

# ABSOLUTE BEGINNER'S GUIDE

TO

# eBay®

**Fifth Edition**

*No prior eBay  
experience necessary!*



# Absolute Beginner's Guide to eBay, Fifth Edition

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# INTRODUCTION

eBay is a true phenomenon.

In 2007, eBay transactions defined a new economy worth more than \$59 billion. Read that number again; it's not a misprint. *Fifty-nine billion dollars*. That's \$59 billion in sales that didn't exist before eBay. Fifty-nine billion dollars of transactions that appeared seemingly out of thin air. Fifty-nine billion dollars in merchandise that wouldn't have been sold otherwise.

Where did that \$59 billion come from? It came from you and from me and from 248 million other people around the world who log on to the eBay site to buy and to sell all manner of merchandise. Before eBay, there was no global marketplace for the 248 million of us; there was no way to buy and to sell that \$59 billion of merchandise, except for small local garage sales and flea markets.

eBay made that \$59 billion happen. eBay brought 248 million of us together.

In doing so, eBay became one of the first—and maybe the only—of the online businesses to make a profit from day one of its existence. eBay kept its costs low by not actually handling any of the merchandise traded on its site, and generated revenue by charging listing fees and sales commissions on every transaction.

Smart people, with a smart concept.

And here's somebody else who's smart about eBay:

*You.*

You're smart because you bought this book to help you learn how to buy and sell merchandise on the eBay site. You know that you need to learn how eBay works before you can start buying and selling, and you also know that a little extra knowledge can give you the edge you need to be a real auction winner.

*Absolute Beginner's Guide to eBay, 5th Edition*, will help you get started with eBay auctions—even if you've never bought anything online in your life. Read this book and you'll learn how to bid and how to sell, and what to do when the auction ends.

More important, you'll learn how to maximize your chances of winning important eBay auctions—without paying through the nose. And if you're a seller, you'll learn how to stand out from the crowd and generate more bids—and higher selling prices.

You'll also learn that buying and selling on eBay isn't that hard, and that it can be a lot of fun. You'll even discover that you can actually make a living from your eBay activities, if you don't mind a little hard work.

Really!

## How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into five main parts:

- Part I, “Welcome to eBay,” shows you how the eBay marketplace works, how to sign up for eBay membership, how to find your way around the eBay site, and how to protect yourself against eBay frauds and scammers.
- Part II, “Buying on eBay,” tells you everything you need to know about bidding for items in eBay auctions, as well as buying fixed-price items in the eBay marketplace. You’ll learn how to search for items to buy; how to bid in online auctions; how to find and purchase fixed-priced items from eBay Stores, eBay Express, and Half.com; how to pay for your purchases; how to place last-second “snipes” to win eBay auctions; and how to avoid getting ripped off by unscrupulous sellers.
- Part III, “Selling on eBay,” is the flip side of the coin. This section tells you everything you need to know about selling on eBay. You’ll learn how to create auction listings, sell items for a fixed price, determine what payment methods to accept, create great-looking product photos, and pack and ship your merchandise.
- Part IV, “Becoming an eBay Power Seller,” is for the really ambitious eBay user. You’ll learn how to research eBay sales, manage your auctions with various auction management tools, sell and ship internationally, open a Trading Assistant business and how to turn your hobby into a full-time profession—and make a real living from your eBay auctions.
- Part V, “Participating in the eBay Community,” is all about interacting with other buyers and sellers. You’ll learn how to manage your eBay activity with My eBay, create your own About Me and My World pages, read and write reviews and guides, and mix it up with other users in eBay’s discussion boards, groups, neighborhoods, and blogs.

Taken together, the 30 chapters in this book will help you get the most from your eBay experience. By the time you get to the end of the final chapter, you’ll be buying and selling online just like a pro!

## Conventions Used in This Book

I hope that this book is easy enough to figure out on its own, without requiring its own instruction manual. As you read through the pages, however, it helps to know precisely how I’ve presented specific types of information.

## Web Page Addresses

There are a lot of web page addresses in this book—including addresses for specific pages on the eBay site. They're noted as such:

[www.molehillgroup.com](http://www.molehillgroup.com)

Technically, a web page address is supposed to start with `http://` (as in `http://www.molehillgroup.com`). Because Internet Explorer and other web browsers automatically insert this piece of the address, however, you don't have to type it—and I haven't included it in any of the addresses in this book.

## Special Elements

This book also includes a few special elements that provide additional information not included in the basic text. These elements supplement the text to make your learning faster, easier, and more efficient.

