



What's the Big Deal about Shopping Online?

Whether you are reading this chapter in August (or November, December, or even April), it really makes no difference. In my proposed, generous timeline, August just seems like a perfectly good place to start for a leisurely education on eBay and online shopping.

I still have friends who look sternly down their noses at me for even admitting that I shop online. It's as if shopping online were some sort of exercise only practiced by computer geeks sporting horn-rimmed glasses and shopping for sushi-shaped flash drives (yes, such flash drives really do exist). Certainly no one in her right mind would ever shop online.



To be perfectly honest, when I appeared on the ABC television show “The View” a couple of years ago, Star Jones was extolling the virtues of online shopping to her co-stars. She was faced with some of the exact same looks of horror that I get. Go figure.

Why buy online instead of at a “real” brick-and-mortar store?

Daydream with me for a moment. Don't you remember standing in the middle of the fourth floor of a major department store desperately looking for someone to “help” you? Or how about searching through endless racks for the right size and discovering that all the items in your size were (of course) left hanging in a dressing room? And I don't need to close my eyes to recall the trauma when my daughter tried to return an outfit to a popular,

high-dollar clothing emporium — only to find out (after the fact) that there was a 7-day return policy — and today was Day 8.

Speed, flexibility, convenience, cost-savings, selection, etc. . . .

I could give you 100,000 reasons (at least) why it's more fun to shop online, but I'll start with just a few:

- * You can browse an online store for hours — or for a couple of minutes — it's completely up to you!
- * Browsing in your pajamas and bunny slippers is totally acceptable, even when buying the most expensive of items. (Yes, even at Tiffanys.com.)
- * You can potentially save hundreds of dollars (or, in the case of very fancy face cream, \$40 a jar) on a single purchase of brand new merchandise.
- * You can bookmark a bargain, comparison-shop elsewhere, and then come back and swoop up the deal.
- * You can find the most esoteric of collectibles (for example a 1912 calendar imprinted on a china plate advertising a local grocer in Monrovia, California).
- * Online coupons can glean discounts on Web site purchases — and some eBay sellers often have their own coupon programs.
- * If you have a question about the item, you can click a link to send your query via e-mail — and get an answer back within hours.
- * If you don't find exactly what you want, you can keep looking elsewhere. You won't be intimidated into buying something you don't want because an overly pushy salesperson brought a never-ending stream of items into the dressing room.
- * With the rising cost of gas and oil, circling the parking lot at the mall can become one expensive proposition. (Be sure to count your travel expenses when you figure the cost of shopping at a brick-and-mortar store.)
- * You can buy a car without going through that insanely ridiculous back-and-forth game the salesperson plays when you make an offer, "I'll check with my sales manager." (Eeyyyew.)
- * You can check the feedback of a seller — before buying — and can fairly predict whether the transaction will be a satisfactory one.
- * Online services like BuySAFE can guarantee your satisfaction with the seller (to some degree).

Of course, everything online isn't moonlight and roses

I don't want you to think that I go all Pollyanna-ish when it comes to online shopping. Almost everything has a downside, and online shopping is no different. For example, when you're shopping online, you may really yearn for the personal side of in-store customer service.

Although you may get great customer service online, you may also miss (what I call) the *suck-up factor*. When you're spending a large chunk of cash in a retail store, the employees tend to be all over you. Think of Larry Miller (in his role as the Beverly Hills store manager in the Julia Roberts film, *Pretty Woman*) as the king of retail suck-ups. He really knew how to treat a customer!



When you're paying retail price in a brick-and-mortar store, you're entitled to an obscene amount of sucking up—in proportion to the amount of money you'll be spending, of course.



So here's my advice if you're not getting the royal treatment you deserve in the store: Try on the items and make note of the styles (name and/or number) as well as your size; then go to eBay and search for the items there. You'll probably save 35 percent.

And check out this list for other instances where in-store shopping may outshine the online experience:

- * You can't try on clothes online and check to see whether you can possibly squeeze into a smaller size. (Perform that activity at the retail store first!)
- * You have to pay to ship the item from their place to yours. But, hmmm, that kinda balances out because you're probably not paying sales tax for your online purchase, and you don't have the cost of driving to the store.
- * When you buy name-brand cosmetics online, there is no nice lady stuffing your shopping bag with oodles of sample-size products. (Of course, when you do get such a great in-store bonus, you can always *sell* those sample-size cosmetics on eBay!)
- * If you want to return an item you've bought online, you've got to pack it up and ship it back to get your refund—provided the seller even takes returns.

Saving money is where I'm at

Think about how much you can pay in the real world for some special items. As an example, I took a bit of time to check just a few items and price them in the following table . . .

