Enhancing your eBay
Strategic and Tactical Skills III

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In our **Enhancing your eBay Tactical Skills I** and **Enhancing your eBay Tactical Skills II** tutorials of **GuruGrams** #41 and #49, we looked at some advanced **eBay** items from our email **help line**, our **What's New** and newer blog pages, and the **alt.marketing.online.ebay** newsgroup. Plus stuff I've been meaning to emphasize beyond our earlier info resources found on our **Auction Help** Library Page and our **Auction Resources** links.

I thought we might once again continue here with some newer **eBay** tactical skills topics. Many of these concepts are enhanced and expanded from their previous appearances in our **WHTNU05.ASP** and **WHTNU06.ASP** news blog pages. Which are now also **RSS Available**.

But first, let's once again summarize the **eBay seller success** rules …

> **Offer unique products not available elsewhere.**
> **Maximize your personal value added.**
> **Always seek out a minimum 30:1 sell/buy ratio.**
> **Always aim for a 21 day payback.**
> **The minimum profitable eBay sale is $19.63.**
> **NO foreign bidders/buyers/transshipments!**
> **Accept VISA/MC/Paypal only!**
> **Never list anything you cannot hold at arm's length.**
> **Use both a scanner AND a 5 megapixel camera.**
> **Spend at least TWO HOURS in image postproc.**
> **NO dropshipping, pallet buys, or consignment sales.**
> **Limit terms and conditions to TEN words maximum.**
> **Clearly state your revenue neutral shipping charges.**

Along with the single key **eBay buyer rule**…

> **ALWAYS proxy bid your max ONCE very late in the eBay auction. Do so in odd penny amounts that are somewhat above a currency denomination threshold.**

Let's go on to some newer stuff…

Image Expansion and Cross Linking

The standard **HTML** way to add an additional ISP hosted image to your **eBay** item description is…

```
< img src="http://www.site.com/image.jpg" >
```

Normally, you might want to add additional images **inside** of your main product description for more detail or to show other aspects of the item you are offering. Other times, your internal description images may be the **only** ones you have. Since images are **absolutely essential** to **eBay** sales, don't miss this crucial detail…

> **Images are ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL to successful eBay sales!**
>
> **If your in-description images are your ONLY pictures, be sure to activate the eBay "camera" icon by clicking on the "The description already includes a picture URL for my item" box on the PICTURES AND DETAILS page.**

These surprisingly simple additions to your basic image-in-description code can give you all sorts of exciting new opportunities…

```
To click expand to a LARGER SIZE IMAGE...

    <a href="http://www.site.com/bigimage.jpg">
    <img src="http://www.site.com/smallimage.jpg" ></a>

To link to a TOTALLY DIFFERENT FILE TYPE...

    <a href="http://www.site.com/link.html_or_etc">
    <img src="http://www.site.com/textimage.jpg" ></a>
```

You might like to have a larger image for more detail, especially to show what all the knobs on a piece of test equipment do or whatever. But just putting your big

image inline has several disadvantages that include **slow loading** and possibly making your final eBay text displays **too wide** to easily read. This simple code linking lets those who want the detail get it at their convenience.

Here's a "click-to-magnify-an-image" example...

An obvious extension is to select any of a number of grouped mages from an HTML table. Here is **an example**. You can extract the actual HTML code by downloading and then using your **view page source** option.

Crosslinking a "fake" image to another link **gives you a way to have pictures without actually having pictures**. Usually, your initial image will be a **.JPG "text" message** that asks the viewer to "click here". This in turn can go to a supporting link that may include most any mix of useful data or images. Which is particularly useful in **linking a manufacturer's web site** for additional technical info.

Here is a "click-to-go-somewhere-else" example...

Note that **eBay** only allows "real" **.JPG** or similar filename types for their images. This clickthrough process lets you **substitute** most any filetype. This is especially handy where, say, a data sheet makes more sense than a picture of a chip.

You can easily get a lot fancier, but chances are you will need to go to **JavaScript** for anything more impressive. Especially when you want changes to appear on any **existing page**, rather than in a new window.

