



**THE** **ROBERT PUGH**  
**eBay**  
**BUSINESS**  
**HANDBOOK**

**How anyone can build a business  
and make big money on eBay.co.uk**



**Fully revised and updated 3rd edition of the  
bestselling guide to succeeding on eBay!**

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# The eBay Business Handbook 3rd edition

How anyone can build a business  
and make big money on [eBay.co.uk](http://eBay.co.uk)

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First edition published in Great Britain in 2006 by Harriman House.  
Second edition published in 2008.  
This edition 2010.

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ISBN 13: 978-1-906659-97-4

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A CIP catalogue record for this book can be obtained from the British  
Library.

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Printed and bound by CPI, Antony Rowe.

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## Sign up to the FREE eBay UK Bulletin

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If this book has helped you with your eBay business and you would like to know more, why not sign up for my free weekly newsletter and keep up-to-date with the latest developments for eBay sellers. You can also send me your feedback and tell me how this book has kick-started your eBay adventure.

Distributed by the publisher of this book – Harriman House – each email contains hints and tips for eBay sellers, technical developments within eBay, a reader's letter ('Ask Molly') and other essential information. HTML issues are also covered, with explanations of when and how to use additional codes to drive your profits even higher. Plus, check out new ideas surrounding general sales techniques and advice for moving with the markets.

It's not all hard work and no play. There are always strange and crazy things happening on eBay and in my 'Trader's Tales' section, I will share some of the more amusing moments from the world of sales. Like the guy who bought half a kilo of Lego and then was disappointed with the amount! Not to mention the weird and wonderful auctions that take place online – how much would you bid for an air guitar?

You can also keep up-to-date with my own eBay career; I'll share my experiences, both good and bad, with you.

To sign up to my free newsletter, please visit: [www.eBaybulletin.co.uk](http://www.eBaybulletin.co.uk)

Best wishes,

Bob (Mollybol)



## About the author

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Bob is married with three daughters, two useless dogs and an extremely active coffee machine.

After 24 years working for the same company, and many years within the corporate sales division, Bob realised it was time for a change.

He began selling on eBay in January 2003, initially by clearing his house of unwanted items, with very little knowledge of computers and no experience of selling via the internet. The first few months proved to be a steep learning curve, but he soon became an established eBay Power Seller and has sold over 39,000 items.



Now, aged 45, he has retired from full-time work and uses eBay to generate an income as and when it is required.

Since this book was first published, Bob has made numerous media appearances to share his expert eBay knowledge and has received plenty of positive feedback:

“As eBay is now a part of life, we were very privileged to broadcast a programme about it. It’s changed people’s lives completely – it’s a monster that has grown and grown and has made so much money, for so many people. Bob was so enthusiastic on-air and actually taught me a hell of a lot about eBay – and what a great book he has written too.”

- Pete Price, Presenter, *Radio City*

Bob’s second book *eBay Q&A – 200 of the most popular questions about eBay* was published in September 2007 also by Harriman House.

He now writes a free, weekly newsletter offering tips, advice and real-life stories about the world’s most famous online marketplace. Sign up today, at: [www.eBaybulletin.co.uk](http://www.eBaybulletin.co.uk)



## Preface

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This book will take you from the very first act of creating your user name through to the creation of your own business.

The eBay process is very easy; to sell on eBay is not complicated and requires no sales experience. However, to use eBay to its full potential, to maximise returns and develop a robust online business, does require an understanding of sales, marketing and business processes. It is these thoughts and techniques that can be found within these pages.

### Who the book is for

This book has been written for anyone who has ever considered the idea of owning their own business and being their own boss. Whether you want to supplement an existing income, or you want a complete change of career, this book is for you.

The book assumes that the reader already knows the basics about eBay, but no great knowledge of running a business, sales techniques or computers is assumed. These areas are covered within these pages to a depth that will enable you to be successful without becoming bogged down with technical detail.

Written in plain English, this book does not require you to have a grasp of complex industry jargon; all that's required is an open mind and a desire to succeed.

This book also contains more advanced ideas for anyone with an existing eBay business. With a fresh, common sense approach to selling, there are many hints, tips and personal recommendations that can be applied to your eBay activities.

This handbook is intended as an introduction to successful eBay selling for those who would like to know more. It demonstrates how anyone can start in a small way and then grow at their own pace to a level to be decided by themselves.

## What the book covers

This book provides you with everything you need to know to get started on eBay as a seller, or improve your sales and profit if you already trade. The book is structured in a logical way, from the most basic planning in the early stages to managing the paperwork.

Unlike other eBay books, this Handbook is based on the personal experiences of an established Power Seller. Everything from the practical concerns of international sales to the purchase of packing materials is covered here.

Perhaps one of the more valuable aspects of this book is the section dedicated to finding stock to sell. Where traders obtain their stock is a closely guarded secret and often finding where to buy can be quite daunting. This book will inform you where to look, how to buy from different sources and, the most interesting of all, how to use eBay as a source of goods.

This book cannot cover every aspect of selling on eBay, there is just not enough space. It will, however, show how I went from zero to achieve a feedback score of 25,000 in just five years. From the very first LP record to the family car, I have sold items to almost every corner of the globe, taken every form of payment known to man, and personally packed a huge variety of items. Anybody can do this, just follow the steps in this book, dedicate the time, set your own goals and soon you will achieve them.

## Structure of the book

This book has been structured in such a way that it covers all aspects of creating an eBay business; from the very first idea, through the processes involved, to building your business for the future. The book follows a logical progression that allows you to evolve at your own speed.

The development of an eBay business can be achieved in several stages, and the chapters of the book reflect this.

## How to get started

The chapter 'Starting out' covers the thinking required behind an online business prior to actually selling. Areas covered in detail include:

- What eBay is actually all about, how it all began, what kind of things are allowed to be sold and what items should be avoided.
- How much is a typical eBay business actually going to cost to get started? This section looks at the practical requirements; a few of the problems you may encounter along the way and gives an idea of just how much time it will take.
- How to choose the items that you want to sell. This section also looks at the best time to sell.
- How to research your chosen market and discover what is really selling, and how your competition is doing. Searching the eBay database is a key element to successful trading – learn how best to use the system to your advantage.
- Creating your seller's account: considering everything from the right name to the format of your listing design, and how to promote your sales activities to achieve maximum return on your investment.
- How big you would like your market to be, whether you should sell overseas and what is really involved.
- How you will trade and what terms and conditions will you include. This section provides practical examples of what to include and why. What will you do regarding your postage conditions, how will you handle any returned goods, and how long will you allow for payment to be made? It's all in this section.
- Understanding which payment options are available. This section is dedicated to this subject and analyses each payment method, providing a comparison between them.

