

# Improve Your eBay Auctions

**44 Common Mistakes Found In  
Many eBay Auctions Explained.**

By  
Terry Gibbs

You are welcome to share this report with others  
as long as no changes are made to the contents.

© Copyright 2007 IWantCollectibles LLC.  
All Rights Reserved.

On January 10th 2007, I asked my newsletter readers to look at an auction I'd selected on eBay, and then send me a list of at least five things the seller could have done better. I thought this would be a good way to get my readers to think about how to sell on eBay.

You see, I know most eBay sellers just muddle through listing the first few auctions, and then never spend any time improving their skills. Instead of improving their skills they continue to blindly sell items on eBay without any thought.

Even worse, I'd bet a majority of eBay sellers never even read eBay's help articles. Not that eBay's help menus will always point you in the right direction, but in most cases eBay will help you get closer to the doing it right, than you'd do with no help at all.

**The ONLY WAY to improve your eBay selling skills is to think about what you are doing, and to look back at your results.**

After asking my readers to look at the auction, I got almost 400 emails with lists of ways to make the auction better. Not surprisingly, I got correct answers in addition to the eleven I'd found, but I also got answers that were off the mark.

In this report, I will show you the auction, my list of errors, and selected responses from my readers with my comments. When you get done reading this simple report, you will surely have improved your eBay selling skills.

**To get the most out of your time, look at the auction, and make a list of mistakes this seller made before going on to the rest of the report. To make it easier for you, I have pasted screen captures of the auction on the next page.**

One quick note before we get started: My intention here isn't to pick on this seller, it's to help you improve your auctions. Even with all the mistakes this seller made, he is doing one thing right. He is actually trying to sell items on eBay. A lot of people never take the first step, so he has something going for him. Now all he needs to do is think a bit more about what he is doing.

Here's the auction I asked my readers to look at:

The screenshot shows an eBay auction page for an 'antique collection of old bottles'. The page features the eBay logo, navigation links (home, pay, site map), and a search bar. The item is listed in the category 'Collectibles > Bottles & Insulators > Bottles > Antique (Pre-1900) > Medicines, Cures'. The item title is 'antique collection of old bottles' with an item number field. The seller's status is 'old meicine'. The starting bid is US \$50.00, and the end time is Jan-14-07 13:01:40 PST (3 days 15 hours). Shipping costs are listed for N. and S. America, and the item location is Batesburg, SC, United States. The history shows 0 bids. The seller's reputation is 100% Positive, and they have been a member since Jan-29-05 in the United States. The page also includes a 'Buy safely' section with two main points: 'Check the seller's reputation' and 'Learn how you are protected'. The description states '16 old bottles collected Ga. S. C. area in the 60,s'. There are two thumbnail images of the bottle collection, and a text prompt: 'The picture in the next page is here'.

home | pay | site map

Buy Sell My eBay Community Help

Search

Advanced Search

Back to home page Listed in category: [Collectibles](#) > [Bottles & Insulators](#) > [Bottles](#) > [Antique \(Pre-1900\)](#) > [Medicines, Cures](#)

## antique collection of old bottles

Item number:

old meicine

Seller of this item? [Sign in](#) for your status

[Watch this item](#) in My eBay | [Email to a friend](#)



[View larger picture](#)

Starting bid: **US \$50.00**

End time: **Jan-14-07 13:01:40 PST**  
(3 days 15 hours)

Shipping costs:

Ships to: N. and S. America

Item location: Batesburg, SC, United States

History: [0 bids](#)

You can also:

Get alerts via [Text message](#),  
[IM](#) or [Cell phone](#)  
[Sell one like this](#)

**Listing and payment details:**

Starting time: Jan-07-07 13:01:40 PST	Payment methods: Money order/Cashiers check
Starting bid: US \$50.00	<a href="#">See details</a>
Duration: 7-day listing	

**Meet the seller**

Seller: [f\\_\\_\\_\\_\\_ \(1\)](#)

Feedback: **100% Positive**

Member: since Jan-29-05 in United States

- [Read feedback comments](#)
- [Ask seller a question](#)
- [Add to Favorite Sellers](#)
- [View seller's other items](#)

**Buy safely**

- Check the seller's reputation**  
Score: 1 | 100% Positive  
[Read feedback comments](#)
- Learn how you are protected**  
Returns: Seller accepts returns.  
[7 Days Money Back](#)

**Description**

16 old bottles collected Ga. S. C. area in the 60,s

Select a picture



**The picture in the next page is here**

One note before you start making your list. This auction ended with no bids.