Here is another **eBay user** who uses the eBay hosting for their "photo album" multiple selections that magically appear all on the main offering page. You can view the JavaScript code by visiting their site and once again by using your **view page source** option.

Meanwhile, here is an example of a simple third party **JavaScript slide show**. And here is my older **Galley Slave** cataloger I did using **PostScript** and **Acrobat**. The latter is not directly **eBay** compatible. But its fast loading single file features make it quite useful for sales on your own website.

Some More HTML Fundamentals

OK, here is "just enough" **HTML** to let you improve your eBay listings. HTML commands may be inserted into your eBay descriptions. They typically consist of an opening carat, the command, and a closing carat. Closing commands will have a "/" as their first character after the opening carat…

Adding white space between paragraphs…

       <p>Your paragraph goes here.</p>

Making one or more words bold…

       Words to be bolded go here.

Indenting one or more paragraphs…

       <ul>
       Stuff to be indented goes here.
       **
**

Printing more than one space in a row…

       Use   for extra spaces.

Forcing a linefeed…

       **Your first line is here.
**
       **Your second line is here.
**
       Your third line is here.

       Note that the <br> command is one of the
       very few that does not need a closing </br>

Here is how to provide a web link…

       Go to <A href="http://www.tinaja.com"
       The Guru's Lair Website for more info.

Note that the link title appears BEFORE the ending . Ordinary text resumes after the . Fancier links can include images and expanded images.

Here is how to add an INTERNAL image...

<IMG "your pix filename">

Note that the link must start with http://... if local hosting is used. Fancier images can include size, position, and other info.

An image and a clickable link can be combined...

<img src="http://www.yourmessagehere.jpg" >

Normally, the image would be a message such as "CLICK FOR IMAGE AND TECH DATA". This allows "image" access to a non-JPEG file such as a data sheet.

Naturally, you should **NEVER** use HTML in any **eBay** listing to add sound, animation, glitz, or garish color.

Additional tutorials on our **Auction Help** library page.

Shilling Again

Several posters to the **alt.marketing.online.ebay** newsgroup seem obsessed with the **"crime"** of shilling, or a seller falsely raising their current price by bogus bids.

In reality...

Shilling simply DOES NOT WORK on eBay!

Any seller stupid enough to attempt shilling will be making enough other really dumb mistakes that they will GUARANTEE their failure.

There are many perfectly legitimate explanations for what may appear at first glance to be shilling on **eBay**. The chances are **utterly overwhelming** that your observation is in error.

Section **2-328** of the **Uniform Commercial Code** clearly states that **any shilling is completely legal** if preannounced or if you have a distress sale. Otherwise, the **only** consequence if detected and challenged (this will never happen) is that **the price drops back to the preshill level**.

Two elements of classic auction shilling are **mark demeanor feedback** in which the shiller watches the mark like a hawk; and the **bailout mechanism** in which the shiller **never** wins their own auction. "I'm sorry sir, I could have sworn you had your hand up." Both of these mechanisms are **totally absent** on **ebay**.

> **A 100 percent sure fire defense against eBay shilling is to proxy bid your max once very late in the auction.**

At that point, the current bid price either **is** or **is not** acceptable to you. It does not matter in the least how the price got that way.

On the other hand, **falsely accusing someone of shilling is in fact a heinous crime**, because you are interfering with their livelihood. For which you can and should get staked to the nearest anthill.

Additional tutorials on our **Auction Help** library page.

Can't put one over on Her

Last summer, I was several hours into a popular rural outdoor auction. When a little old lady near me turned to her friend and said "**Why, that man has been talking all morning!**"

Bailout Guidelines

If you are running an **eBay** store, it is super easy to bury yourself in worthless trash that consumes more and more costly storage space. Ideally, everything in storage should be listed and producing long term income with a well defined (usually 15 month) sellout date.

At least once a year, I feel it is more than a good idea to reevaluate everything in storage and do a total bailout. Sort of a "reset to zero" going out of business sale.

Let's start a new list of possible bailout guidelines...

- **If you touch it, you list it or you get rid of it.**

- **Focus on completely clearing any problem area, one entire shelf, tote, or similar region at a time.**

- **Have and aggressively use secondary disposal methods, such as wholesaling out to another eBay seller via the Alvin Pile.**

- Dramatically slash prices over anything not moving at all. Give them one final chance before flushing.