## Preparing for the first listing

This chapter looks at all of the preliminary work involved before the first listing goes live.

- Check out the competition; find out what's selling and what is not fetching the right price. See how your chosen item has been selling during the last month.
- Guidelines on how to prepare your item for listing.
- Advice and guidance on the packing materials you will need, where best to obtain them and how much they will cost.
- Consider how you will post your item, which carrier you will use, how much it is likely to cost, and how best to package your item to ensure a safe delivery.
- Which camera should you buy and how much will it cost? Advice and examples regarding saving your pictures onto your computer and how to edit them. Plus hints and tips for the best pictures.

## Creating your first listing

This chapter is a complete step by step walk-through of creating an item listing on eBay, with hints and tips at every stage.

- How the mechanics of the process actually work; what you really need to know to sell your first item.
- Ensure you get the maximum number of visitors to see your item by selecting the correct location on eBay to place your auction.
- It's all about choosing the best title in this section. Without a good title, nobody will find your item in the first place.
- It's the description of your item that will convince the visitor to do business with you. This section looks in detail at various techniques used for describing your item and shows how to make it look its best.

- What to consider when setting a start price, how long should you allow your auction to run, when should you start it and should you use a reserve? This section also covers the loading of your pictures onto eBay and outlines the extra options available to promote your item.
- What is likely to happen during the auction, what kind of contact might you get from potential customers and how to deal with this. You may decide to revise your auction details, cancel bids or even remove the auction altogether. This section covers the processes you will need to know.

### After a listing has ended

The end of your listing marks the beginning of the next phase in the sales process, many things will happen and this section covers these.

- How you are likely to be paid – the many different payment options are explained. How you will be informed of payment.
- What to consider when packaging your item to ensure a safe delivery, but also maximise your profit.
- The various issues surrounding dispatch are shown, along with recommendations on best practice.
- How to sell more items to second and third placed bidders; the ‘Second Chance’ option is explained here.
- This section will also explain how you can claim back eBay fees should your buyer default.

### Refine your listing format

Take your eBay listings to the next level. Create your own look and design your own page format.

- With fully worked examples, this section shows how to include larger pictures at no extra cost, provide live links to other websites and promote your other items. All of this is possible with little or no knowledge of computer codes.

- Fully customise your listings using basic HTML codes which are fully explained. Alter the colour of your pages and create your own backgrounds and borders. Cross promote your other items with live picture links and more. All the codes you need, and an explanation of how to use them, can be found in this section.

## Fraud

Learn more about fraud on eBay. Whenever money changes hands, there is the opportunity for fraud and it does happen. This section will highlight the issues around:

- Payment fraud. How to anticipate this situation, what to check for and precautions you should take.
- The possible hijack of your eBay account. You will receive many attempts by third parties who will try to obtain your password and take control of your account. There are many ways to fall foul of these scams and these sections look in more detail at the systems used to guard against these scams and how to spot potential dangers.
- What eBay will and won't do concerning fraud on their site. This section outlines their policy and provides advice on how to proceed if anything does go wrong.
- What to do if you are the victim of fraud. How to put things right with minimum hassle.

## Developing your business

Develop your online business and build on your eBay brand. This chapter discusses options to maximise your eBay business for increased sales and higher profits. Included are comprehensive sections on:

- eBay shops. The available options, how much they cost and what advantages you would expect to see. An insight to the various seller tools that are available. How these enhancements can be used to encourage repeat sales from your satisfied customers.



- Finding stock. This is one of the more frustrating aspects of any business. This section describes practical ways to obtain more stock, including the use of eBay as a source of goods for resale.
- How to increase both the exposure of your listings and your cash flow by becoming an eBay Affiliate. What is involved, what the benefits really are and how you can make money simply by passing business to eBay from your own website.
- Power Seller status. What it means and how to make the grade. Is it really good for sales?
- Trading with the global economy. This can appear to be a minefield of red tape and regulations. It is possible to export from the UK with minimum stress, and this section details the requirements and outlines what is really needed.

## Manage the paperwork

Keeping on top of the paperwork in any business is a demanding task, and an eBay business is no different. This last section of the book looks at:

- The legal issues surrounding business on the internet and how these impact on requirements such as VAT.
- What your position is regarding tax; both income and capital gains tax will be explained.
- Becoming self-employed. This section delves into more detail about self-employment, how easy it is to register, how exactly you go about it and what it means for things such as National Insurance.
- Your tax return. With any business, comes the need once a year to submit final accounts to the tax office. This section highlights some of the typical costs of an eBay business and provides guidance when calculating your profits from selling on eBay.

At each stage of the book, references are made to my own experiences of selling on eBay, highlighting the pitfalls I've discovered along the way and some of the more interesting ways to make selling both enjoyable and very rewarding.



## Introduction

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Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be your own boss, to work when you decide to and make as much money as you want? Perhaps you would like to work from home, spend more time with the children and, at the same time, create a business that could grow as large as you wish.

I did, and after just two years selling on eBay I had all of these things. Following a long career in the world of corporate sales, I became disillusioned and realised that I did indeed yearn for a different way of life.

Five years ago I had no idea what eBay was. But then I was introduced to the site by a friend and was very soon hooked. I realised then that this could be the way to change my life and that of my family.

The last five years has passed so quickly! I have sold in excess of 39,000 items, gained Power Seller status and have a feedback rating in excess of 25,000. Perhaps the most important aspect of this journey has been that I have achieved this success with my family, working from home. In the early days everybody was involved with packing, sending emails and so on – a real cottage industry.

Now, five years on, I have left full-time work and can concentrate on eBay full time. I work when I want to, and when the sun shines I don't have to work at all. After almost 20 years driving along the motorways of the UK, I can now smile to myself when I hear of traffic jams and congestion as I make another coffee and walk to my office.

My story is not unique by any means; there are thousands of people earning good money from eBay. Some just want to supplement their existing income, some to own their own business and others, such as myself, want a complete change.

I achieved all this in just two years from a standing start, and I have learnt so much along the way. I send items to every corner of the world and have developed a complete end-to-end process that allows me to sell everything from an unwanted CD to the garden shed. Everything I know about selling on eBay is in this book. If you want to change your lifestyle a little, or maybe make a complete new start, this book will help you get there.