For some reason when I converted the auction into photographs the swap image didn't display correctly. In the auction the picture below was to the left of the two smaller thumbnails under "**Select a picture.**"



01664

[The power of protection from AOL and eBay. Learn more](#)

---

**Shipping, payment details and return policy**

**Ships to**

N. and S. America

\*Sellers are not responsible for service transit time. This information is provided by the carrier and excludes weekends and holidays.

Note that transit times may vary, particularly during peak periods.

**Domestic Handling Time**

Will usually ship within 3 business days of [receiving cleared payment](#).

---

**Shipping insurance**

Not offered

---

**Seller's payment instructions**

WILL TAKE MONEY ORDERS OR CASHIERS CHECK

---

**Seller's return policy:**

Item must be returned within: 7 Days

Refund will be given as: Money Back

---

**Payment methods accepted**

Money order/Cashiers check

[Learn about payment methods](#)

Now go ahead and make your list of ways to make this auction better before going to the next page. The total number of ways to improve this auction is ###, so you should be able to find at least five things.

Ok. Ready?

Lets get started discussing ways to improve this auction. When I first looked at this auction, I identified eleven ways the seller could improve this auction. Here's my list:

1. **Shipping is listed highest first.** You can't see this in the pictures, but the seller offered UPS shipping which resulted in shipping costs of \$52.60 being shown at the top of the auction. Clicking on the shipping link brought up additional options - parcel post at \$22.40, and Priority mail at \$26.90. The seller should have listed the cheapest shipping first. This is done by specifying the cheapest shipping method in the first drop down box on the specify shipping form. Additionally, eBay buyers tend to bid higher on items with flat shipping charges rather than computed charges.
2. **Poor photos.** Neither of these photos show any detail, and the staging is terrible.
3. **Using eBay photo hosting.** The seller paid to insert the second picture. My tests have shown using eBay photo hosting drops ending prices by up to 17 percent. That number assumes pictures that show detail. This drop is due to the forced small size of the images, and the loss of detail caused by eBay compressing the images. To make it worse, during peak traffic periods eBay has problems serving the images they host. This means your images aren't seen by bidders. Additionally, the second picture added to the seller's listing cost without helping him. In fifteen minutes anyone can learn how to create and insert wonderful pictures into eBay auctions without paying eBay fees. Time well spent.
4. **No description of individual bottles.** Some of these bottles might be valuable. Some probably aren't. By not including a description of each bottle, the seller has removed any chance that someone searching for a specific bottle will find it. At a minimum the embossed text on the bottles should have been used in the description.
5. **Should have listed bottles separately or in relevant groups.** If I was selling these bottles and didn't know what they were worth, I would sell them individually. I'd create at most 14 auctions. Most

auctions would have only one bottle, and the bottles that are unmarked would be placed into one lot. All auctions would be started at 99 cents or less. This would allow me to list the bottles with lower shipping costs, and, based on what this seller paid in listing fees, might even be cheaper to list.

6. **Opening price should be \$49.99 or lower.** EBay charges \$1.20 to start an auction at \$49.99, and \$2.40 to start an auction at \$50. This seller paid \$1.20 for nothing. Furthermore, my tests have shown starting items at low prices results in higher ending prices. This assumes the items are listed in the best manner. An antique or collectible listed correctly on eBay will always reach at least wholesale value on eBay. The bids by dealers will make the item appear more attractive to end users and usually result in the item selling for above wholesale.
7. **No condition statements.** This guy is selling old bottles. Are they scratched? Are they dirty? Are they chipped or broken? Condition always effects value, and must be included in every auction description.
8. **No link to his other items.** This seller was offering 7 different items at the same time as this lot of bottles. Adding a link to his other auctions takes almost no time, and when done along with a statement promising to pack multiple wins together will increase prices at no extra cost. If your items warrant it, listing one fantastic item as a featured plus auction and including a link to your other more mundane auctions works extremely well.
9. **No confidence building statements.** Earlier I mentioned the lack of condition statements. When writing an auction description it is important to build confidence with prospects. This seller has 1 feedback. In order to build confidence the seller needs a detailed description of the bottles, an explanation of how he will pack the bottles to insure they arrive safely, and maybe even a few short lines explaining how he got the bottles and why he likes them.
10. **No me page.** In the process of getting started selling on eBay it is easy to overlook creating a me page, so this isn't as big an error as the others, but this seller has credibility problems. Even if he didn't

make constructive use of his me page, just a photo of him and his dog sitting on the porch together would help put a human face on this seller.

