

Avoiding eBay Scams

Read through this checklist and save yourself time and aggravation. A bit of due diligence will help you avoid eBay scams.

Only buy items with photos. The photograph is a good way to insure the seller actually has the item. No photo is a good indicator of a scam.

Check the photo against catalog photos. Many scammers use photos taken from other auctions or from online catalogs. Look for the background and lighting. Professionally taken photos have better lighting, and clearer backgrounds.

Check the seller's user history. This is on the feedback page and will say something like this: "Member since: Saturday, Aug 13, 2001 Location: United States" New sellers or sellers who have been members for a long time, but not as active sellers are more likely to be committing auction scams.

Check the seller's eBay feedback. If the seller has few feedbacks or recent feedback as a buyer, but not as a seller this may be a clue. It's easy to get feedback by buying cheap items. Check the items the seller has been buying and selling. There are links on the feedback page to the auction the feedback relates to on the right side of the page.

Do an eBay search for auctions by the seller including completed auctions. Check to see if he has sold the same thing before. If he has, ask the earlier buyer if they got theirs yet. Here's a link to the search form.

Make sure the address you send payment to is the same as the seller's registered eBay address. If it's not the same address, it may be a tip off to a scam. Here's the link to get the seller's registered address.

If you are buying something expensive call the seller. You can get the telephone number with the link above. You have to bid on the item in order to get the contact information. This is a great way to avoid eBay scams. If you buy something and don't feel comfortable, call the seller.

Ask for advice from knowledgeable sources. If you are buying antiques or collectibles, you should get an idea of the value and rarity before buying. Since most collectibles you see on eBay were mass produced, you will get the chance to buy others.

Educate yourself. Learn about the items you are interested in. Go to antiques stores and shows to see what is available. When you factor in shipping costs and uncertainty about the condition many items are cheaper to buy locally. You will make new friends who share your interests, and will not fall prey to eBay scams.

Have a friend go over and look at the item. I bought some trains last year out of Northern California. (I live in Arizona.) I had one of my friends drive over and look at them. He paid the seller and then mailed me the trains. I sent my friend a check to cover the purchase price and then gave him something for his trouble. This is a bit more work, but much safer than sending large sums of money to a stranger.

Search for information online. Use Google.com to find out more about the specific item you are interested in. You might discover it cheaper at a store, or find out the item is really common and be able to find one later from a less risky source.

Ask the seller questions. This will give you some information about the character of the seller. If you are unsure about the condition, ask for additional photos. The best way to avoid an eBay scam is by getting to know the seller.

Check the payment options. If the seller only takes money orders or wire transfers it might be an eBay scam. If you can pay with a credit card, this will give you additional protection. Almost any- I wanted to all, but am sure there are exceptions- credit card transaction can be reversed by calling the issuing bank. Some sellers only take money orders to avoid bounced checks. If a seller refuses to take anything but a wire transfer run.

Check the description and the tone of the ad. Does the person sound eager to sell? Does the person sound like they know what they are selling?

If the item is valuable because of its color, ask the seller for pictures with a common household item for contrast. My dad bought a rare maroon train car that was actually light red. The seller's poor lighting caused the car to appear much darker in the photos. If my dad had asked for a picture of the car next to a can of Campbell's soup he would have seen it was the picture making the car darker because the can would be darker.

Ask the seller about his return policy. Many sellers sell as is with no returns, some sell with returns only if the item is not described correctly. Saying the item is sold with no returns in the auction does not allow the seller to misrepresent the item, but will make it harder for you to press a claim.

Ask yourself "If I saw the item at a show, would I buy it?" Many times people bid on eBay auctions for items they would otherwise ignore. Some reasons for this are greed, ignorance, and impatience. Greed because "It's a low price, and I can always resell it at a profit." Ignorance is when you buy items without knowing enough about them. Impatience causes buyers to buy when they are ignorant.

Remember the seller is selling. Descriptive words like rare, uncommon, and unique are subjective and quite over used. Some items are hard to find, but most eBay auctions are for common or relatively common items. Unique is probably the most over used word in describing collectibles. Unique means there is only one. These descriptions are sales techniques to get higher bids by making you think the item is harder to find than it is. Ignore them.

Know in advance what you are willing to lose. I'll buy any train auction for under a hundred dollars without checking the seller out because I won't lose much sleep over a hundred dollars. You need to know your attitude and personality to answer this question.

Know when to cut your losses. If you get a eBay scam over a 50 auction, it's not worth hundreds of hours of lost sleep. I know the scammers count on this attitude to allow them to continue ripping people off, but it's really not worth the time to pursue a small loss. File a complaint with eBay, leave a negative feedback, then move on.

Don't leave feedback until the item is received and you are satisfied with it. Feedback is your leverage to get a return if the item is not as described.

ALWAYS leave negative feedback when the seller is deceptive or unwilling to correct his mistakes. This is your way to warn other bidders. If you had been warned, you could have saved your money and time. The feedback system won't work unless you are willing to leave negatives for bad transactions.

Use separate eBay accounts for buying and selling. This way your selling account won't be damaged by retaliatory feedback when you leave negatives for others. You have to use accurate contact information when creating each account. eBay will remove feedback from accounts without accurate contact information.

Don't fall in love with your eBay account. I use a buying account until it gets 30-40 feedbacks and then start a new one. This way no one knows what I am buying. Also, because I know I will be using a new account in a few months, I can be honest when leaving feedback.

If you have been ripped off do not threaten the seller. Ebay calls this "user to user threats" and will suspend you immediately. Some eBay scammers exploit this. They will provoke you into threatening them, then forward the e-mail to eBay and your account will be cancelled. If you have filed a fraud complaint with eBay it will be closed because "eBay does not investigate complaints from non-members."

If you feel taken by a seller have a friend read your e-mails before you send them. Have your friend make sure they are polite and do not include accusations. Be polite and explain why you are unhappy. Name calling will not help. People make mistakes when listing items, and many sellers will make them right. When you open with an attack, you put the seller in a different frame of mind. For the same reason, don't threaten the seller with negative feedback in the first email.

Don't try to renegotiate the price after you receive your purchase. Explain clearly and politely why you are unhappy and tell the seller you would like to return it. I refund the purchase price and shipping both ways when I make a mistake. Sometimes I send the buyer the shipping money instead as a make good. I never do this when the buyer opens with a demand for a lower price.

In closing, remember, most items you see on eBay are common. You will see them again and again. Don't jump to purchase something, but rather take your time and wait for the right seller and the right item.

eBay is a great forum for buying interesting items for your collection, and you can get some great deals. In the few instances I have felt ripped off, most of the time it was my greed that caused the problems. If I would have asked the seller some questions and gotten more information before bidding, I would have saved myself some grief. While there are eBay scams, a bit of prior prevention will protect you.

Have fun buying on eBay, but remember, a bit of caution will do more to protect you than anything else.

Short note about the author

Terry Gibbs writes about antiques, collectibles and eBay in his monthly Collector Strategies Newsletter. You can sign up for his free newsletter and get additional information about his books on collecting and eBay at his website: <http://www.iwantcollectibles.com>

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