take that critical step from visitor to bidder is vital. As we have discussed at length, there is a veritable treasure trove of search phrase data accessible through the search engine databases. This information is just ripe for picking as it's always current. Best of all- this information is FREELY available.

Data, data everywhere- what next? Learning to take the type of search phrase data and use it to develop keyword rich, though at times grammatically poor titles is a critical skill to hone over time. This one marketing technique is singularly the most important part of the process. Simply put- knowing and understanding effective keyword usage will guarantee a dramatic increase in your traffic. This is not hypothetical, assumptive or wishful thinking. Our entire strategy rests on factual information. Using this approach effectively, it is impossible to not see traffic gains!

NINE

Proven Tips, Tricks & Strategies- The Inside Story

Jumpstarting your feedback- 50 in 30! If you are already a well established eBay seller with a level of feedback sufficient to make visitors to your auctions “feel” comfortable with you as an eBay seller, feel free to skip this section. For the rest of the class, read on, as there will be homework.

We are about to delve into a bit of eBay 101. By now, you are well aware that eBay’s feedback system amounts to your on-line report card. Easily viewed by the world at large, you will live or die by your on-line reputation. A 2005 edition of *Entrepreneur Magazine* devoted almost exclusively to helping businesses embrace eBay carried an interesting comment. Entrepreneur Magazine noted that most eBay sellers protect their feedback more aggressively than they protect their inventory. Though not the only criteria buyers use to decide on a merchant, it is by far the most important as folks


will use it to qualify you as a seller. A high feedback seller with an abundance of recent negative feedbacks will predictably see a dramatic decrease in sales.

Assuming you are either relatively new to eBay or are in the process of setting up a second ebay ID, must you wait for dozens of sales to start to build your eBay feedback? I think not! Though not a new or innovative technique, I am going to outline a method of taking the fast track to higher feedback.

You've seen by now that I like to present real-world information and follow up with the exact steps you need to take to implement the information. Rest easy as we won't deviate here. Most business owners I speak with over the course of a day with think that spending \$100.00 on building a strong business reputation would be deemed a "small change" investment. In other words, it's money well spent. How these same business owners balk when I suggest going on an eBay buying spree. The process is simple. Very much like a business owner may allocate advertising dollars for a newspaper ad, a yellow pages ad, or even a direct mail campaign, I am asking that you set aside a fixed budget for a one-time eBay feedback building initiative. For the sake of example, I will use a flat \$100 investment to best illustrate this process.

The process is easy and not particularly time consuming. It may even be fun! Head on over to the eBay website and search under ANY global search term that comes to mind. Search terms like "pet," "clothing," "fashion" and the like are good starting points. You need not stay within the confines of your own industry. The only goal here is to deliver an extremely large list of auctions to cull through.

Once you've pulled up your 14,000 matches, give or take a few thousand, set your list view to show auctions by price. You'll find hundreds of penny auctions to sort through.


 **WINNING BIDDER TIP!** *Windows users can save lots of time by simply right mouse clicking the auction they want to view. This will leave the original list intact as save you the time of recreating your master list. Simply click the “open link in new window” option from the drop-down menu.*

Here’s where it gets fun. Start buying! You’ll find thousands of items to bid on. It’s important to make note of a few very important points before you bid, however.

First up, double check the shipping costs for your intended purchase. Many sellers will list items at a penny and subsequently charge \$10.00 or more for shipping costs. These sellers are making 100% of their profits on the shipping charges alone. In many cases, sellers let the actual product sell beneath cost as they make up the money on the back-end. A one-cent purchase with an associated \$10.00 shipping cost is not a one-cent purchase. You will have just spent \$10.01. As the goal is not the acquisition of merchandise, but rather, the creation of feedback that counts here. We want to maximize the allocated one hundred dollar investment in feedback. Also, keep in mind that your commitment to buy is a legally binding contract. It’s always wise to ask questions before you click to complete the sale.

eBay has very stringent and aggressively enforced policies that specifically do not allow the sale of feedback. Such is the value eBay places on it’s own internal monitoring. In fact, sellers cannot even use the word *feedback* in their listings. I discovered this quite by accident sometime in 2004. My auction subtitle included a short notation asking bidders to “view my 100% positive feedback before you buy.” My intent was to do nothing more than ask my own winning bidders to take a good look at what others had said about my services. Little did I know at the time that there were folks out there trying to

sell feedback. Needless to say, eBay closed that loophole very quickly. If eBay suspects that a seller is selling feedback, that seller can be permanently banned from eBay. The real truth is that many sellers have gone underground with this practice, offering low cost auctions with no shipping costs. When an auction has an appearance like this, it's a pretty safe bet that it's been listed to, in part, satisfy the feedback market out there.