**11. The seller wasted money on a subtitle.** This seller paid 50 cents for a subtitle and then spelled the word medicine wrong. Subtitles are rarely worth the expense. In fact, I rarely use subtitles because they are considered part of the description rather than the title for searches. There are a few exceptions when a subtitle makes sense, but not many.

Before we go on, one last note about errors I noticed. I mentioned in my newsletter, the seller doesn't have any backend. That means he is not trying to get additional sales from people who look at his auctions or buy from him.

To him -- maybe this is most eBay sellers -- eBay is just a place to sell products. It's not about building a business, or making repeat sales. While I think this is an error in judgment, I am not counting it as an error because it is an advanced tactic, and this is a new seller.

But if I was looking at YOUR auction, I would consider not having a backend an error.

One last thing we should discuss before we move on to the comments sent in by my readers. From just looking at the list above this seller spent between \$3.40 and \$4.05 listing this auction. (High price assumes he went for the value pack which includes a gallery image, a subtitle along with listing designer which he didn't use for 65 cents, and a photo pack for \$1.00. Low price assumes gallery at 35 cents, subtitle at 50 cents, and second image at 15 cents.)

Knowing the eBay fee structure and making the best use of starting prices and listing upgrades is an extremely easy way to lower your selling costs.

When I looked for this auction, I did a search for the word "old" with a price between \$50.00 and \$50.01 with no bids. The search brought up 3271 items. That's \$3925.20 in excess fees right there, and that's just for auctions with the word "old" in them. A search for the word "the" brings up

40 thousand auctions with a starting bid of 50 dollars. That's \$48,000 in waste, and only counts auctions that haven't received a second bid.

Every year eBay raises their fees and eBay sellers come out of the woodwork screaming the sky is falling. While at the same time eBay sellers are wasting hundreds of thousands of dollars a month on eBay fees. Are these the same sellers? Probably. Are they my newsletter readers? Probably not.

Now lets look at some of the comments sent in by my readers. Many of these were sent in by more than one person. I've selected the ones that made the point in the most concise manner for inclusion here. These aren't in any order, just the way I got them from my inbox.

- **No reference item in photos to judge size.** I missed this. I always include a nine volt battery in my images so people can make a size comparison. I am just so used to doing it, I don't even think about it anymore. A coin, a dollar bill, or any other household item people know the size of will work. However, don't use a cigarette package or a lighter as some buyers will not bid on items that might smell like smoke.
- **Doesn't accept PayPal.** If he was selling an ebook, an impulse item, or a commodity like videos or clothes not accepting PayPal would drive off some bidders, but antiques and collectibles aren't usually effected by the lack of PayPal. However, adding multiple payment options is a good way to get more bids.
- **Spent money on extra pictures that don't showcase anything not shown in the original picture.** Also submitted as: **Two photos used, but they look almost the same -- what's the point in paying for an extra photo?** I consider just the use of eBay photo hosting as an error, and because I don't pay for images, I can include images that are only slightly different to make a point. But this is a better way to explain what's wrong with these photos than my plain poor photos comment.
- **Has only had one sale....must have been his mother** - Also submitted as: **Lack of feedback.** This wouldn't be a big factor if the seller had a longer description that built confidence. Quite a few people suggested buying cheap one cent auctions in order to get some



feedback before starting to sell. I don't recommend buying one cent auctions to get feedback. While eBay has been cracking down on this lately, there is a better reason. When you buy items on eBay, you learn how sellers treat buyers. If you pay attention to how others treat you, you will improve communications with your buyers, and learn how to stand out in crowded niches. Once you start selling with an eBay account you should create another account for buying with. Creating a second eBay account is explained on the IWantCollectibles website.