### caution

A caution tells you to beware of a potentially dangerous act or situation. In some cases, ignoring a caution could cause you significant problems—so pay attention to it!



### note

A note provides information that is generally useful but not specifically necessary for what you're doing at the moment. Some notes are like extended tips—interesting, but not essential.



### tip

A tip is a piece of advice—a little trick, actually—that helps you use your computer more effectively or maneuver around problems or limitations.



### “Mike Sez”

This element is my personal opinion or recommendation regarding the topic at hand. Remember—I might not always be right, but I'll always have an opinion!



Finally, in various parts of this book you'll find big checklists. Use these checklists to prepare for the upcoming task—just check off the items on the list, and you'll be ready to go.

## Further Reading

I'd be somewhat remiss if I didn't point you to further reading on the subject of eBay—in particular, books you can read after this one to help you be even more successful with your eBay auctions. To this end, I draw your attention to several other books I've written that you might find useful:

- *Easy eBay* (Que, 2005), a four-color, step-by-step guide for easily intimidated eBay newbies.
- *eBay Auction Templates Starter Kit* (Que, 2006), a book-and-CD combo that shows you how to create eye-popping auction listings, by using either ready-to-use auction templates or by creating your own templates with HTML.
- *Tricks of the eBay Masters, 2nd Edition* (Que, 2006), which assembles 600 tricks and tips from almost two hundred successful eBay buyers and sellers—great advice that any eBayer can use.
- *Tricks of the eBay Business Masters* (Que, 2007), which includes the best tricks and tips from successful eBay businesses of all types and sizes—just the thing you need to ramp up your eBay business to the next level.
- *Making a Living from Your eBay Business, 2nd Edition* (Que, 2006), which shows you how to turn your eBay hobby into a profitable business. (This one's more of a business book than an eBay book—just what you need to turn pro!)

And if you're interested in turning your eBay sales into a real business, check out *Starting a Successful eBay Business*, a LiveLessons DVD video tutorial for all budding eBay businesspeople!

## Let Me Know What You Think

I always love to hear from readers. If you want to contact me, feel free to email me at [abg-ebay@molehillgroup.com](mailto:abg-ebay@molehillgroup.com). I can't promise that I'll answer every message, but I will promise that I'll read each one!

If you want to learn more about me and any new books I have cooking, check out my Molehill Group website at [www.molehillgroup.com](http://www.molehillgroup.com). Who knows—you might find some other books there that you'd like to read.

## IN THIS CHAPTER

- Secrets for Finding What You Want
- Secrets for Winning the Auction—At a Reasonable Price
- Secrets for Safer Bidding
- Secrets That Any Bidder Can Use



# SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL BIDDERS

You want to be a player. You want to bid with the best of them. When you bid, you want to win. When you win, you don't want to overpay.

This is the chapter you've been waiting for. Read on to discover the secrets and strategies that will help you be a successful eBay bidder!

## Secrets for Finding What You Want

We'll start out with some secrets to help you find items on which to bid. eBay's top buyers are quite adept at finding exactly what they want—and for a reasonable price!

### Secret #1: Search, Don't Browse

If you know what you're looking for, don't go through the time-consuming hassle of clicking and loading and clicking and loading to access a particular item category. Using eBay's search function will find what you want a lot quicker.

### Secret #2: Search Smart

Searching for an item on eBay is easy; finding what you really want is hard. You're more likely to find what you're looking for if you can use the auction site's advanced search capabilities to fine-tune your query. Some specific search tips can help you perform more effective—and efficient—searches:

- **Narrow your search**—Some of the more popular categories on eBay list thousands of items. If you do a search on `nba`, for example, you'll be overwhelmed by the results; narrow your search within these large categories (to `nba jerseys` or `nba tickets`) to better describe the specific item you're looking for.
- **Make your queries precise, but not too precise**—When you're deciding which keywords to use, pick words that are precise, but not overly restrictive. If you must use a very general word, modify it with a more specific word—or you're apt to generate a huge number of results that have little relevance to the specific information you're searching for. As an example, `model` is a pretty general keyword; `Star Wars Death Star model` is a much more precise query. On the other hand, if you search for an old `Star Wars Death Star model` partially assembled without instructions not painted, you probably won't return any matching results. If you get few if any results, take some of the parameters out of your query to broaden your search.
- **Use wildcards**—If you're not sure of spelling, use a wildcard to replace the letters in question. Also, wildcards help you find variations on a keyword. For example, if you want Superman, Supergirl, and Superdog, enter `super*` to find all “super” words.
- **Vary your vocabulary and your spelling**—Don't assume that everyone spells a given word the same way—or knows how to spell it properly. Also, don't forget about synonyms. What you call pink, someone else might call mauve. What's big to you might be large to someone else. Think of all the ways the item you're looking for can be described, and include as many of the words as possible in your query.

