Enhancing your eBay
Strategic and Tactical Skills VIII

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Back in **Enhancing your eBay Tactical Skills I** , **Enhancing II**, **Enhancing III**, **Enhancing IV**, **Enhancing V**, **Enhancing VI** and **Enhancing VII** in **GuruGrams** #41, #49, #62, #70, #71, #78, and #87, we looked at some advanced **eBay** items from our email **help line**, our **What's New** blogs, and that **alt.marketing.online.ebay** newsgroup. Plus stuff I've been meaning to emphasize beyond our earlier info resources that you will find in our **Auction Help** 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 coverage in our **WHTNU07.ASP**. **WHTNU08.ASP**, **WHTNU09.ASP** and (ongoing) **WHTNU10.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 **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 more recent concepts…

Alternatives to eBay

One of the seldom mentioned advantages of all these "alternative to eBay" sites is the tremendous savings in bubble wrap, strapping tape and other shipping stuff…

Altec Trader
Atomic Mall
Auction Quests
Auction Warehouse
Blujay
Bonanzle
Buy It Sell It
Buy Sell Trades
Craigs List
Deal Tent
Ebid
Ecrater
Epier
Hi Bidder
Intershop Zone
Kijiji
Liquidation
Mighty Bids
Moaas
Mystore
Online Auction
Oltiby
Overstock
Quick Bargain
Powersellers Unite
Really Smart Deals
Specialist Auctions

Treasure Soft

U Bid Right

US Auctions Live

Usiff

Webidz

Web Store

Wenzy

Your High Bid

And, of course, the reason for your shipping supplies savings is that you will not be shipping anything.

This site tracks the popularity of some of the above services. They are all (with the sole exception of **Craigs List**) "noise on the graph" below **eBay**.

Google Product Search (formerly **Froogle**) ultimately should provide serious **eBay** competition because it has a much better model: No listing fees, no value fees, true reverse Dutch auction (prices drop till items sell), and each bid is an instant and certain winner. As can **Amazon**.

Craig's List and **Kijiji** can be most useful for heavier items sold locally. Kijiji is now called **eBay Classifieds**. These may not be available in your immediate area. You can apparently start up your own direct **eBay** competition by using the products at **Rainworx**.

Here's a little known trick to do a national **Craig's List** search…

To search Craig's List nationally:

> **http://www.google.com/search?**
> **hl=en&as_q=site%3Acraigslist.org+searchterm**

Replace "searchterm" with the item you are searching for.

Reducing Freight Shipping Hassles

Freight shipments have dramatically improved in many parts of the country recently. "Freight" is usually defined as "anything over 150 pounds in weight".

First and foremost, there is now a **UPS Freight** that handles **LCL** (less than carload lot) pallets of hundreds of pounds or more. While kind of pricey by today's standards, they completely blow away what the locals used to charge. And are ridiculously easier to deal with than traditional shippers.

Two tips: Rates can be much cheaper if you pick the item up at your nearest UPS dock rather than demanding residential delivery. And **freight anything will often be a lot cheaper if a delivery or pickup liftgate is not needed**.

Note that few if any trucking firms will prep stuff for you. Even tasks as simple as shrink wrapping a skid. But, for a fairly steep extra charge, some **UPS Stores** can provide pickup and packaging services. Many now offer LCL freight.

There are bunches of new web-oriented freight brokering services…

ABF Freight Systems
ClickShipNGo
Con Way
Craters and Freighters
DIY Freight
Fedex Freight
Freight Center
Freight Click
Freight Quote
Freight Rate
Intershipper
Quote 4 Freight
UPS Stores
UPS
US Post Office
UPS Freight
U-Ship
U-Haul

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With some of the more competitive services, a typical rate for 400 pounds two states away might be around $240.00. Pricier alternatives that offer additional services include **Intershipper** and **Craters and Ferighters**.

Another alternative is to ask around locally who makes routine truck trips back and forth. These can be ridiculously cheaper and can greatly simplify packing and prep. Or, use the shippers yellow pages from your pickup city. Sometimes you can find a hungry trucker that can cheaply shrink wrap and pick up for you.

Lastly, **U-Haul** can be an outstanding bargain at $19 per truck. But the 60 cents per mile plus fuel can eat you alive on longer distances. **Note that the U-Haul one-way rates from A to B can be obscenely higher than from B to A**.

One of the better examples of truth-in-advertising was that eBay seller who stated **"All fright arrangements should be made by the buyer"**.

eBay Popularity and Image Theft Detection

As near as I can tell for sure, **eBay** hosts their own regular sized images for you. But requires a click thru to your website or similar host for any enlarged picture.