- **Title needs keywords.** My recommendation that each bottle be sold separately was based on each bottle being listed with a title describing the bottle like "Old Brown Glass Poison Bottle," or "Dr Scammer's Patent Medicine bottle dated 1901." The most important keywords should always be included in the title because the majority of eBay searches are done for titles only. You can find out the most searched keywords for every eBay category by looking at the related searches at the top of every category. Ebay pulse lists even more common search terms for most categories.
- **No background or poor background in photo.**
- **He should point out the value of the return policy. I don't believe there are many antique sellers that offer such a generous return.** This is credibility again. Well said.
- **He is not offering insurance on a highly breakable item.** This is really a problem with the description because the eBay system for calculating insurance costs is difficult. You are forced to specify an amount for insurance in advance. If you don't know what the item will sell for, you can't enter an amount. The description should have "Insurance is available at cost if desired," or "\$100 worth of insurance is included in the quoted shipping amount. Additional insurance is available at cost."
- **Bottles need to be cleaned.** I sell a lot of junk trains on eBay for parts or restoration, and do nothing with them. Leaving them as found and describing missing parts and damage leads buyers to believe they are getting a better deal. Additionally some items can be damaged by improper cleaning. But these bottles don't fall into either of those

exceptions. These could be ran through the dishwasher and come out OK. Presentation is everything.

- **He should have used a lower starting bid with a reserve to attract more bidders.** This is a bit different than noticing the difference in fees between \$49.99 and 50.00. On these I wouldn't even use a reserve. I would have just listed them all at 0.99 each with no reserve. The ones worth anything would sell, and the others would go into the Goodwill box. **A note here about the fees.** I would have done no more than 14 auctions at 99 cents each. Factoring in hosting my own photos, the total insertion fees would have been \$3.50. Earlier I said the minimum insertion fees paid by this seller were \$3.40. For an extra dime he might have sold something and recouped all his costs. Time wise I could list 14 auctions for 14 different bottles all with descriptions and at least two photos in under 45 minutes. We'll come back to the time factor in a minute when we discuss research.
- **No BIN (Buy It Now.)** I don't think this is an error. I don't recommend people use BIN for antiques and collectibles unless they know exactly what the item is worth. I watched an auction recently for an oatmeal container sell for \$273.00. The last similar container sold for \$12.00. If a BIN had been used on the container the seller would have surely lost money. Sure it's not going to happen all the time, but it will never happen with a buy it now.
- **Wrong Category.** Quite a few readers mentioned he had listed in the wrong category because if these bottles are from the 1960's they don't belong in the pre 1900 category. Example: **I'm not sure these are in the right category. Are they just old bottles or are they medicine bottles? Some of them could be liquor bottles.** I think this is the poor description again. My impression is he collected the bottles in the 1960s and they were old then. If that's true they were in the right category if they are medicine bottles. I'll discuss this in more detail in the section on research.
- **Should have offered shipping world wide.** If I was selling these as a lot I wouldn't offer them to international bidders. I once sold a six pack of Coke bottles to a buyer in Italy. The bottles sold for under ten dollars, and the shipping was about \$40 which caused the buyer to refuse to pay. As individual bottles I'd ship them anywhere in the world. This is a

judgment call. In almost all cases accepting international bidders will increase sales prices.

- **Should have used the word "lot" in the title.** Great suggestion if people search for groups of bottles. I know some categories do get searched for this word, and the seller certainly is selling a lot.
- **Title is in all lower-case letters.** Grammatically this statement is correct. From a selling point of view using all lower case words may attract more attention because it forces searchers to look closer. This is something you might want to test in your auctions.
- **Returns policy seems to be unconditional and probably needlessly generous.** I don't consider this to be an error. It's actually the second positive thing about this auction. (The first was he actually listed the bottles.) Some eBay sellers might consider this an error because they aren't comfortable offering a strong guarantee, but a strong guarantee will almost always bring additional bids. Explained correctly a strong guarantee would counter his low feedback quite well. With a bit more feedback and detailed listings, a strong guarantee would increase bids high enough to more than cover the cost of the few returns he'd get.
- **No terms of trade quoted (packaging – despatch time).** I consider this to be part of the description. A simple statement about how the bottles would be packed would help. Mentioning when he will mail them after receiving payment could drive away bidders depending on his policy.
- **The time of day the auction ends is a slow time period on eBay.** I just read an economics paper addressing this issue. The economists looked at thousands of DVD auctions. (One DVD per auction.) They found DVDs ending during the day brought higher prices than those ending at other times. This is thought to be because there are fewer items listed during the day meaning less competition from other sellers. Most sources tell you to end auctions in the evenings. For antiques and collectibles the ending time doesn't effect the sales price because collectors are like junkies. Additionally, today most serious eBay buyers use sniping programs.