- **Fine-tune your results**—Did eBay’s search engine return an overwhelming number of matching items? If so, you need to fine-tune your search to be more specific. Look at the results generated from your initial search. Think about the good matches and the bad matches and why they ended up in the results list. Then enter a new query that uses additional or different keywords and modifiers. Your goal is to make the next list of results a higher quality than the last.
- **Different day, different results**—Remember that new items are constantly added to any given auction site, and closed auctions are constantly removed from the listings. If you didn’t find anything that matched your query today, try again tomorrow; you’ll probably find a different list of items for sale. (Another good reason to save your favorite searches and use eBay’s email notification service.)

### Secret #3: Search for Misspellings

Here’s a good way to take advantage of other users’ mistakes. Some eBay sellers aren’t great spellers—or are just prone to typing errors. This means you’ll find some items listed for auction under misspelled titles. It’s not hard to find the occasional Dell personal *commuter*, Apple *ipud*, or jewel *neklace*.

The problem for these sellers—and the opportunity for you—is that when you’re searching for an item (correctly), listings with misspellings won’t appear in the search results. If potential bidders can’t find the listings, they can’t bid on them, either—leaving these misspelled listings with few if any bidders. If you can locate these misspelled listings, you can often snap up a real deal without competition from other bidders.

The key, of course, is figuring out how an item might be misspelled. Let’s say you’re looking for a bargain on a camcorder. Instead of searching just for *camcorder*, you might also search for *cam-corder*, *camcoarder*, *camcarder*, and *camcroder*. Give it a try—you’ll be surprised what you find.



#### tip

If you don’t want to think up all the possible misspellings yourself, you can use the Fat Fingers website ([www.fatfingers.com](http://www.fatfingers.com)) to do it automatically. Enter a query into the Fat Fingers search box, and it will search eBay for that phrase and phrases that contain similar misspelled words. It really works!

### Secret #4: Search for Last-Minute Bargains

When you search the eBay listings, be sure to display the results with auctions ending today listed first. Scan the list for soon-to-end items with no bids or few bids, and pick off some bargains that have slipped others’ attention.

Of course, the best way to find these last-minute bargains is to use eBay's Deal Finder, which we discussed in Chapter 6, "Using Bid Assistant and Other Bidding Tools." Just go to [dealfinder.ebay.com](http://dealfinder.ebay.com) and make your search; Deal Finder will return those items that have no bids with less than 4 hours left in the auction.

## **Secret #5: Check the Seller's Other Current Auctions**

You'd be surprised how many times a seller has more than one item you're interested in. Click the View Seller's Other Auctions link to see everything else the seller has for auction—and bid accordingly!

## **Secrets for Winning the Auction—At a Reasonable Price**

When you've found what you want, the next trick is to make sure you end up as the winning bidder—without overpaying. Here are some secrets that will enhance your chances of being the high bidder, without bidding too high.

## **Secret #6: Do Your Research**

Don't bid blind; make sure that you know the true value of an item before you offer a bid. Look around at auctions of similar items; what prices are they going for? And don't neglect researching outside of eBay; sometimes, you can find what you're looking for at a discount store or in a catalog or at another online site—where you'll probably get a real warranty and a better return policy. Shop around, and don't assume that the price you see at an auction is always the best deal available. Be informed, and you won't bid too high—or too low.

## **Secret #7: There's More Where That Came From**

In 99.9% of eBay's auctions, that "one of a kind" item really isn't one of a kind. In fact, some sellers (especially merchant sellers) will have multiple quantities of an item, which they release to auction in dribs and drabs over time. In addition, some collectibles are bought and sold and bought and sold by multiple buyers and sellers over time, continually changing hands via new auctions. If you don't get this particular item, there's a good chance you'll get to bid on something similar soon.