While not an exact count, such click-thrus can be used to determine how popular your currently listed items are. They also can be used for image theft detection, should you get bunches of hits of something you have not recently listed.

Any hits on your website will show up in your log files. Access to which, of course, you should **demand** from your ISP. Once again, **such counts will usually be low**, because not everyone will click and expand. And any revisits may pick the image off a local cache, rather than a new fetch. Or you may not have provided any enlarged image at all. Then again, multiple images on an offer might increase the apparent number of click-thrus.

The two referral source log formats in use seem to have recently changed. Their **noncurrent** listing may be of form…

> **http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?**
> **ViewItem&item=290210415168**

…and only gives you the item number. Extracting an actual item description would take some rather fancy programming involving a number-to-description table lookup.

The current listing is more useful and more friendly and informative….

> **http://cgi.ebay.com/Lot-15-full-size-1-4-inch-flat-**
> **mono-phone-plug-/230454105591?cmd=ViewItem**
> **&pt=LH_DefaultDomain_0&hash=item35a82295f7**
> **200 0 0 117694 463 5083**

Note that we can strip out **ebay** referral log listings by searching our log files on **http://cgi.ebay.com/** And that we can eliminate much grunge by cropping to the first **"-/"** occurence. Leaving you with the title only.

Apparently their old delimiter of **"underline-W"** has been recently changed to a **"hyphen-forwardslash"**.

I have a **logfile reporter** available that generates an amazing amount of useful and customizable data from your ongoing log files. Its original tutorial appears **here**, and its latest **eBay** reporting revision **here**.

Speaking of Which…

I've long been **overly enameled** of the **PostScript** general purpose computing language. And have created many dozens of custom (and customizable) tools and utilities of specific **eBay** interest. Of particular note are the ease and the convenience and the flexibility with which **PostScript** can read or write most any disk file in most any language. Especially image bitmaps.

Ready to use **PostScript** utilities are found in our **PostScript Library**, while useful tutorials are often included in our **GuruGram** library. Your usual starting point should be **Using Distiller as a PostScript Interpreter**. Followed up by the online **PostScript Reference Manual**.

Next in order should be our **Gonzo Utilities** tutorial The actual Gonzo Utilities themselves are found **here**. These are a combination pagemaking and illustration package that is completely open source. And are proudly non-WYSIWYG.

Turning to some useful **eBay** apps, interest, we've **just seen** how **NEWEBAY1.PSL** can serve as a highly useful combined item popularity monitor and **eBay** image theft detector. Also available are great heaping bunches of utilities useful for image post-processing. These are summarized **here** They include…

> **Airbrushing and Blending**
> **Architect's Perspective**
> **Background Knockout**
> **Background Slideunder**
> **Bitmap Perspective Lettering**
> **Bitmap Circular Lettring**
> **Bitmap Typewriter**
> **Dodging and Burning**
> **Exploring the .BMP Data Format**
> **Gonzo Utilities**
> **Knockout JPG Artifacts**
> **Pixel Interpolation Algrothims**
> **Swings and Tilts**
> **Vignetting**
> **White Punchthru Elimination**

There are two minor but crucial gotchas anytime you use **PostScript**…

> **Acrobat versions above 8.1 default to locking out most disk file access. To regain control, enter an "acrodist-F" from your Windows command line. Per these details.**

And…

Really Dumb eBay Newbie Blunders

Here's a summary of the more common stupid beginner's mistakes that too many **eBay** newbie sellers make…

BUYING LIQUIDATION PALLETS - Everything on one of these has at least one problem. Most of it has been higraded. Much of it is unsuitable for **eBay** sales. Shipping charges can be far beyond outrageous and your opportunities for personal value added are often severely limited.

CONSIGNMENT SALES - eBay success DEMANDS something near a 30:1 sell/buy ratio. Even with a 50% commission, you only have a ludicrous 2:1 SBR. Worse, price expectations of outsiders is usually outrageously out of line. Besides "them" often not understanding the nature and obligations of **UCC contract law**.

FOREIGN SALES - If you are a success with domestic sales, foreign sales are not needed. If you fail domestically, foreign sales will not help you in the least. There are far too many ripoff opportunities, misunderstandings, bureaucratic keytowing, outright lies, and third party costs to make foreign sales even remotely worthwhile.