# 1

## A day in the life of an eBay trader



Dear diary...  
Dear diary... two years on  
Dear diary... April 2010





## Dear diary...

**6.30**

My day starts with the rather loud sound of the alarm clock ringing at 6.30. My wife, Debbie, still works part-time, so this wake up call is for her. I snooze through to 7.00. I no longer possess an alarm clock - this was one of the first things to go when I retired from the conventional rat race of life.

**7.00**

Catch the news headlines on the radio. The weather is set to be good for the next few days, which is welcome as I have some work to do in the garden that I have put off for weeks. (On the other hand, the weather forecast is always wrong and if it rains I can leave the garden again.) Following the weather is the traffic report. This is the most fun to listen to and is certainly worth staying in bed for. Congestion, traffic queues, hold ups on the M25, broken down lorries and lanes coned off - another typical day in the life of a commuter. Back to Zzzland.

**7.05**

The house starts to stir. With three school-age children (sorry, I mean 'young adults'), the timetable to use the bathroom is extremely tight. In they go, one after the other, while I go downstairs to feed our two dogs. Or rather, the dogs round me up and herd me downstairs towards the food bowls.

**7.07**

Switch on the kitchen radio and flick on the kettle. This kettle holds a special place in my affections. Since leaving the world of corporate sales, the kettle and I have formed a relationship which would be the envy of any courting couple. We spend so much time together and I can turn it on whenever I want. The radio has another news flash: traffic lights not working, ensuing queues, etc. The kettle boils.

7.15

*Back upstairs with two cups of tea. Everything is moving along nicely, except the bathroom is still not free - with a houseful of women what do you expect?*

7.45

*I have managed to grab a bathroom slot and donned my working uniform: shorts, tee-shirt and no socks (don't you just hate wearing socks). No more suits to choose from (sold them on eBay), no more ties to select (sold on eBay), no more shiny black shoes to wear (eBay) and, best of all, no more shirts with collars (even I couldn't sell these on eBay).*

*Downstairs, the working day is starting. Debbie switches on the main computer and wireless router, which provides broadband connection to the three terminals in the house: one for buying, one for selling, and one for the kids' MSN.*

*It's time now for the first look at my eBay auctions to see how things are moving.*

*Lego sales are 'building' well and the Captain Scarlet fancy dress costume has reached £9.55. Having bought 25 of these at £4.60 from a high street shop, it's good to see them so popular. The make-up sets purchased from Boots for £3.32 are selling well at £7.49, and the Wade Whimsies bought for 50p are now at £11.65.*

*I have 137 auctions live at the moment, with nine ending this evening. The current sales value of these nine is £68.27. eBay auction values tend to rise towards the end of the fixed period duration as the item moves towards the top of the list, so things for today look good so far.*

*Time to check the emails.*

*This is always a voyage of discovery as you never really know who has your email address. There are 17 new emails: four of which are offering me over-the-counter drugs [delete]; a 'great new mortgage deal' [delete]; some 'incredible anti-spyware*



software' [delete]; and penis enlargement cream [file for future reference].

There are usually three other types of email received:

- spoofs, which will try to solicit passwords and personal details from me,
- questions from potential buyers and, best of all,
- notifications of payments received whilst we have been asleep.

I'll get round to these later, but now it's time for the worker in the household to drop the kids off at school and depart for work.

### 8.15

The house is quiet at last!

Having spent 24 years working for the same company and many years as a Sales Account Manager pounding the motorways of the UK, my daily commute now consists of an eight yard walk, coffee in hand, to my garden shed - the centre of my eBay operations.

### 8.20

Time to open up the shed for the day's business.

When I say shed, it is a little bit more than just a shed. This is a purpose built wooden building the size of a single garage, designed for one purpose: to make money. Inside is the third computer terminal. This one is for selling, no games software on this one, no MSN or chat rooms, this is a sleek, mean machine and along with the kettle is the other love of my life (apart from the wife, kids and dogs of course).

The shed, or 'office', also has rack after rack of storage capacity shelving from floor to ceiling, with items to be sorted, items to be listed soon, items currently listed and items sold and not yet shipped. There's storage for packing materials, boxes, bubble wrap, sticky tape and so on. There is an area for photography and another for packing up the sold items. This is my world.

### 8.30

*Let's get started.*

*Turn the radio on, maybe Classic FM, I'm in a chilled kind of mood today.*

*The emails need dealing with. The questions from potential buyers are the most important as these guys may move on to another auction if the reply is not quick. There are four at the moment:*

- Do I ship to the USA? [Yes]*
- Do I combine items to reduce shipping? [Yes]*
- Will I end the Warhammer auction early for £16? [No]*
- Do I accept American Dollars cash? [As a last resort]*

*The spoof emails are great fun to read, and some of them can be very convincing (I have included a selection at the end of this book). Apparently, in just one night I have been invited to become a Power Seller (again); had my PayPal account accessed by a foreign IP address; face suspension if I don't validate my eBay details immediately; and I need to update my billing details after an eBay audit. Some of the spelling and grammar is just awful.*

*The rest of the emails are notifications of instant payments into my PayPal account. Although I have been in bed, all over the world other people are awake and as we sell 40% of our items overseas, payments can arrive at any time. Which is just fine by me!*

### 9.00

*It's time for the packing to be completed. This is perhaps the most tedious element of my day. It can take anything up to two hours depending on sales. If you can imagine the run up to Christmas and wrapping those presents every day, you will get the idea. Today is not too bad, I should be finished in an hour. The items I sell are all different, the size and weight will vary in almost every case. A seller of DVDs for example, would have an easier*

time of packing as all of the items are the same shape and weight. For me, the key thing is to anticipate how the item will be packed before it is sold.

I will endeavour to send an item as soon as it has been paid for - this will get them out of the shed and should result in a happy buyer. Today I have predominately toys to send:

- A Disneyland Polly Pocket play-set bought for £2, sold for £23.50 [fairly straightforward, into a box, brown paper, done].
- A fancy dress nurse outfit brought from Toymaster Kingdom for £3, sold for £7.50 [into a bubble bag and away].
- Thomas the Tank Engine train, bought for 20p at a car boot sale, sold for £11 [roll in bubble wrap and into a bubble bag].

This packing lasts for just about an hour. It is not the most interesting of tasks, but the radio was good company and the dogs put in an appearance, sniffed about, stretched a bit and then went back to sleep in the kitchen.

#### **10.00**

Step outside into the natural light and look at the garden. It still needs some work. I am just about to roll up my sleeves when thankfully I am distracted by the dogs barking inside. The postman has arrived and a bundle of mail is on the mat. Just time for a quick cup of tea in the garden while I read through it.