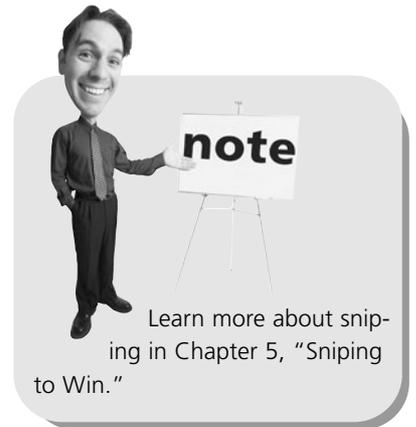
Along the same lines, you should never—I repeat, *never*—bid on the very first item you see. In almost all instances there are several other items on eBay similar to the first item you saw. Look at the entire list of items before you choose which one to bid on. Seldom is the first item you see the one you really want or the best deal.

## Secret #8: Don't Show Your Hand

This is the first of the two key components to the sniping strategy: Don't place an early bid on an item. That just signals your interest and attracts other bidders—which results in a higher price.

## Secret #9: Wait Until the Last Seconds to Bid

The second component of the sniping strategy is the snipe itself—the literal last-second bid. Wait until there are only 10–15 seconds left in an auction, and then place your best bid. By bidding so late in the process, you don't give competing bidders any time to respond. If your bid was high enough, you'll win without fear of being outbid in response.



## Secret #10: Watch, Don't Bid

When it comes to not bidding (for sniping purposes), one of the key tools is eBay's Watch This Item feature. You can place any auction item on your watch list and keep tabs on the bidding while you wait to snipe. Just click the Watch This Item link on the item listing page and then watch the items on your My eBay page.

## Secret #11: Watch the Finish

Don't forget the downside to sniping—that you can be sniped, too. Don't get outbid at the last minute. Because most auction activity occurs at the very end of the auction, track the last hour of your most important auctions and be prepared to react quickly to last-second snipers.

## Secret #12: Get in Sync

When you're sniping, precision counts. Make sure that you're in sync with eBay's official clock ([viv.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?EbayTime](http://viv.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?EbayTime)). If you're a few seconds slow, you could lose a sniping contest!

## Secret #13: Look for Off-Peak Auctions

You already know that the final minute of the auction is the best time to place your bid. But are there specific times of the day that offer better bargains for bidders?

The answer, of course, is yes. Believe it or not, some sellers schedule their auctions to end in the wee hours of the morning—when there aren't a lot of bidders awake to make last-minute snipes. Look for auctions ending between midnight and 5:00 a.m. Pacific time if you want some competition-free sniping.

### **Secret #14: Bid in the Off Season**

Although there is some category-specific seasonality, the best overall time of the year to pick up eBay bargains is during the summer months. Summer is the slowest period on eBay, which means there are fewer people bidding—and lower prices for you.

### **Secret #15: Put Your Best Foot Forward**

When you do bid, don't weasel around. Make your bid the maximum amount the item is worth to you, and be done with it.

### **Secret #16: Don't Let the Proxy Bid Things Up**

If two or more people are bidding on the same item, eBay's proxy bidding software can automatically (and quickly) rocket up the price until the bidder with the lower maximum bid maxes out. It's kind of an automated bidding frenzy conducted by two mindless robots.

Some bidders refuse to participate in proxy bidding. If the price is to increase, they want to do it manually. If you want to hold total control over the entire bidding process, how do you defeat the automatic bidding software? Simple: Make sure that your maximum bid is the same price as the next incremental bid and no higher. It might take a bit more work—and it's not the way I like to do things, personally—but it does put you in total control of the bidding process.

### **Secret #17: Know When to Say No**

Be disciplined. Set a maximum price you're willing to pay for an item and *don't exceed it!* It's okay to lose an auction.

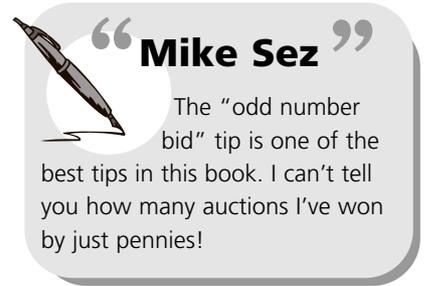
Don't automatically rebid just because you've been outbid. It's too easy to get caught up in the excitement of a fast-paced auction. Learn how to keep your cool; know when to say no.

### **Secret #18: Check the Seller's Past Auctions**

While you're checking up on a seller, use eBay's search function to display all the seller's completed auctions. See whether the seller has sold multiples of this particular item in the past. There's no need to get into a bidding war if the same item will come up for auction again next week.