DROP SHIPPING- Problems with dropshipping (more correctly called "dropshitting") are (1) There are waaaaay too many fingers in the pie. (2) Far too many competitors WILL panic and WILL trash prices. (3) The sell/buy ratio is ludicrously too low. (4) Any opportunities for personal value added are sorely limited. (5) The majority of products offered are outrageously overpriced unsellably useless trash. And, of course… (6) It is **YOU** that gets hung out to dry on the inevitable noship, lateship, or wrongship.

GOUGING ON SHIPPING - Your shipping charges should always end up revenue neutral and the most reasonable method for your buyer. Tracking should always be provided. Your best route for insurance is a largely unannounced self-insure. Protected, of course, by your 30:1 SBR.

SHILLING - Bidding up your own prices simply does not work on **eBay**. First because shillers will be making enough other stupid mistakes that they guarantee failure. Second, because the two key elements of shilling (mark demeanor feedback and auctioneer bailout) are totally absent in the **eBay** venue, and thirdly, because any intelligent buyer will bid only once very late in the auction. Thus thwarting any and all shilling attempts.

PRICES TOO LOW - The average "breakeven" price on an **eBay** transaction is something like $19.63. This is the absolute minimum transaction cost that should be sought after. And it set by the time and effort required to consistently fill an order and run a business. **If you are attempting to sell items of lesser value, group or consolidate them to guarantee minimum cash flows per order.**

MARGINS WAY TO LOW - An **eBay** buyer has a reasonable expectation of paying one sixth the normal list price new of most any item. After years of experience, we have found that a **sell/buy ratio (SBR) of 30:1 is essential for a successful eBay venture.** Which translates to you never paying more than half a cent on the dollar to acquire inventory. There simply is no room in the pie for anyone selling eBay stock to you to make a direct profit of any sort. Suitable sources of supply can be found **here** and **here**.

Circular Bitmap Lettering

Getting circular text to look decent when retouching a **Bitmap Image** can be tricky. Such as in this "**click-to-expand** example…
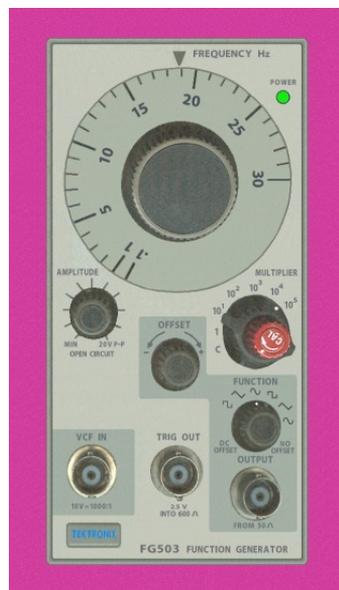
Yes, our **Bitmap Typewriter** excels at bitmap lettering touchup to amazingly low pixel counts. And is the best you can possibly do using whole pixel techniques. This can handle most any angle of text by a post rotation in **Imageview32** or whatever. But may get tedious if many different rotations are needed or you are not sure of their exact angles. Instead, **Acrobat 9** can do "almost" as good in the larger point sizes. **And it includes a .PDF to bitmap output option**.

One of my favorite ongoing tricks is to **throw another million calculations at it**. It turns out to be nearly trivial for **PostScript** to **create a catalog of all possible rotations** of all needed text. You simply use the ones you need and throw the rest away. Like so…

```
/letcolor {202 255 div 201 255 div 206 255 div
        setrgbcolor} store
/backcolor {64 255 div 70 255 div 60 255 div
        setrgbcolor} store
/rottext (.2 .5 1 2 5 10 20 50 100 200 ) store
/leadspace 110 store
/font1 /MyriadPro-Bold 12 gonzofont font1

0 0 mt 1000 pu 1000 pr 1000 pd closepath backcolor fill

gsave 310 300 translate letcolor 72 {leadspace 0 rottext cl
    5 rotate} repeat grestore
```

Your intermediate result might look something like this…
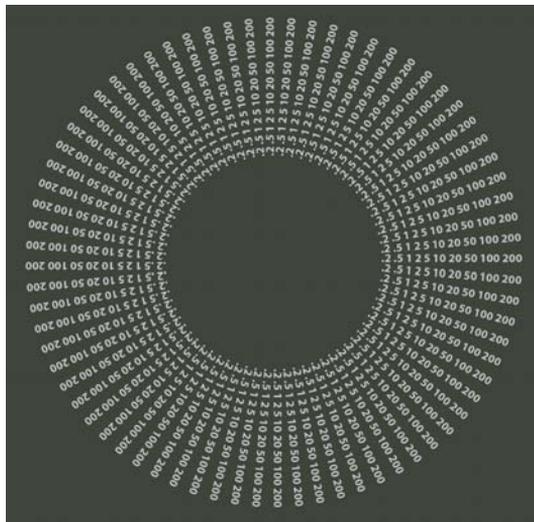
It may often be best to **run double or triple your final size** so the anti-aliasing works properly. You take your **PostScript** output and **distill** it to .PDF. Then convert to a bitmap. Scale the bitmap to the proper size. Finally, cut and paste the needed characters.