It is not a bad day. Two UK cheques have arrived (brilliant, no PayPal fees on these); 45 Euros from a lady in Finland who bought some vintage Lego; and a \$14 Postal Money Order from the US (which unfortunately is only negotiable in the US - another email to write later).

There is a great note with one of the cheques from a lady who bought some Winnie The Pooh Duplo for £10.50 for her daughter:

---

Dear Sir / Madam

Please find enclosed a cheque for £13.50 to pay for the Winnie The Pooh Duplo pieces inc P&P. My little girl will be most appreciative.

This is the first item I have purchased from eBay and I am not sure my nerves can take anymore.

Yours faithfully.

---

What a great note! I will get this packed up after tea and in the post immediately.

Not waiting for cheques to clear can be asking for trouble, but with a reasonably low value one I am happy to take the chance. In almost three years, only two cheques have bounced.

This note also shows how important first time buyers are. For one thing, they tend to bid more which is good for business. It also shows just how much fun eBay can be. I'll post the toys quickly, send a polite response, leave great feedback for the buyer and they may just visit again.

---

### 10.30

Time for a quick check on eBay to see how things are moving.

I have sold another set of comedy DVDs for £4.99 (picked up 36 sets of these for £20); and two rugs in the shape of Bob The Builder at £9 each, which we bought from the discount shop QD for £3.99 each. We bought 48 rugs in total and they are not selling that fast, so may consider reducing the price.

Tonight's items have now reached £76.47. The first item ends at 19.30, so still loads of time for them to go up in value.

I am at a bit of a loose end. Coffee is not until 11.00, I don't really fancy the gardening or any more packing, so it's off to the park with the dogs for a quick walk.

---

**11.00**

*Coffee time. Our house runs along very traditional lines; coffee at 11.00 and tea at 16.00. Usually I would take some time out to relax a bit with my coffee, but today I have some new stock that I want to get photographed.*

*Whilst on a day out in Great Yarmouth, we found a shop selling Thomas The Tank Engine model trains for just £1 each. We bought 73. The range has now been discontinued and they should sell for £7 each. I will run each model in a traditional auction to determine the market value and then offer the remaining trains on a 'Buy It Now' basis to move the volume.*

*Back out in the office, the light is just right for photography. I select the best background colours for the trains and take two pictures of each one, transferring them directly to the computer from time to time.*

**11.30**

*The front doorbell rings. There is an extension bell in the shed so that I can hear (the dogs going ballistic also caught my attention). DHL have a huge parcel for us. Debbie has been busy buying again. I suspect that I know what it is, but I am not allowed to open the box. Debbie bought it and has the right to inspect it first - everybody likes to receive a parcel.*

*I've finished the photography for today. Just time to pack up the Winnie The Pooh Duplo, Lego for Finland, and both Bob The Builder rugs, which have been paid for. Once this is done I have a sack of parcels waiting to be dropped off at the postal depot later this afternoon.*

**12.00**

*Time to start preparing for the auctions that will start tonight. I don't use any automated sales tools, but will schedule auctions to start at my preferred times. I also use large pictures within my item descriptions and these will need to be uploaded to my website in advance. As the items to be listed tonight are*

*all very similar (the train photos I took earlier), I only need to write the description once and then use the 'Sell similar' option for the subsequent auctions and slightly alter the pictures.*

**12.20**

*Look at the time! I have been so busy that I lost track. Debbie will be home at 12.30 and I promised to do the vacuuming in the house. Rush indoors and quickly push the vacuum around a bit. Just in time. The doorbell rings, the dogs go mad again and Debbie has arrived home.*

**12.40**

*It's time for lunch. There's a great sandwich shop in town that does a fantastic brie and bacon panini. It's a nice day, so we decide to leave the car at home and cycle into town. The cycles were one of the first purchases made after I gave up the 9-to-5 work life. We sold the second car and in an attempt to slow down the pace of life, bought two fold up mountain bikes.*

*Before we go, there is just time to open the large box. As I suspected, it's a huge collection of Brio wooden train track purchased from eBay only three days ago. There is loads here: tunnels, trains, engine sheds, etc. Buying whole collections from eBay and then splitting them into smaller lots can be very lucrative. A large collection cannot be sold overseas as it needs somebody with a large house to store it in and a large bank balance to buy it. In smaller quantities, it can be shipped anywhere, easily packaged and at pocket money prices. We tend to concentrate on toys, but it would work with football programmes, CDs or DVDs and computer games.*

**14.00**

*Return home from cycle ride. Dismount gently (this keep-fit stuff does hurt to start with).*

*A quick check on the auctions' progress shows that the Warhammer Space Marines are now well over the £16 we were offered earlier in the day, and the Fisher Price plastic knights*

are £10. Whilst out on our bikes, two Buy It Now options were taken for fancy dress costumes, the profit from which will pay for lunch. The total value of tonight's auctions has now topped £90. Back into the office to finish tonight's auctions. The pictures have been loaded onto the website, and I can begin to write the description of each item and then schedule it to start sometime between 19.30 and 22.00. I manage to get ten items listed in an hour, which is good going. I could do more, but these should bring in £100 plus and I don't want to work all of the time or I might as well get a proper job!

**15.00**

Time to pick up the kids from school and walk the dogs again. On the way I drive past my local postal depot and drop off my sack of parcels.

**15.30**

Return home with two very tired dogs, they are still not used to the extra walking, and three young adults with attitude.

**16.00**

Tea time.

A nice cup of tea and time to catch up with the day's events. It's good to put your feet up now and then - I still don't fancy the gardening. The local paper has arrived and Debbie (Chief Buyer) is scanning the small ads for anything that might just make a profit. Nothing today it seems.

It's time to check the email again.

There is another offer of a cheap mortgage and a replica Rolex watch, just for me. I don't even own a watch anymore. Two more questions from interested bidders:

- Do we ship to the USA? [Yes]. There is a pattern forming here. No matter how big you write 'WE SHIP ANYWHERE', you will still get the same question.

- The second email is asking if we have a fancy dress costume in another size. [Unfortunately, no.]

There is not much to do for the rest of the day. The auctions start to end at 19.30 and I will watch them end if we are about. Even after many thousands of sales, it is still a fantastic feeling to see the last minute increase in value as the final seconds tick away.