- **Seller didn't do any research.** Research would have pointed out things like: some bottles bring more because of where they are made, what they were used for - soda, medicine, perfume etc..., people collect bottles marked poison, some kind of nipple - called a "pontil" - on the bottle increases it's value, color effects value as does condition, words embossed on the bottle also effect the value. It also looks like people search for the word "cure" rather than medicine. This would have helped the seller decide if these bottles were even worth listing. As I said before my cost to list these in individual auctions would be \$3.50, and it would take me about 45 minutes to list them. I'd also have to pack the ones that sold which would take more time. Before listing any of these on eBay, I'd want to know that my money and time was worth the effort. Research would also show what categories these bottles belonged in. Even if I didn't end up listing a single bottle, I would be adding to my knowledge of old bottles thus increasing my chances of spotting valuable bottles in the future. Based on my quick research the best case title would be: embossed name if any; Pontil if present; color; patent, cure or soda if known; state or state abbreviation depending on space left.
  
- **Seller uses abbreviations.** From looking at the most popular searches in the bottles category, four are for the names of states. Two as abbreviations, two as full words. Research would have shown people buy bottles based on what state they were made in. Listing states in both formats makes sense.
  
- **Put a visual counter on the auction...too many hits with no bids will scare real bidders away.** Also submitted as: **Counter is at 333 with no bids.** When I looked at this auction the counter read 2. By the end of the auction the counter was at 2028, and 1994 of those people were my readers. (I sent my readers through a counter so I could see how many people looked at the auction, and compare this with the number of replies received.) Having a counter showing high numbers of viewers without a bid could have an effect on the selling price. Overall it shouldn't, but the seller would have done better to hide the counter or not use it at all. Most sellers don't make proper use of counters anyway, so they are best left out. The eBay provided counters are worthless. Sellathon has counters that provide much more data at a low cost.

- **No mention of when payment is due.** This isn't really needed, and done in an aggressive manner would be harmful. In December I had a seller return a money order because he received it 11 days after the auction ended and his rules stated it must be received within ten days. This was during the Christmas mailing season. This is kind of attitude is just crap. On the flip side, I avoided bidding on one seller's items for years because of his long list of aggressive rules. Finally he had something I couldn't live without. After winning the auction, I called him to pay with a credit card. I ended up talking to him on the phone for an hour. He was a nice friendly guy, but for some reason, he went out of his way to be aggressive in his auctions. I know this hurt his sales. Most eBay buyers will pay quickly and without a problem. The few that will cause problems will cause problems no matter what you do. Meaning you might as well be pleasant to everyone.
- **No comment that will combine shipping or give a discount on shipping for purchase of other auctions has up now.** This is part of the standard description, and goes adjacent to a link that opens in a new window to the page listing other auctions.
- **Does not tell viewer to buy or bid.** Only one person mentioned this. (Good job Eric.) Including a call to action will usually get more bids. Even better is to use a call to action that will get the bidder to visualize the results of winning this item. By instilling a sense of ownership before the auction ends, a bidder is more likely to respond to being outbid in order to avoid the sense of loss. I've talked about this before in the newsletter, and will do a longer article in the future.
- **Because they're sold from Georgia and South Carolina, a military memorabilia buyer would want to know if the bottles were found near a Civil War encampment.** This would fall under research, but might effect the value. Good point.
- **The display of the merchandise is careless and sloppy. I wonder if he's just gonna slap the other half of that box on and ship the bottles as is. I have no confidence that he is competent enough to actually get me the bottles in unbroken condition - even if I did want them.** I actually mentioned this in my list, but Bill did a great job of expressing this so I included it again.