 **WINNING BIDDER RECOMMENDATION!** *Also critical to note, I strongly recommending not deviating in any way, shape or form eBay's policies. Let's look at the best reason first- it's just wrong. I have become a fierce advocate of playing well with others and playing by the rules. eBay is a legitimate business entity with a global responsibility to their clients. (i.e. folks like you and I). Not only are practices like taking sales for auction items off eBay, and abusing the feedback system wrong, they are a slap in the face to the very opportunity that eBay creates. eBay is consistently my largest source of new clients. If a client comes to me looking to purchase a service that I have listed on eBay, they MUST go directly through eBay's system for their first order. No exceptions. It is simply bad business to do anything that will compromise your integrity as an eBay merchant.*

After you've identified the qualifying auction, simply complete the auction. Make it a habit to run a quick eye over the feedback of the seller beforehand to watch for any red flags prior to placing your bid. In an effort to save time, always look for auctions that have a *Buy It Now* option lest you invest your limited time resources in the monitoring of 100 or more ongoing auctions.

Once you have made your purchase, I strongly recommend that you make in instant payment to the seller. The best time to do this is immediately after the auction closes with your purchase. You are much more likely to receive

positive feedback from a seller who is the recipient of two back-to-back emails- one for the closed auction and the second for the instant payment. I know that from my own standpoint as a seller, those auctions still give me the warm and fuzzies! In one respect, most all eBay sellers are alike in one area. The PayPal generated email that announces “You’ve Got Cash” still makes me smile!

After you have completed your auction and subsequent payment, it’s time to wrap up the process with two final steps. The first step is to leave prompt feedback for the seller. It’s important to look again at the quality of the feedback you leave. As a rule, you will see a much higher percentage of returned feedback if you follow a few simple rules. As a general rule, flattering feedback sees a higher feedback return. I’m not referencing they type of feedback that sounds like your mother wrote it, however. Let me share a quick story about this.

This past holiday season found me shopping on eBay. In the course of my bargain hunting, I came across an auction that I chose to complete. As I do with all my eBay purchases, an instant payment went to the seller. Before the item even shipped, the seller left me very flattering positive feedback.

“An asset to the eBay community! Thanks from PhoenixTradingCompany!”

Not only was I flattered by the feedback, but I felt a sense of obligation to leave feedback in kind to this seller. This seller has over 73,000 feedbacks with a 99% positive feedback rating. I smiled when I read the feedback he had left. The feedback he left me let me know quite clearly that he understood how to work the feedback system to maximize his return feedback. Also worth noting, all this was completed well within the eBay rules. He left me immediate feedback based on my immediate payment. From his standpoint, I was well deserving of the feedback he left. No playing ”let’s chase the buyer”

with me for his payment. The transaction was smooth and worry free. Upon delivery of my order, I immediately logged on to eBay to leave positive feedback in kind.

I have a few feedback statements that seem to have a higher conversion rate than others. When left, I seem to get more feedback in return. Statements like, “*A Credit to eBay- Fast Payment, Friendly. Can’t ask for more AAA+++*,” have seen a very high rate of returned feedback. Sure, I could use simple phrases like “*AAA+++ Good Seller.*” But I would much rather stack the deck in my favor. It takes no extra time and the returns are immeasurable.




Of course, you will find your own unique way of wording feedback that is personal to you, but by now, I suspect you have a good feel for the point here. In terms of the numbers, in my industry, approximately 60% of folks will leave feedback. Using this as a bit of a benchmark, if you’re your \$100 feedback investment sees you closing auctions that average a dollar, your hundred dollar investment should yield you approximately 60 new positive feedbacks. A follow up email by you to the seller letting them know you have already paid for your purchase and have already left very positive feedback for your purchase will reap huge rewards in returned feedback. Never underestimate the power or courtesy!

We need to poke around under the hood again and look at the dynamics of how folks read web-based content. No doubt, someone reading this will already be thinking that all of the new feedback let will be seller feedback, and not reflective of your company as an on-line merchant selling goods or services. Let’s look a bit deeper at this. eBay bidders are very much like traditional web surfers. They have limited attention spans, look for key information that is only a mouse click or two away, and purchase largely in part by how the “feel” about a particular auction. When starting out, the feedback associated with your ID will be heavily slanted to the experience of

sellers. But let's look at how a typical eBay user views feedback. There are three critical components of the feedback information that carry most all of the weight.