Debbie has placed a number of items into our buying 'watch list', so we run through these and check the potential for profits. Some sellers are just so bad at selling their items, that another seller can buy them, present them in a better way and make money. This is our aim here. Today we see a collection of eight Lilliput Lane cottages with a current auction price of £8. They weigh so much that they cannot be sold outside of the UK and the description is very poor. Referring to our buyer guide, we think these models could be worth between £40 and £60, so they are certainly worth keeping an eye on.

Also on the watch list is a large Playmobil mansion house, shown in a box - not its original box - just a load of bits in a brown box. Pictures sell items. This seller did not assemble the house, so we have to rely on the description to work out the value. It includes quite a lot of furniture, which is always popular. The current price is £30, another one to watch.

### 17.30

Preparation for the evening meal, not by me though. There is an understanding in the house that Debbie prepares the meals and I will recycle the dishes and tidy up afterwards. I'm just leaving a few feedback comments for recent buyers. I tend to do these in batches as it can turn into a chore if you leave it too long.

Just time to check on the day's business. Not a lot of change. Tonight's auctions now total £92.35, but as they all end in the time period after dinner and before bedtime I am confident they will rise further.



Tonight I am selling mainly toys, so have timed the auctions to end after the evening meal is finished and before children go to bed. This should ensure that the young ones are still around to coax mum into one final bid to secure the toy they have set their heart on. I know it sounds mean, but it's a dog eat cyber-dog world and think how the child would feel if mum lost out for a pound.

**19.00**

Dinner is over, and the children have even done some of the washing up. The dogs have been fed and the house starts to wind down from the hectic day. The kids drift away to their rooms to watch the music channel instead of doing homework and I can settle back ready to watch the auctions end.

A quick check of the emails reveals the usual last minute questions from bidders who have just spotted our auctions:

- Do you combine lots and reduce shipping? [Yes, no problem.]
- Do you accept PayPal from the USA? [We accept PayPal from anywhere.]
- Do you ship to the USA? [\*\*\*!!\*!! Yes, we would love to - Note to self, must write in a bigger font size]

**19.25**

Tonight's auctions are about to end.

This is the exciting bit, what it has all been for.

The total sales value for the nine items is now £103.35, none of the items have increased significantly, just the odd bid here and there.

First up is half a kilo of assorted Lego pieces. These are left over when I sort out all the premium pieces such as windows and figures. The current price is £8.60 going into the final moments. I like to make £10 a kilo, so this is about right. No movement in the final seconds and the auction closes at £8.60.

There is a ten minute gap between my auction end times. I am keen that should a bidder be interested in more than one item,

they are not rushed. I leave just enough time for them to recover from one auction and prepare for last minute bidding on the next. Always let your customers buy in a relaxed way.

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**19.35**

My next auction ends in 5 minutes. It's a Star Wars Lego set, quite nice, no box, but most of the pieces are here and four great pictures really showed it to it's best. It's had 18 bids so far and the price is currently £22. This is a reasonable price - it took me an hour to build a few days back. Two bidders are showing an interest, one in the UK and the other in France. The price moves up another £2 and the set is destined for a trip across the channel. The UK bidder acts again, but still is not a high bidder, the price is £26. Into the final few seconds and they think it's all over...it is now, a new bidder from Italy with 250 feedbacks to their name has come over the top of the French bidder and taken the set for £32. They must have put in a large proxy bid, but we will never know just how much they were prepared to pay.

---

**19.40**

Not a bad start to the evening, time to make a coffee.

---

**19.45**

As the next auction is almost about to end an email arrives, someone has bought two fancy dress witch costumes with a 'Buy It Now' option for £13 and paid as well.

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The next auction is for a Fisher Price model helicopter and trucks from the old (I mean vintage) airport set. The auction high bidder really wants this model. They are in Canada, with only one feedback score and have placed three proxy bids. (Proxy bidding is the eBay system that allows you to place your maximum bid now - the system then bids on your behalf up to your maximum.) They are currently winning at £8.50. Placing multiple proxy bids shows that a buyer is determined to win, although with a more unscrupulous seller, this technique can cost the bidder dearly.

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No movement. Still, it's a fair price. No movement that is, until, with 20 seconds to go, a bidder with 1,639 feedbacks in the UK enters a bid that removes all three proxy bids and takes the helicopter for £16. The winner turns out to be a collector of Fisher Price models, we get on great and another eBay friendship is formed.

I hate to think of that poor child in Canada who has an airport, but no helicopter - every child should have a helicopter. As I have another set with the same models, I make an immediate second chance offer to them. Moments later they have accepted for a price of £15.

I love it when the second chance offer is taken. They do have to be made as soon as possible, while the bidder is reeling from the defeat and getting an ear bashing from their children. I will make identical lots whenever I can just in anticipation of this.

**19.50**

Another ten minute gap. Time for a quick email check - nothing of interest here. The first auctions scheduled to start tonight have begun their ten day duration. These auctions will have a 15 minute interval, which will make things less rushed in ten days time.

My next auction is for a Playmobil construction site digger. It's a nice toy, quite large and still available with a retail price of about £15. The price is £7.09, the current high bidder is in the UK with a feedback score of 66. The seconds tick away and no more bids are forthcoming, so it sells for £7.09. Not bad, as I picked it up at a car boot sale for 50p.

With the running total for the evening at £78.69, and still five auctions to end, I am quite pleased.

**20.00**

The first payments are starting to arrive for tonight's sales, I will need to send some invoices, but will do that later.

The fifth auction to end is for 6cm of used Pokemon trading

*cards. I have no idea which of these cards is of value to a collector, so I sell them by the cm - 6cm should be worth between £7 and £10. This auction has had 276 hits, so they are still very popular. The current price is £7.57, which is where it ends. A little on the low side. I do have some more, but the second bid is £7.07, right on the lower threshold of my price range, so I won't make a second chance this time.*

**20.05**

*Next up is a selection of Fisher Price plastic knights from a huge castle set. I buy the castle with the knights and then dispose of the castle: the packing would be horrendous, whereas the knights can fit into a small box. I paid £4 for the castle and 15 knights. I have been watching these throughout the day and the current price is £14. At £1 per figure, it's about what I would expect.*

**20.06**

*The bid on the knights has risen to £22 - this is very good, that's tomorrow's lunch paid for. Now it's £24.40, the second bidder with two feedbacks is now winning again, let's hope they both really need some more knights for their castle.*

**20.07**

*Up to £26.40. Still with the newer bidder. Then £30, I think I will have some wine with my lunch.*

**20.08**

*The current high bidder is still the fairly new eBay member with 2 feedbacks and at such a high price I now begin to wonder if payment will be OK. Fingers crossed that this is not the end.*