A choice of 72 increments would give you a 5.0 degree rotation. Which translates to a 2.5 degree worst case error and a typical error of slightly over one degree. The color parameters in **Paint** or whatever are typically 256 times larger than those in PostScript and are easily and directly scaled as shown above.

Beware of Those Bulk Auction Bids

Auctions that combine a **bulk buy option** with lot sales are almost always a sucker bet. I've yet to see **any** auction where the bulk sale was not a prewired giveaway to a selected insider.

This gets even worse when the winning bulk bidder is allowed to place a higher proxy. Ferinstance, at a picture framing auction, the chosen bidder might bid and win at 30K, but proxy bid up to 45K. If there were 300 lots, **the average lot price would have to exceed $100 without the proxy and $150 with**.

Which clearly is in the "ain't gonna happen" range.

Yeah, there can be exceptions. But these are often few and far between. If what is being sold is remotely near being a viable business, and if any owner or employee is not in jail or drug rehab, **chances are that bulk will win**.

And that you are wasting your time attending.

Exceptions might be when there are an enormous number of poisoned lots, only one or two very pricey items that are not obsolete, or some outrageous obligation (such as an epa gas tank dig up or health regs) attached to a bulk sale.

More on similar topics on our **Auction Help** library page.

Some Hints on Telephone Etiquette

We usually answer our phone with the four digits "4073". Which we have found quite useful when combining a personal phone system with a number of business services with a technical help line.

Among other things, we have found that **Eastern callers seem to demand more formal responses than Southwestern ones**. With some practice, you can get dialect down to a fractional state area. Or, in the case of yinz guys in Pittsburgh, within six blocks.

This numeric response also makes a really great scam spotter, as **they instantly lose their place in the script they are reading**. Several key phrases can then set off alarm bells worthy of a Pink Floyd **"time"** concert intro.

Ferinstance **"Is this a business?" is a dead giveaway.** There is no need for any legitimate caller to ever ask this. Never.

"How are you today?" is another obvious scam. Few legitimate callers will ever ask this, and those that do will merrily go on with their conversation even if you do not answer. The key rule is **"Whoever speaks next -- loses!"**.

Try it. Works every time.

The instant we suspect a scam, we respond with **"What is the purpose of your call?"** Any irate response is a dead giveaway that they have been had.

Promptly terminating any foreign call makes infinitely more sense that spending lots of time patiently explaining why you are **always** going to terminate any foreign call anyhow.

Few scammers have any reasonable defense against a **"You have the wrong number"** response. After all, there are two types of wrong numbers: the "real" ones, and those in which the caller does not have a snowball's chance in hell of accomplishing their goals.

An argument over whether you is you can be quite entertaining.

"Surveys" are best deal with by announcing you have a **$89 minimum consulting charge** and repeatedly requesting their VISA number. Which we don't accept any more anyway, because **Paypal** is much more cost effective and convenient.

"English as a third language" calls are best gotten rid of as soon as possible. Intentional rudeness can be a valuable tool here. Sometimes the hints are obvious. Such as when we were just told we had a **"virusses founded"** situation. **All of our virusses founded are belong to us.** Despite their album having gone platinum.

The old standby "You have reached this number in error" can also be useful. More so when repeated repeatedly. We have also found that it usually pays to flush any problem caller with a hangup or intentional rudeness. Better now than after having to issue a refund or get negged on **eBay**.

Using the eBay Logo

When are you allowed to use the **eBay** logo?

With one exception, the usual answer is **"practically never"**. Although written and negotiated specific exceptions are sometimes possible.

eBay does let you put a logo and link on your website **if you exactly follow their rules**. Their **logo** is quite tiny and must not be altered in any manner. It is only allowed to reference your own current eBay auctions or store.

Or the generic **eBay** home page itself.

The legibility of their small link can be improved by going to a bitmap from their .gif and retouching. But even this action is probably technically illegal. A fair use example of their logo appears **here**. Or on most any other of our **Guru's Lair** page headers to the right of the main title.