Overall Rating- This is the easy to read number that eBay currently displays as a blue underlined number. An example would look like this: [\(1,733\)](#)

Percent Satisfaction- Just as it sounds, this is the ratio of happy to unhappy bidders. For sellers with significant feedback, I never expect to see a 100% feedback score. The law of averages states you can never keep everyone happy, but if the seller has a 99.9% positive rating, eBay longevity, and no recent trend for multiple negative feedbacks, I have virtually no fear about bidding. I trust in the averages and know that in all probability that I will be a pleased winning bidder.

Feedback Score:	3528	Recent Ratings:			
Positive Feedback:	99.9%				
Members who left a positive:	3531	Past Month	Past 6 Months	Past 12 Months	
Members who left a negative:	3				
All positive feedback received:	6587	 positive	392	1833	2805
		 neutral	1	1	1
		 negative	1	1	1
		Bid Retractions (Past 6 months): 2			

[Learn about](#) what these numbers mean.

eBay Bidder Comments- Quite simply, this is the text and messages folks use to describe their experience with you as a member of the eBay community. Buyers and sellers here have an open venue to be as flattering or unflattering as their experience warrants.

The emerging data shows that less than 3% of eBay bidders will click through to read beyond page one of a potential seller's feedback. Here is the real beauty of jump-starting your feedback. Sure, though there will undoubtedly be a window of time where those who view feedback will see predominantly seller feedback. Keep this in mind; your higher feedback will

have direct result of driving more buyers to you. More buyers will result directly in more buyer feedback. Within no time, your initial feedback created from your buying spree is soon buried beyond that critical first page.

Using Multiple IDs- Your Key to a Broader Footprint. Two years ago, I attending a couple of eBay courses a local community college. Offered was both a beginner's eBay course as well as an advanced eBay marketing course. Though I could have easily taught either class, my goal was to see if I could pick up any new information that might aid to my eBay success. The instructor of the class, certified by eBay to present the course material, referenced eBay's policy of allowing multiple IDs. He noted that many eBay members set up a unique ID for buying and another for selling. To date, eBay does not differentiate between the multiple ID's and eBay users are free to buy and sell freely under several ID's.

This is one of the most under-utilized methods of expanding your eBay footprint. Marketing like this has its roots in the world of retail marketing. Take a moment and look around you the next time you are shopping for groceries. Make it a point to notice the number of your favorite national brands that are on the shelf. In most all cases, you'll see your favorites stacked many products wide. The mindset behind this approach is quite simple. By providing maximum visibility for their products, manufacturers have long known that there is a direct correlation in increased sales. More eye exposure leads directly to higher sales. The products become, in essence, easier to buy. You simply reach out your hand and grab one of the many products on the shelf.

You can use the exact same technique on eBay. By using multiple ID's, you are then free to dramatically increase your eye exposure on eBay. As in the retail world, you can then expect more sales. It's important to note that eBay will allow posting of up to ten identical items. Any more than 10 at a

time and eBay will issue a warning and possibly remove your current auctions.

Be Courteous, Be Polite and Play Well With Others! There are times I sit in my office and wonder what happened to plain old politeness and courtesy. With many years of eBay experience behind me and not a single negative feedback, I am still amazed with the very occasional email that I see. The most common occurrence these days relates to a client's SPAM filter holding a message from me- usually an order confirmation. As a rule, if I don't hear back from someone within 2-3 business days after a completed order, I'll follow up with a second reminder email. I've long since realized that not everyone is in front of a monitor every day. Folks have vacations, babies, family situations that take them away from their PC for a time. Such is the nature of life today.

The emails always have a similar tone, "My order was completed 2 days ago. If I don't hear back from you TODAY, I'll leave negative feedback." Another piece of information that I've long since learned is that there are lots of people who have had less than desirable experiences on eBay. Mistreated by one eBay seller, they deem this to be the norm on eBay. My point is this- you get what you give. By extending courtesy, allowing folks the benefit of the doubt, and using negative feedback only as a last-ditch option, you will find your eBay customers to be appreciative of your approach and ultimately happier with their overall experience with you as a seller. My own feedback is cluttered with terms like "honest seller," and the like. Feedback like this works wonders to elevate the comfort level of potential new clients. In fact, it is invaluable.