**20.09**

*With about one minute to go, the bid rises to £32, and the winning bidder changes again. 28 seconds later the bid is up another £2 and the new member is again winning. A further 10 seconds later it is £35, still with the same bidder.*

## 20.10

*It's all over. The final bid was for £37, the winner was the bidder with two feedbacks from Banbury, Oxfordshire and they paid straight away with PayPal. The second bidder had also bid £37, but as it was registered later they did not win.*

*That was great for me, I enjoyed it. Time for a cigarette (as I don't smoke it will have to be a virtual one). That was the last of the toys for tonight. There are still three Warhammer auctions to end, but they finish later in the evening as I am trying to capture the American buyers. I'll come back later to see how they do.*

*The current tally is £123.26. I am pleased with this. Time to check on the other members of the household: both dogs fast asleep; all children safely tucked up with soaps or Sky telly; and Debbie chilled out with a good book.*

*It's around 20.30, time to unwind in front of the TV for a while. It was not so long ago that I would have been returning from a business trip to Leeds or wherever at about this time; hot, flustered and with loads of emails to catch up with. Oh, how I miss it!*

## 23.00

*That's it for another day. The Warhammer auctions went OK. Time to lock up the house and off to bed. It's been a funny old day, I didn't seem to get a minutes rest. Might have to take the day off tomorrow. And I never did get the gardening done - oh well, there's always next week.*



## Dear Diary... Two years on

*It has been over two years since my last diary entry and things sure have changed in the 'Mollybol' household!*

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**08.00**

*Time to get up. The last child needs a lift into school and as the older two are at university, it falls to me to provide transport. My wife, Debbie, no longer works outside of eBay, so upon my return from the school run its time for a quick cuppa and slice of toast. Debbie is the first to check on the business and will greet me upon my return with those three little words I love to hear: "We have sold..."*

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**09.00**

*Into the office (I mean shed in garden), coffee in hand - some things never change. Time to power up the pc and check the emails and overnight sales. Since first writing two years ago, I have secured 5 good wholesalers of new items, so my product mix has changed a lot and sales have grown accordingly. The emails offering to enhance my penis size are still much the same!*

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**09.15**

*Start the packing. I still hate this as much as ever, but have refined my processes such that I know how to pack each item and much of the pre-work is already done with just the buyer's address to write. Having kids that are poor students is great as you can exploit them and get them to pack items for less than the minimum wage!*

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**11.00**

*You guessed it, coffee time!*

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**11.30**

*New stock arrived yesterday, it needs to be sorted, photographed and listed. My main lines now include make up and cosmetics,*

Power tool accessories, perfume and branded toys, I do still have a soft spot for secondhand and collectible items, but these no longer make up the bulk of my business.

Today it is a new batch of make up; day creams, night creams, hydrating creams, regenerating creams and more types of mascara than you can shake a stick at. Thankfully a house full of females soon explains what they are for and I can list them - the price of this is four of each item lost in the cause of 'research'!

### **13.30**

Lunch - it has to be quick as I have another eBay bulletin to write. Ever since this book was first published I have written a weekly newsletter which records my thoughts and the developments on eBay, issue 113 needs my attention. I must stress that even though my Q&A column is titled 'Ask Molly', I am a guy, ok one that sells perfume, knows all about lip balm and needs a penis enlargement (apparently), but a guy none the less.

### **15.00**

That's pretty much it for the day, so pick up youngest child from school and the afternoon is my own. A great new tea shop has just opened at the local fruit farm, so a few cups in the orchard should go down well. I must stress that today is NOT in the months running up to Christmas; during the months September to December things are not so leisurely and the lounge resembles a cross between Del-Boy's flat and Arkwright's store room.

### **18.00**

A quick check on sales reveals that the plastic puppy raincoats are still selling well as are the new perfume lines which all smell the same to me anyway.

### **20.00**

Time to relax after another hard day at the office. It has been almost four years since I left the rat race of corporate life, not missing it yet.



## Dear Diary... April 2010

What a year it has been on eBay, the site never stands still and so another edition was called for and here it is.

It is now almost 5 years to the day since I left British Telecom to follow the eBay dream and so far it has been a blast. If you have been following the adventure on my web blog then you will have an insight into the day to day life of this eBay trader, if not, please read on, you just can't make this stuff up.

**09.00**

Waking up in the Mollybol household has become later over the past year. This is mainly due to the fact that 2 kids now live away at university (most of the time) and the baby is in sixth form and has a bus pass. It has to be 9am as I am expecting a visit from myhermes to pick up my larger parcels, more about this later in the book.

**09.15**

Tea! The first cup is always the best. Some things never change and life seems to revolve around the super new kettle, the last one gave up the ghost. In the past my next job would have been to power up the pc and check sales & emails, but no longer. Whilst I have been making the tea, Debbie, my long-suffering wife, has been checking the business on our new Blackberry phone - what a boon this is and again I'll cover it in more detail later.

**10.00**

The large parcels have gone, breakfast has been consumed and it is time to open up the shed. This daily commute still sits well with me when I remember the early starts and horrendous road conditions of the old days. The shed, or 'Molly HQ' as it is affectionately known, is still in a mess, so I won't dwell on this. If you can imagine a cross between Del Boys flat, Arthur Daley's lock up and Arkwright's storeroom then you get the idea.

**11.00**

*Coffee time!*

**11.30**

*The eBay business still consists of three main areas: cosmetics and make-up, new items (mainly toys) and collectables (old junk). With so many women in the house the sale of cosmetics has been terrific; I still don't know why there are so many mascaras or what exactly an 'action liposome' is, but the margins are good.*

*The bootsale season has just started; this continues to be a mainstay of my stock supply. I have now been delving through boxes of junk for over 23 years and still turn up enough gems to make it very worthwhile. Today I have to sort and list a large box of 'Thomas the Tank Engine' trains and track. I list the track individually, a kind of 'pick & mix', buyers can build their own track layout and all I have to do is alter the quantities; no additional photographs! It is a good tip actually, buy collections and spilt them up for a better return.*

**13.30**

*Lunch at a small café nearby. The Blackberry does its stuff 'ding-ding' another sale - it helps the digestion somehow.*

**15.00**

*It's the 'no longer a school run' time - yahoo - so I can settle back and start the packing. Number 3 daughter still helps with the addressing of parcels when she gets back from college; I just pack the tricky ones.*