Penny Auction Scams

I've been asked about those "penny auction" sites. These are in no manner an auction. They are simply a gambling "slot machine" with an utterly outrageous house percentage take. **These are also a tax upon the monumentally stupid.**

In a penny auction, **you buy the rights to bid**, often something around a dollar per bid. Prices start at one penny and increase at one penny per bid. The final award price is usually very low, perhaps a few hundred dollars for a new car or ten dollars for a laptop computer.

Let's assume the site buys a laptop for $300. How can they make a profit if it only sells for $10? Well, each bid was sold for something around a dollar. So, there were 1000 bids to get from a penny to the ten dollar final price. Their laptop sells for $1010 and thus will generate an outrageous profit.

The sites also "let" you bid on bids. **Thus "squaring" their potential return!** Ferinstance, say 100 bids normally sell for $100. They open at a penny and close at, say $19. Thus, they sell their 100 bids for $1919 instead of the usual $100. **Their cost per bid is, of course, ZERO!**

The kicker. of course, is that **most bidders lose most of the time**, blowing their bid dollars for NOTHING in return.

Is this a scam? The "house take" on this gambling operation is so ridiculously high that **there is no need whatsoever to cheat**. Yet cheating is trivially easy by not shipping or shipping a defective or obsolete product. Or by shilling or using automated response bots.

These entire operations are clearly online gambling, plain and simple. At a **vig** that would cause a Las Vegas Casino operator to be tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail.

Some stats can be found **here**. Of the hundred or so penny auctions, over half of them have folded. And the top few have most of the market share.

The sites seem to be choking on themselves, with more of them saturating a highly questionable market. And it is more or less trivial for you to start your own penny auction scam. Showing a profit, however, is another matter entirely.

An interesting ploy might be to bet on which site is going to fold next. Poor participation might dramatically improve your odds. But **a folding site is likely to shill or non deliver, so your risk can be higher**.

More on U-Haul

A **U-Haul truck rental** can be an incredibly good deal. Provided you only use it locally for less than a day. The rates start at $19. Which can be **much less** than renting a car instead!

But there are some gotchas. **There is a mileage charge of 59 cents a mile**. Which racks up alarmingly on longer distances. And U-Haul is a master at nickel and dimeing you over insurance, mats, and other add-ons. Their $169 trailer hitch can easily cost you $400+ out the door.

But their real secret is their one way charge adjustments. **It costs a lot more to go one way from a location with scarce equipment to one with lots of equipment than vice versa**. This varies from day to day and time of week as well.

Ferinstance, San Diego to Thatcher might cost you $442 plus fuel, while Thatcher to San Diego might be $724 plus fuel!

In general, **the one way and round trip rates will often end up around the same if both locations have a "normal" inventory**. Total time and any "second driver" considerations may shade points one way or the other for you.

Two of their lesser known (and somewhat rarer) offerings are their 5x8 or 6x12 open trailers. Weather permitting, these are easier to load and unload and may travel easier. **U-Haul** does not like these going out of area.

A general tip: **four wheel trailers back much easier than two wheel ones**. The larger size might be less of an overall hassle. Also, their trailers do not unhitch worth a damn for intermittent use when loaded.

I never could justify owning my own trailer. For occasional trips, the insurance and road service alone is worth any cost difference. Especially if your needs vary.

Discounting Early Enthusiasm

While it certainly pays to aggressively seek out each and every **upcoming auction** that could possibly be of interest, **getting really excited about any new auction listing early on may not be a good idea**.

Firstoff, **many auctions are never held**. They are simply blackmail by a landlord or a bank or a supplier to convince the bad guys they are serious about getting paid. This is especially true of storage shed auctions.

Other auctions may be "prewired" to a single bulk buyer. Especially if they are allowed to proxy bid. Certain items may also have a tendency to mysteriously disappear between the first announcement and the actual auction as well.

The initial descriptions **always** sound better than what you actually will see during your preview. And time conflicting auctions may create "better choice to attend" triage situations.

A good rule is to **let the auction announcement "age" a little before you really get excited about it**. By all means, put it on your calander.

But do so in pencil.

Many auction listings can be found **here**. And your own custom regional auction finder can be created for you **here**.

For More Help

Earlier releases in this series are found as **Enhancing your eBay Tactical Skills I** , **Enhancing II**, **Enhancing III**, **Enhancing IV**, **Enhancing V**, **Enhancing VI** and my **Enhancing VII**.

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**. Seminars available as noted above.

Further **GuruGrams** await your ongoing support as a **Synergetics Partner**. For details, you can email **don@tinaja.com**. Or call **(928) 428-4073**.