- Always favor keeping new stuff over old, high value items over low, light items over heavy, clean over dirty, working over needing refurb, popular sellers over unknowns, items within your expertise over questionables, packaged over loose, compact over bulky, quantity over onsies, and small items over larger ones.

- Carefully research current eBay prices. Chances are they have dropped dramatically. Avoid ever listing anything for less than a $19.63 opening price.

- Group oddball low value items into like assortment lots or flush them entirely.

- Links to manufacturer's listings can sometimes be used to replace the need for a custom photo. This can simplify and speed up low value item disposal. Avoid any listings without a photo or a photo-like link.

- Know exactly what you have in inventory, where it is, its value, and its disposal plan.

- The key tests: Would you buy this now? For how much?

- Tag and schedule all items to be refurbed. Then prioritize them in order of bang for the buck effort. Attack the big lumps first.

- Try to use production line techniques where you shoot and process many photos at once. And try to maximize items listed per work session.

- Alternate listing big ticket items with nuisance onezies. Mix and match "easy" and "difficult".

- Try to list at least four hundred new items during a bailout.

- Don't agonize over individual decisions. If it is not a clear winner that you are genuinely excited about, flush it.

- Always ask why some item has been neglected or unattended to. Chances are if it wasn't worth it then, it won't ever be.

And finally, of course…

<div style="background:cyan; text-align:center;">**Never sell anything you do not feel good about.**</div>

Exploring Your Log Files

It still amazes me how many people have never heard of **log files** and do not **demand** their total daily access from their **ISP** Internet Service Providers.

A logfile is a daily record of **all** traffic to your website. A few more important uses include finding out **how popular** which files are, **spotting errors** on newly uploaded files, **recording RSS hits**, exploring **visitor route patterns**, and finding **referrals**, or links to those websites **where your visitors are coming from**.

Logfile features of specific **ebay** interest do include **finding out how many daily views were made** to each of your eBay photos to gauge their popularity. And spotting **possible image theft** should you get lots of hits on any image not currently listed.

In mid 2005, eBay made a made a dramatic change in the format of the referral info they provide to your image hosting ISP's log files.

You can now extract **item names** and other useful info **directly** from your log files. Instead of having to deal with mysterious numbers. This can be enormously useful, both to **keep track of your own more popular eBay items**, or to **detect any image piracy**.

The new format of the referral string in your log entry will look something like…

<div style="background:#e0d0f0;">

http://cgi.ebay.com/Refrigerator-freezer-energy-saver-10-amp-plugin_W0QQitemZ5982681673QQcategoryZ3 188QQtcZphotoQQrdZ1QQcmdZViewItem

</div>

In particular, we see an **http://cgi.ebay.com/** prefix, followed by the item name with spaces replaced by hyphens, followed by a unique "**_W**" delimiter. If wanted, **QQ** tabs can be further used to extract the item number and the category number.

Apparently **most but not all** of eBay log reports are in this new format. Some older store-only items seem to be listed differently. Hopefully, better formats will eventually appear for all referral listings.

There are lots of different ways to access your log files. These range from simply viewing them in an editor to costly report generators such as **Webtrends**. Direct logfile viewing is not for the faint of heart.

I've written some free **PostScript** based log file readers. A later version that includes both eBay image reporting and RSS feed reporting is our **LOGRPTX2.PSL**. An earlier tutorial on logfile reporters in general appears as our **ANALOGEB.PDF** of our **GuruGram 28**.

Any **eBay** listings with more than one image may create more than one log entry and need a count adjustment. This can be resolved by the **GET** string filename elsewhere in your log entry. Also, only the **first** image access by any viewer will normally get logged if the viewer has a **local image cache** on their browser.