**16.00**

*Tea time and maybe a biscuit or two. Just a few quick emails need a response:*

*"Do you combine lots for cheaper postage?" - Yes!*

*"Will you ship to the USA?" - Yes!*

*"Have you sent my parcel yet?" - Yes, hopefully you received our dispatch note!*

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**17.45**

*The young Elf has done well again and 2 sacks of parcels are ready to be sent. I still send anything under one kilo with Royal Mail and need to drop this lot off at the depot before 6pm.*

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**20.00**

*Tomorrow's parcels have been booked in with myHermes, just the 3 this time, but all the savings add up.*

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*That's almost it for the day, just time to start a couple of sales for those items not shifting very well, particularly some body lotions nearing their 'use by' date!*

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# 2

## Starting out



- Overview
- What exactly is eBay?
- First steps
- What to sell
- When to sell
- Research the market
- Establish your selling account
- Decide on your target market
- Establish your trading terms and conditions
- Payment options
- eBay charges





## Overview

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They do say that the longest journey starts with the first step, which in the case of an eBay business is certainly true. The great thing about starting an online business and selling on eBay is that you control how long the journey will be and how fast you want to travel.

Private sellers no longer need any money to get started as auction prices starting at 99p are free, all you need is an unwanted Christmas present or two and you will be in business.

How big your business grows will depend on many things, which may also vary over the fullness of time. The beginning, however, will be a similar experience for the largest corporate undertaking or the smallest sole trader with only the germ of an idea of what they want to do.

This first chapter introduces you to eBay, how it was formed and how big it really is, who sells on eBay, what is permitted and just why eBay is the ideal medium to fulfil your ambitions.

Without a plan, all you have is a set of good intentions, so this section will show you the process to create a plan that suits you. It will be nothing to do with a computer or using the internet, but instead a close-up look at the aspects you would like to see from your new undertaking. Included are some thoughts about:

- how to get design ideas;
- what you could sell;
- who you could sell to; and
- how you would like to be paid.

## What exactly is eBay?

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eBay is an online marketplace that enables trade on a national and international basis. It consists of millions of people that together form a trading community consisting of individuals and businesses all using the eBay systems to trade millions of items every day.

When the internet came along, it offered the ability to improve many services. For example, *Amazon* became famous by creating a great online bookshop. But, in essence, *Amazon* was still just like a mail-order bookshop – just faster and cheaper. However, online auctions, led by eBay, were revolutionary. Without the internet, they could not exist. It is the internet that gives them their power by allowing an audience of millions to share the service.

Even though eBay has roughly the same number of fixed price items for sale as it does auctions, its global appeal remains impressive.

To say that eBay is big hardly does it justice. eBay is huge, and it is still growing. There are now hundreds of millions of registered users of eBay. eBay is truly global and allows any member in any country to trade with any other member.

eBay is the platform for trade that can be used by businesses and individuals alike. It has removed an entire level of the supply chain and put manufacturers and wholesalers directly in contact with the end consumer.

Items sold on eBay are classified in a system of categories and sub-categories. There are thousands of these categories which ensure that any item has a logical location within the site. On any given day there are millions of items for sale, including antiques, toys, books, computers, sporting goods, photography and cars. The items listed on eBay fall into two main types:

1. Those you can bid on, just as you would do in any traditional auction, and
2. those items that have a fixed price, where you have the option to purchase them immediately ('Buy It Now'), just as you would do in any retail outlet.



## eBay background

Founded in the USA in 1995, eBay.com was originally intended as a trading site for collectors of various items such as *Pez* sweet dispensers and *Beanie Babies*. eBay has now become much more, and almost anything that is legal is available through the site.

## eBay in figures

Some facts and figures that help give an idea of the world of eBay.

### eBay figures

- The most expensive item sold on eBay to date is a private business jet for \$4.9 million.
- eBay.co.uk has 14 million registered active users and is growing each year.
- eBay visitors average 1 hour 46 minutes on the site and view 225 pages per month.
- eBay net revenues are forecast to reach US\$9 billion in 2010!

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## eBay.co.uk

Founded in October 1999, eBay.co.uk is now the UK's largest online marketplace and the number one e-commerce site. Over 40% all active internet users visit eBay.co.uk once a month.

On eBay UK:

- There are anywhere up to ten million items for sale at any one time.
- The number of registered users is fast approaching 20 million.
- eBay.co.uk has over 13,000 categories.
- Around 178,000 professional sellers in the UK use eBay as a primary or secondary source of income.
- There are over 13,000 'featured shops' in the UK.

### An average day

On an average day on eBay UK, someone buys a:

- mobile phone every 21 seconds;
- laptop every 2 minutes;
- MP3 player every 2 minutes;
- car every 2 minutes; and a
- woman's handbag every 36 seconds.

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### What is a listing?

A listing is the term given to an item on eBay and it can be in one of two main formats: 'auction' or 'fixed price' which is often referred to as 'Buy it now'. Some eBay options relate only to auction format and some are specific to fixed price, however most of the advice in this book will apply to both unless stated otherwise.

**TIP**

Choose a product you already know something about and enjoy working with. Consider issues such as: how you will acquire your stock, where you will store it, and what will be involved with shipping.

## What sells on eBay

There is no doubt in my mind that eBay is big and getting bigger every year as more and more individuals and businesses discover the benefits that this marketplace has to offer.

*But what actually sells on the site and how do you make money from it?*

Over the past five years I have sold thousands of different items, including two garden sheds, a washing machine, a full size Queen Mother armorial flag, a Spike Milligan concert advertising poster, our family car as well as almost everything in the house that is not nailed down.

I am always trying different things and will, as the saying goes, try anything once, although I have not yet tried to sell autumn leaves, a snowman, genuine mud from a very wet rock festival, a jar of pickle or an empty box, but all of these items have been put up for auction – and sold!

Almost anything can be sold through eBay – even the kitchen sink (which I sold for my brother-in-law for £150). There are some prohibited items (more on these below) and some items are not worth anything. Apart from that, almost everything that has a value can be put up for sale – and it seems that even things that don't appear to have any value can also find buyers. With prices for items starting at just one penny and with a £10 million upper limit, everything will find its own level.

My best purchase to date has been an assembled kitchen complete with sink, taps, worktop, and even a small fridge, the whole lot for £65. I had no need for the fridge so that was sold back on eBay for £50. The kitchen has now been re-installed and looks great, not bad for £15.00!

## Prohibited items

### Is my item allowed on eBay?

eBay have set out guidelines to help sellers decide if their items may be sold on the site. A list of prohibited items can be found in the appendices and there are more details available through the eBay online help sections. This list provides a very clear indication of what cannot be sold. Everything not listed would probably be OK to sell. eBay has three definitions of items that may or may not be allowed to be sold.