## Secret #19: Bid in Odd Numbers

When you bid, don't bid an even amount. Instead, bid a few pennies more than an even buck; for example, if you want to bid \$10, bid \$10.03 instead. That way, your bid will beat any bids at the same approximate amount—\$10.03 beats \$10 any day—without your having to place a new bid at the next whole bid increment.



## Secrets for Safer Bidding

Many would-be buyers are reticent about the whole online auction process. To that end, here is some practical advice to make bidding on eBay as safe as possible.

### Secret #20: Check the Feedback

Check out the seller's feedback rating. Make sure that the seller of the item you want has a good feedback rating—and avoid any sellers who don't. You should also click the seller's numerical feedback rating to display actual comments from other users who have dealt with this user before. The best way to avoid bad sellers is to find out that they're bad sellers beforehand.

### Secret #21: Ask Questions

If you're unclear about any aspect of an item you're interested in, ask the seller questions via email. In addition to answering your specific questions, some sellers have additional information or pictures they can send you one-on-one. There's no excuse for ignorance; if you're not sure, ask!

### Secret #22: If It Sounds Too Good to Be True, It Probably Is

A rare copy of *Action Comics* #1 for only \$25? A brand-new laptop computer for only \$50? There has to be a catch. That *Action Comics* is probably a facsimile reprint, and the brand-new laptop PC is actually a remanufactured unit with a cracked screen. Be suspicious of improbable or impossible deals; always ask questions that confirm or reject your suspicions.

### Secret #23: Use a Middleman for Expensive Items

If you buy a high priced item through a person-to-person auction, consider using an escrow service. Although you'll pay for the service (in the neighborhood of 5%, typically paid by you, the buyer), it's a good safety net in case the seller doesn't ship or the item isn't what was described. In addition, you can use escrow services to accept credit card payments when the seller doesn't or can't accept credit cards directly.

## Secret #24: When You Win It, Inspect It

When you receive the item you paid for, open it up and inspect it—*immediately!* Don't wait a month before you look at it and then expect the seller to rectify a situation that was long considered closed. Okay the item and then send the seller an email saying you got it and it's okay. If you sit on it too long, it's yours—no matter what.

## Secret #25: If You Get Ripped Off, Tell eBay About It

If you have a problem with a seller, first try working it out between the two of you. If things don't get resolved, contact eBay with your grievance. And remember, if you paid via PayPal, you can use eBay's Buyer Protection Plan to file a claim and (hopefully) get reimbursed for your loss.

## Secrets That Any Bidder Can Use

We'll end this chapter with some tips that should prove useful to any eBay bidder. Read on!

## Secret #26: Use the eBay Toolbar

eBay offers a neat little add-on for your web browser that makes it easy to track auctions you've bid on, or that are on your watch list. When you install the eBay toolbar, it appears as part of your web browser, under all your normal toolbars. Figure 10.1 shows the eBay toolbar as it appears in Internet Explorer.

**FIGURE 10.1**

Track your auctions in your web browser with the eBay toolbar.



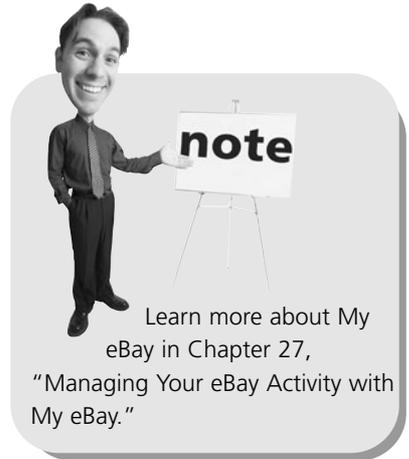
The eBay toolbar also includes some other useful features, including the capability to search auction listings from the toolbar, go directly to your My eBay page, and view the top picks in selected categories. The eBay toolbar is free and available for downloading at [pages.ebay.com/ebay\\_toolbar/](http://pages.ebay.com/ebay_toolbar/).

## Secret #27: Use My eBay to Track Your Auctions

Don't let your auction activity get away from you. If you're a regular eBay user, the best way to track all your auction activity on a single page is by using My eBay. My eBay can also track your favorite auction categories, as well as your account status—and let you access the pages you use most often, without having to click through useless parts of the site. Personalize My eBay the way you like and then bookmark it; it's a great home page for the heavy auction trader.

## Secret #28: Read the Fine Print

What methods of payment can you use? What about shipping? Any other details that might affect your decision to bid? Read the entire item listing before you place your bid so that you aren't surprised by the fine print in any auction.