- **Failed to use even rudimentary HTML in the description.** Also saw: **Didn't use template.** Neither of these are required to get the highest selling price in an auction. A template can make it easier to list items because it removes repetitive typing to include standard verbiage like shipping terms, and the link to your other auctions. Basic HTML can improve the layout of the auction, but bidders won't care if the description and photographs provide enough information.
- **Sounds like a really boring person (ebay should be fun!!!!)** I think this is just a person with poor typing skills. That actually explains a lot. If you are a poor typist, a template will help because you won't have to type in all the information you add to all auctions. Also, concentrating on higher margin items makes sense. The biggest thing that will help poor typists is a system. Regularly listing items on a specific day will build familiarity with the keyboard in addition to eBay.
- **Asking the customer to be involved in calculating the shipping costs is a real turnoff.** I agree. I always place a fixed shipping and handling cost in my description. If the shipping sounds high I explain why it's that high - "this item weighs ## pounds," or "due to the length of this item the post office will charge an oversize fee." Even better if it's an item I know will bring me a good profit I state the shipping as I will pay all shipping costs above \$15. Whatever is needed to make the buyer understand I am not gouging him.
- **Not a great idea to sell breakable items on eBay.** This is not relevant, and bottles are actually quite sturdy. I've sold more fragile items without problems. It just takes proper packing, and these bottles would be easy to pack. I usually wrap items in paper, then bubble wrap because the bubble wrap sometimes reacts to paint. It won't react to glass, so bubble wrap alone would be fine here. Then put the bottles in a large box with wadded newspaper or peanuts to separate them. Paper is better than peanuts for heavy items because it does a better job of preventing shifting.
- **Not using FAQ's (Frequently Asked Question Section).** I've tried these in my auctions and found no difference in ending prices for antiques. For ebooks it does help. This is something you might test in your auctions. Note - I do think using a single five line paragraph with shipping packing and insurance information works better than a list

because it is easier for the reader. In fact, when you are writing your description keeping your paragraphs below five lines increases readability and should increase bids with no extra effort.

- **Consider selling more items at a time and staggering ending times so it doesn't feel like the day the auction ends is the day the seller takes off with your money.** Also: **consider setting up a store to build that sense of permanency and trust.** I don't think either of these comments are mistakes. I've seen no evidence that eBay buyers think stores build confidence. In fact, I doubt the average eBay buyer is even aware of the difference between a store listing and a fixed priced listing. Selling more items at a time really depends on the time available for listing and then packing. Additionally, staggering ending times doesn't allow the seller to spend a fixed time period doing either the listing (assumes seller is not willing to pay a dime to schedule auctions) or the packing. I'd rather spend two hours listening to an interview on CD and pack all my items, than have to do a few a day.
- **Auction says 16 old bottles and there are only 15 displayed.** I got this in quite a few versions. By my count there are 16 bottles. There is a little brown bottle over on the lower left! This shows the picture is confusing people.

A few additional comments I got that were interesting:

- I would like to add that I made more mistakes on my first listing than this person.
- This auction might be ripe for arbitrage by a bottle collector or a rival bottle dealer. If I knew more about antique bottle collecting (unfortunately I don't because that's not my area of expertise) and really studied the picture, I might find this auction to be a really great deal, especially if I won the lot for the opening bid. Assuming I used priority mail shipping to my zipcode (which works out to \$20), the per bottle cost works out to be less than \$4.50 per bottle.
- I love your newsletter, it is one of the few I actually read. You actually have - gasp - ORIGINAL content. Wow. That's unusual these days.

- Please send us more links to items such as these. I think your readers can learn a lot by analyzing these poor listings.

Great stuff. I want to thank everyone who participated. I think I'll do another one of these, but rather than selecting an auction that needs improvement, direct you to a perfect auction. As soon as I find one, I let you know.

If you didn't find five ways to improve the auction, your skills need help. The best way to improve your skills fast is with my eBay Mastery Package.

If you are already an eBay master, the eBay Mastery Package will help you build a back end, and take your business beyond eBay.

Find out how the Mastery package can help you at:

<http://www.iwantcollectibles.com/mastery.php>

**You can sign up for my free newsletter with the form  
half-way down the eBay Mastery page.**