No Unhappy Customers

Zero Defects certainly is a laudable goal, but getting there with any real world customers can be tricky at best. **Chances are that you will be blindsided where you least expect it.**

Some strategies towards "no unhappy customers" include…

- **Thoroughly researching your products.**
- **Carefully understating descriptions**
- **Giving 15 day inspection privileges.**
- **Promptly offering (often full) refunds.**
- **Protecting yourself with 30:1 sell/buy ratios.**

- **Giving immediate tracking info.**
- **Shipping as quickly as possible.**
- **Avoiding problem categories.**
- **Keeping most product weights fairly low.**
- **Linking listings to additional info.**

- **Never skimping on proper packaging.**
- **Carfully clean and refurb before shipping.**
- **Prompt refund as your ONLY adjustment.**
- **Spell out all known defects or problems.**
- **Never selling anything customer unsuitable.**

- **Recognizing that problems are expected.**
- **Keeping terms less than 10 words maximum.**
- **Avoiding humor that WILL be misunderstood.**
- **Never worrying about the feedback sideshow.**
- **Verifying good product stock before listing.**

- **Keeping shipping charges revenue neutral.**
- **Trying to be available 24/7.**
- **Never saying anything nasty in emails.**
- **Flushing anyone who nickel and dimes you.**
- **Remembering no good deed goes unpunished.**

- **Testing electrical items for usability.**
- **Never trying to be a penpal.**
- **Blocking ALL refunded buyers regardless of fault**
- **Responding factually & unemotionally to feedback.**
- **Absolutely no foreign bidders or shipment.**

Let's look at some "case studies", some of which were clearly our fault...

- I replaced a knob on a Tek plug-in without properly phasing its position. The customer rightly complained that the settings were off.

- We mixed up two orders shipping together. Customers have **NO** obligation whatsoever to return anything to you. All you can do is politely ask. In the case of lower value items stocked in quantity, comping is fastest and cheapest in the long run. But you **NEVER** ask any customers to ship to each other.

- I called an Option 1 TCXO oscillator an "oven" not noting that a fancier option 4 oven existed and was in fact customer expected.

- An apparently mint PIC emulator from a bankruptcy auction would not communicate for the buyer. I felt this was baud rate or interconnect related, but refunded anyway.

And these problems which clearly were not...

- We were falsely accused of selling product safety recalls. All of our offered products post-dated any recalls and were fully corrected at time of manufacturer. All code dates are always carefully checked.

- An individual bought a precision seismic testing simulator thinking it was a plain old car audio thumper.

- We thoroughly reconditioned a precision scientific instrument including expensive factory replacement parts. It tested perfectly. The customer claimed a failure within twenty minutes of operation but absolutely refused to make the simple measurements (a VOM resistance check) that could have allowed an email/phone repair. This with full docs provided and all parts available.

- Customer negged us without contact after dozens of our unanswered emails, phone calls, and eBay communications.

- Customer negged us over nondelivery after an extremely late payment and unreasonably short delivery expectations.

- Customer negged after an improved variation of an offered product was shipped. The new product even still had the same Tektronix "-**A**" part number version as the old one.

Much more on related topics on our **Auction Help** library page.

The eBay Spring Slowdown

The usual **ebay** spring slowdown is nothing to worry about. This is simply that little dip between the winter slack period and the summer slump.

Sellthru Rates Versus Total Return

Some **eBay** sellers seem obsessed with having as high a **sellthru rate** as they can, attempting to sell everything every time on its first listing.

In reality, there probably is **no correlation whatsoever** with fast sellthru and optimal eBay profits. In fact, **if things are selling too fast, you are probably charging far too little**.

My own feeling is that if it takes a few weeks or even a few months to sell something, the chances are you can get a much higher price for it. And that your **total return** even after the extra fees should be significantly higher. Especially since your first relisting is free.

At least to me, a **twenty one day cashout** and a **fifteen month hang time** appears about right for industrial items acquired in quantity. Especially if a **30:1 sell/buy ratio** goal is in fact achieved.

And even better if there are one or more "**I'll take them all**" buyers lurking in the wings.

For More Help

The **alt.marketing.online.ebay** newsgroup often has useful solutions to **eBay** problems on it. Additional auction help resources are found on our **Auction Help** library page. Custom auction locators can be created for you on a private or public basis per our **Auction Resources** services.

Additional consulting services are available per our **Infopack** services and on a contract or an hourly basis. Additional **GuruGrams** are found **here**.

Further **GuruGrams** await your ongoing support as a **Synergetics Partner**.