We all know that happy clients have a higher probability of become repeat clients. These same satisfied clients are more likely to refer others to you. These days, I see at least one new referral per week. Referrals are the best

type of inquiry across my desk as they are folks who don't need to be "sold". They come to me already feeling good about what they can expect. The fact that referrals are generally direct sales also means higher profitability in these transactions as there are no associated listing or final value fees!

Your Best and Most Often Overlooked Asset- Your Current Customers. Even the best of us can overlook the importance of marketing to our existing clients. Let's take a quick look at some important demographic features of your existing clients. First and foremost, they buy what you sell. By this I mean that if you have a pet supply company, you already have an in-house list of folks who buy pet supplies. If you sell automotive accessories, you know well that anyone who has purchased from you already buys automotive accessories. This may sound like the quintessential no-brainer, but think about this: larger corporations spend millions of dollars annually to define and capture contact information for folks who buy their products. Millions of dollars are spent yearly to purchase lists of qualified clients.

Not only do these folks fit the bill in terms of buying what you sell, they are ALREADY familiar with your company. In a world full of choices, these folks have already made the decision to choose your company. The numbers are truly staggering. Better than 50% of your customers have bought a product/service that you offer in the last 6 months *from another provider*.

Marketing to your existing client base is easier than most folks think. The most commonly used method is email. Email marketing is an art unto itself, but the basics are easy to master. The "big picture" intent of any email marketing initiative is to reinforce your company's name in the mind of your existing clients. The goal is simple. The next time one of your clients needs to purchase what you offer, you want your company name to be the first to come to mind. As a general rule, the overwhelming majority of folks who receive an email from a company they have done business with do not deem this to be

SPAM. In fact, to take this one step further, as you are sending an email to a client who is already known to use your product/services, email of this nature is remarkably well received. There are many third party services that help administer email mass mailings or you can opt to manage your email list in-house. A wise tip is to include both meaningful as well as promotional content. An email with content of interest to your clients that includes an industry or market specific tip is more likely to be read than an email with promotional content only.

Frequency does indeed matter. Sending weekly email, even to the most eager of recipients, all but guarantees that your email will end up in an email folder somewhere. Once it hits the folder, its probability of being read drops dramatically. Opt to send email out every couple of months and you run the risk of folks not recognizing your company name. The emerging data shows the sweet spot to be approximately once monthly. This allows for folks to read what you are presenting without a large time investment, while keeping your company name fresh in the minds of your clients. Also recommended is to keep the length of your email such that it can be read in its entirety, in under 30 seconds. So, by a show of hands, who is already using outbound email as a marketing tool? Just what I thought. Almost always overlooked, highly effective and extremely low cost, email marketing simply makes good business and economic sense. What more can you ask for?

A Companion Website- More Sales and a Higher Profit. Though this was mentioned earlier, it is very much worth revisiting. In a conversation last year with a client, he expressed his frustration as he was spending an average of \$6,000 per month in eBay fees. I actually laughed out loud as I know this is a sure sign of a successful eBay Power Seller. Interestingly, this same eBay seller was doing minimal, if any business from a companion website. eBay can and does allow a single link to a companion website from your About Me page. Not only can you list more inventory with less associated cost, you are

also helping to build your eBay credibility. eBay auction visitors who see a companion website with a professional look and feel have a higher degree of confidence in you as an eBay seller. More confidence correlates directly into higher sales.

You now have a new set of tools to work with. My hope is that you will take your newfound knowledge and apply it with all the passion and determination you can. It is time, however to look something most folks have never given a lot of thought to. What if eBay disappeared? What would happen to you if you no longer had the global reach that eBay provides? This exact same scenario can and does unfold every day. A long-term client of mine- a gentleman of high moral and ethical standards, was recently told by eBay that he was suspended from all further activity on eBay. The suspension notification came to him by email using very general terms. At the time of this writing, he was still awaiting a reply from eBay with more specific information. In his world, eBay effectively went away.

The point I am making is this. For ANY business selling ANY product or service, a well diversified marketing plan not only makes good sense from a shared risk standpoint, it might just mean the difference between business survival and lack thereof. The majority of this book covers eBay listing and auction strategies, but there is more to running a successful on-line business than having successes with your auctions. In my next book, *Marketing Your Business - Powerful Information that Produces Results™*, I'll demystify the often misunderstood concept of successful marketing for today's small businesses. You will benefit from practical real-world information that will help you to both develop as well as implement a marketing plan that works for your specific business.

In the meantime, I wish you all the success that eBay has to offer. May the wind always be at your back and may every auction close with a Winning Bidder!

David