



eBay - Part II

Online auctions - can selling really make money?

So you have made your first few purchases on eBay and you want to turn your hand to selling. Well I hope to offer you a few wise words to make things go more smoothly.

Firstly, before thinking of selling it is wise to have your eBay account in good order, make sure you do not have 'shades' or negative feedback. Buyers are less likely to want to buy items from people with shades or people with negative feedback. If you have bought a couple of items and received positive feedback you will look like a more trustworthy buyer.

Before listing your items for auction on eBay it is worth considering what payment methods you are going to accept. Without any other services you can accept; Cash, Cheques, Cash on Delivery, Postal Order and Bank Transfer. I would strongly recommend you do not accept cash unless the item is going to be collected in person. With cash sent in the mail there is no tracking and problems can occur if the money is not received. People are also increasingly requesting sellers to accept bank transfers. If you do not mind others knowing your bank sort code and account numbers, this method of payment avoids the fees associated with services such as Bill Point and Pay Pal. However I do recommend you insist the buyer enters their name as the identifier when transferring the money, as this will be the name that appears on your bank statement and therefore makes identification easier.

If you are going to be selling a lot of items it is worth investigating the other online payment services; Bill Point and Pay Pal. Until very recently Bill Point was integrated into eBay and was the better option. However eBay has recently changed this in favour of integrating Pay Pal and is phasing out Bill Point as its preferred method. If you can spare the time to set up both it will give the seller more payment options and make the purchase of

your items more attractive. Note that these companies charge for their services and you may want to re-charge this to your buyers.

When you have your account ready with extra payment options available, it is time to list your item. Firstly it is recommended that you have a digital photo or scan of the item you are selling. The first photo in a listing is free and items sell much, much better with a photo.

eBay offers two different selling formats; Traditional Auction and Buy it Now. Also eBay allow you to combine the advantages of both if you wish. Buy it Now was introduced relatively recently and allows you to list a price for the item. If the buyer is prepared to pay this price, they can buy the item straight away and end the listing.

The second listing stage involves category selection, it is important you select an appropriate category for your listing. People browsing the items on eBay will not see your item if you have listed it in a different place to other items of a similar nature. With that in mind you may want to search for similar items to yours, to see which categories they are listed in.

The main categories are then subdivided into more specific sections with possible 3rd or 4th levels of sub division. As with the main category it is important to get the right section or you will not get maximum exposure. You will start to spot trends, for example people list both hardware and software in the category Computers & Gaming -> Vintage Hardware -> Acorn. If you abided strictly with the category titles and listed the item under a software category it is very likely your software would have been lost.

You can list your item under two categories, but as you would expect this doubles most of the listing fees. So unless you need a wider exposure on an item of greater value then it is probably not worth it. It is also worth noting you can move your item between categories at a later date.

The next stage is very important; you have to describe the item you want to sell. This is where the

inner salesman in you has to be teased out. I cannot re-iterate enough the importance of writing a good description with as much information as you can. This serves two purposes, it makes the item look attractive to buyers and it also stops buyers asking you too many questions.

Try to put as much detail into the ' Item Title' as you can, if we take a Risc PC for example; "SA Risc PC 64Mb, 1.2Gb, CD, R4, 2 Slice + NIC" contains a lot of information for the buyer to make them interested enough to click on the listing to find out more. It is worth avoiding the temptation to put ASCII art and words like RARE into the description unless the item ' is really' rare. Another trick people use, is to insert words that are common searches, for example; "SA Risc PC (Easy to use like a Mac!)". People searching for "Mac" on eBay will then get your listing in the search hits as well as Apple Macintosh machines for sale. It is unlikely that people wanting to purchase an Apple Macintosh will purchase the Risc PC instead, so I would recommend the more detailed item description.

The ' Item Description' field gives a larger area for you to describe your item as well as giving information about postage options and terms of the sale. It is always best to try and put as much information into the description as you can, but unlike an advert in the newspaper, space is not at a premium so there is little need for acronyms. HTML is also accepted, so you can create lists and place paragraph breaks and horizontal rules in appropriate places to improve reading. It is worth avoiding the temptation to insert pretty backgrounds and other tags that make listings look un-professional.

After entering the ' Item Description' , the following page requires lots of information from pricing to location details. Firstly decide on the period you want to list the item for, you have a choice of; 3, 5, 7 or 9 days. Careful listing of an item to include two weekends will give buyers who use eBay from home instead of work time to look and bid on your auctions. I recommend a 9 day auction, starting on either Thursday or Friday evening or Saturday morning. You also have to decide on a start price and reserve price. Personal experience shows buyers on eBay dislike reserves and you get lots of emails

asking you to disclose the reserve. If you are unsure if your item is of value or do not mind what price it reaches, I recommend you start the listing at £1 and let the bidders raise the price. However if you do set a reserve, you may want to state the reserve in the item description text.

The ' Item Location' information is self explanatory and is very useful for bidders who are looking to possibly collect!

The most important part of the listing in my opinion is a photograph. At a real auction, you have the opportunity to view the item however over the internet the next best thing is a photograph. I personally would not consider listing an item without a photograph as past auctions have shown items without photographs do not fetch as higher final value. As the first photograph that is listed is free, it really is a must. The only problems I have faced are with uploading the photos with a RISC OS browser.

At the bottom of the page, there are some extra ' cost' options that are worth considering for higher value items, the one I would recommend is ' Gallery' for an extra 15p you can have the item photograph on the listings page.

Payment options are on the next page, you need to simply check the boxes that relate to the payment options you are willing to accept, eBay also allows you to integrate Pay Pal payments by entering in your Pay Pal email address.

It is very important to outline who pays for postage and I recommend you find the postage costs before listing the item, buyers like to know the amount they have to pay before bidding. Do not be tempted to try and make money on postage, buyers will leave negative feedback if they think they are being ripped off. A charge of 80p for packaging (new jiffy bag and tape) plus postage fees seems acceptable. You can list the postage insurance available at this stage, 63p for recorded delivery and appropriate registered postage costs.

You can also list ' Payment Instructions' to aid the buyer. This is important if you accept payment by

Pay Pal or Bill Point and want the buyer to pay for the payment fees. An accepted eBay practice is for the buyer to add the online payment charge to the postage amount. You may want to include in this section a statement like this:

"If you would like to pay by eBay Payments/Pay pal, <http://www.paypal.co.uk/>, then please add 3% to the total cost."

If you would like to pay by using Bill Point, <http://www.billpoint.com/>, please add 25p for goods £10 and under, for goods between £10 and £350 please add 25p and 3.30% of the total cost.

"I can send an invoice with these methods of payment calculated, if it is easier for you..."

Finally select the areas you are willing to ship to and if you are willing to accept escrow.

You will now have chance to review your listing and make any changes before submission. eBay also lists the fees associated with the listing at this stage.

After selecting the Submit Listing button your listing is accepted into the eBay system and will appear in the selected category usually within 30 minutes.

Now you can sit back and wait for the bids to start. There are a number of useful hints and tips for the auction listing period and the auction completion period, but I will leave those until next month.

Matt Cook