Selling alcohol or tobacco on eBay is generally not allowed; although if the container is deemed to be collectable, it is possible to sell the bottle or tin with the contents intact. Selling a selection of bottled beers from the early to mid eighties, I received an email asking if the beer itself would be OK to drink. I replied that there was a likelihood that the beer would be off by now. They didn't bid on them.

1. *Prohibited*: means that these items must not be listed on eBay.
2. *Questionable*: means that items may be listed under certain conditions.
3. *Potentially Infringing*: means that items may be in violation of certain copyrights, trademarks or other rights.

Knives are no longer permitted for sale on the UK site (eBay.co.uk) and Ireland site (eBay.ie) with these limited exceptions:

- Dining cutlery sets that include knives used for eating
- Letter openers
- Razor blades and surgical blades
- Tools such as chisels, axes, saws and hoof trimming tools



The trick with selling collectable beer or alcohol containers is to sell the containers themselves and not what is in them. Play down the contents and include a piece in your description that they are not to be consumed. Do not make any comparison with current shop prices "just one of these cigars would cost £8 in Tesco" will result in the listing being pulled.

## What will eBay do with prohibited listings?

eBay has a strong sense of community and to a degree is self-policing. Other members will report items that contravene the rules. To quote eBay on this:

*"eBay reserves the right to delete any listing that may violate any legal provision or the general principles and values of the community at large, even if the legal provision or principles and values are not explicitly stated on the eBay site."*

This basically means that in some cases, eBay will make a judgement as they best see it.

## Who sells on eBay

The eBay community is made up of buyers and sellers who visit the site to trade. This might include large companies, small companies, individuals running a business from home, or individuals just trying to clear out an attic.

Anybody who is over 18 can register, and within a short while can buy or sell. To many, eBay has become more than just a trading site; a sense of real community exists with those individuals who have been using the site for a while. Discussion boards are very popular, not only for exchanging experiences, but also for meeting new virtual friends.

eBay has millions of members worldwide, selling millions of items at any one time. eBay.co.uk is part of the eBay network. All of these members could have access to your listings and could become your customers. These eBay members could also be your competitors as they can market to the UK in the same way that we can direct our sales to another country.

## The eBay community

eBay is a collective of many individuals, each with a common goal: to either buy or sell in a pleasant rewarding environment. Information and knowledge is freely exchanged between members via a number of user forums or discussion boards. The discussion forums are found under the 'Community' tab on eBay.

Almost any question can be posted on to the system, and anybody browsing through the forums can choose to reply – both question and answer are available for all to see and learn from. There are discussion boards for a whole range of issues: one specifically for new users, one about postage and payments and even a discussion board for HTML concerns.

TIP



When starting out on your selling career with eBay, refer back to these boards from time to time, as, if you have a problem, it is certain that someone else will have a similar concern and you may just find the answer.

eBay Power Sellers have a dedicated discussion board where more complex issues can be discussed. Many Power Sellers also patrol the general forums offering their experience to those who ask.

Through the discussion boards, members meet and get to know each other, discuss topics of mutual interest and help each other to learn all about eBay.

eBay can become part of a member's lifestyle. Many members have created second businesses, or left day jobs altogether, by trading on eBay. For hundreds of thousands of others, eBay is the place to share a passion for items that are collectable or special in some way.

As mentioned the community is self-policing, and users frequently form 'neighbourhood watch' groups to help guard against misuse or violations of site etiquette.

eBay encourages open and honest communication between the community and the company. Members of the community often give their feedback to improve the environment in which they spend their time.

The fundamental principle of eBay is that every trader, whether large or small, has the same set of rules for trading. With the exception of volume-related discounts and benefits for top sellers, it is a level playing field.

## The eBay values

eBay was founded on five key values and the eBay.co.uk site also holds these at its heart. As with all systems and markets, there will be those who break the rules and go against the interests of the community; however these amount to only a very small proportion of eBay users. With a little caution and some help from the recommendations within this book, you will be able to avoid most pitfalls and trade successfully in an environment where a problem is very much the exception.

### The five key eBay values

1. eBay believe that people are basically good.
2. eBay recognises and respects everyone as a unique individual.
3. eBay believes everyone has something to contribute.
4. eBay encourages people to treat others the way that they want to be treated.
5. eBay believes that an honest, open environment can bring out the best in people.

Reading these values for the first time can seem a little strange (and might seem rather too American for British tastes!), but after you have been involved with the site for some time you will find that the community at large generally upholds these values.

## First steps

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The actual procedure of selling on eBay is quite straightforward. There are help pages on the website and the sales process will guide you through each stage. You may already have bought on the site and have an understanding of the layout and be familiar with some of the eBay jargon. If not, there is a glossary of terms and abbreviations at the back of this book which should provide some assistance.

This section is about some of the things you will need to know before you start to sell on eBay.

First, it is important to understand some of the background. I will talk about the equipment you will need, who supplies it and, most importantly, how much it is likely to cost.

Understanding the implications, both on your time and your finances, will prepare you for the following section which will look at the subject of what to sell. *It's all about planning.*

When I started, I charged straight into selling. I had not bought anything before and did not understand anything about eBay. I have now learnt and adapted over time, but can't help thinking how many mistakes I could have avoided with a little more preparation in the early days.

**TIP**



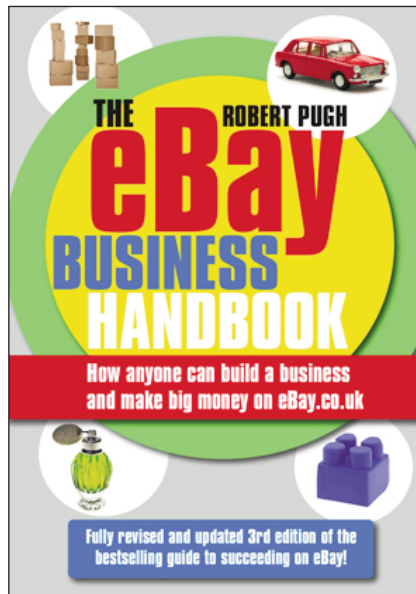
Consider buying a few low price items to get started. Not only will this boost your feedback score, but it will also give you an insight into the buyer's point of view, which you can use when selling your own items.



# The eBay Business Handbook

How anyone can build a business and  
make big money on eBay.co.uk

Robert Pugh



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