## Secret #29: Don't Forget Shipping Costs...

When you're placing your bid, remember that you'll actually have to pay more than you bid; you have to pay shipping and handling to put the item in your hands. If S&H costs aren't detailed in the item listing, figure them out yourself, or email the seller to get a reasonable estimate. That ultra-cheap \$2 item looks pretty expensive if you have to add \$5 shipping and handling to the base price.

## Secret #30: ...But Don't Overpay for Shipping

Not only should you not get taken by surprise by shipping costs, but you also shouldn't be taken advantage of by unrealistic shipping and handling charges. Get a ballpark feel for shipping on a specific item from the seller's location to where you live. Expect a little overage on the seller's part (she has to buy packing materials, labels, and such), but not too much. If you know that shipping should be in the \$2 range, accept a \$3 charge—but question a \$5 charge.

## Secret #31: Pay Quickly

Don't delay—*pay!* Look, the seller needs the money, and the sooner you pay, the sooner you'll get what you paid for. (And the fastest way to pay, of course, is with your credit card, via PayPal.)

## Secret #32: Don't Be a Deadbeat

Don't bid unless you really intend to buy. Nobody likes a deadbeat—and if you do it often enough, you'll get kicked off the auction site, permanently.

## Secret #33: Pay by Credit Card

Now that most auctions are credit card enabled (via PayPal), use that option. Paying via credit card is relatively safe and leaves a good paper trail—and ensures that your item will be shipped quickly.

### **Secret #34: Money Orders Cost Money**

The seller says that money orders or cashier's checks speed shipment. Depending on your bank, it might cost a few dollars to cut a money order or cashier's check. Be sure to factor these costs into your total expenditure—and question whether you really want to pay to cut a money order for a \$5 item.

### **Secret #35: Provide All the Information Necessary**

When you send your payment, be sure to include your name, shipping address, email address, and item name and description. Even better, enclose a copy of the item's checkout or listing page, with additional information written on it. (I can't tell you how many envelopes I've opened with only a check or money order inside; you gotta tell 'em who the payment is from and what it's for!)

### **Secret #36: If It's Pricy, Insure It**

If you bought a rare or high priced item, ask the seller to insure the item for shipping. Pay the extra cost; it's worth it in peace of mind alone.

### **Secret #37: Document Everything**

In case something goes south, it helps to have good records of all aspects of your transaction. Print copies of the confirmation email, plus all email between you and the seller. Be sure to write down the seller's user ID, email address, and physical address. If the transaction is ever disputed, you'll have all the backup you need to plead your case.

### **Secret #38: Keep a Log**

Not only should you document all the correspondence for an individual auction, but you also should keep a log of all the auctions you've won. If you do a lot of bidding, it's all too easy to lose track of which items you've paid for and which you've received. You don't want to let weeks (or months!) go by before you notice that you haven't received an item you paid for!

### **Secret #39: Communicate!**

Don't assume anything; communicate what you think you know. If you have questions during an auction, ask the seller. When the auction is over, email the seller. When the seller emails you, email back to confirm. Email the seller when you send payment and again to confirm receipt of the item. The more everyone knows, the fewer surprises there are.

In addition, remember that not everyone reads his email daily, so don't expect an immediate response. Still, if you don't receive a response, send another email. If you're at all concerned at any point, get the seller's phone number or physical address from the auction site and call or write her. A good phone conversation can clear up a wealth of misunderstandings.

## Secret #40: Be Nice

You're dealing with another human being, someone who has feelings that can be hurt. A little bit of common courtesy goes a long way. Say *please* and *thank you*, be understanding and tolerant, and treat your trading partner in the same way you'd like to be treated. Follow the golden rule: Do unto other auction traders as you would have them do unto you.



### tip

Want even more advice? Then check out my companion book, *Tricks of the eBay Masters, 2nd Edition* (Que, 2006). It's filled with 600 tricks and tips that any eBay buyer can use!

## THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM

Here are the key points to remember from this chapter:

- Sniping—a literal last-second bid—is the most successful tool for winning eBay auctions.
- Keep track of items you haven't yet bid for by using the Watch This Item and My eBay features.
- When you place your bid, make it the highest amount you're willing to pay—and then walk away if the bidding goes higher.
- The best time of year to pick up good deals is during the summer.
- You can sometimes win an auction by bidding in an odd amount—\$20.03 instead of \$20.00, for example.
- The faster you pay, the faster you'll receive the item you won!

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