Compare the Prices!		
<i>Item</i>	<i>Real-World Price</i>	<i>eBay Price</i>
P205/40R17 high-performance tire	\$120.00	\$72.26 (Free Shipping)
Manolo Blahnik leather ballet flats	395.00	199.00
<i>Sex and the City</i> TV Full Series DVD set	299.99	142.00
Brio Thomas & Friends Edward Engine	16.95	3.48
2005 White House Easter Egg	??	10.00
<i>Baby Einstein</i> 16 DVD Set	319.84	46.50
2006 Chevrolet SSR Coupe	42,085.00	38,900.00

After you've read a little more of this book, I encourage you to take a few minutes and search online for some items you regularly buy. See for yourself whether buying them online can "show you the money" so you don't miss the suck-up factor. In the October chapter, I explain the ins and outs of the eBay search engine so you can always find what you're looking for.

I hope I've given you enough reasons to get excited about shopping online — because once you're hooked, you'll never go back to paying brick-and-mortar retail prices.

Just who is doing all this online selling?

It's your neighbor, your aunt, your Cub Scout troop leader, the Avon lady down the street — it's me! How cool is that?

In the Doris Day/Rock Hudson era (*sigh* weren't they just perfect?), our parents did all their shopping at mom-and-pop stores close to home. They knew the names of the people behind the counter, and the store clerks

remembered them. Our parents could walk into a restaurant and order the “regular” and the waitress would know just what meal to bring. My Mom would get an occasional call from the salesclerk at the local fashion emporium to alert her when something she thought my mom might like had come in. Today we don’t commonly have these luxuries.

Today, when we roll up to the drive-thru window, we shout our order into a plastic microphone — and get it (or something like it) repeated back to us in a disembodied voice on a scratchy audio speaker. When you go to a department store, it’s almost impossible to find the same salesperson to wait on you as last time — but then again — there is really no waiting *on* anyone. Pretty much we live in a self-serve world.

Families working from home

Since locally based businesses barely exist anymore, eBay has taken over as the mom-and-pop “Mecca” of retail. This is the home of the real American dream, the only shadow of its existence that I can see today. It seems the work ethic of our parents’ generation has been replaced by going to seminars and buying into get-rich-quick-scams; people who really want to work for a living seem to be a rarity. But not on eBay. On eBay you’ll find families putting kids through school, families supporting their sons and daughters in Iraq, retirees having the time of their lives running their own Internet business, and more.

In the many books and classes that I’ve done about eBay, I have personally met thousands of these wonderful people running home-based family businesses. Their businesses may grow — but will still employ Grandma in the shipping department. Everybody can help out and enjoy the results. Now, *there’s* an American Dream.

Here’s a several-year-old picture (Figure 1) of my daughter Susan, who worked with me (on and off) in my eBay business. eBay was a pretty big deal for her as she went through her teens; my eBay business added the extra money to put her through prep school and university.

Large retailers expanding their reach

You’ll also find some of America’s large retailers and manufacturers with businesses in eBay Stores. Sears, Bose, Oreck, The Sharper Image, and others have extended their retail networks to include eBay. You may find special bargains, or just their regular priced goods — but they all take the eBay market seriously.



Figure 1



So think about it. Shopping on eBay is like supporting the American Dream. You can get good customer service from people who will remember you and appreciate your business – that's definitely worth the time spent online.

What's so different about eBay?

If that American Dream stuff I just told you about isn't enough to convince you that eBay is special, perhaps the many ways to shop and buy will be. These next sections introduce you to the different shopping venues awaiting you online – compliments of eBay, of course!

The mainstay auction format

When you shop eBay, you may be able to participate in an auction and get your item at a very low price – or – you may end up in a huge bidding war with another buyer and pay too much. Who knows? That's the fun of participating in auctions.

An auction on eBay will look very much like the listing in Figure 2 below. There will be a place to bid and you can check on the bidding history. (I tell you more about the fine points of auctions in the October section.)

NIB UGG AUSTRALIA Boots/Winter Size 8 M Shoes Chestnut
Item number: 7754138409

You are signed in

Current bid:
US \$77.00
Place Bid >

End time:
5 hours 47 mins (Mar-30-06 21:24:01 PST)

Shipping costs:
US \$9.95 (discount available)
Standard Flat Rate Shipping Service

Ships to:
United States

Item location:
United States, United States

History:
23 bids

High bidder:
(11 ☆)

You can also:
[Watch this item](#)
[Email to a friend](#)

Listing and payment details: [Show](#)

Meet the seller

Seller:
shoetime (63818 ☆)

Feedback:
99.8% Positive

Member:
since May-24-00 in United States

- [Read feedback comments](#)
- [Ask seller a question](#)
- [Add to Favorite Sellers](#)
- [View seller's other items:](#) [Store](#) | [List](#)
- [Visit seller's Store:](#)
[SHOETIME](#)

Buy safely

1. Check the seller's reputation
Score: 63818 | 99.8% Positive
[Read feedback comments](#)

Figure 2

An auction with the Buy-It-Now option

This is just an auction with a twist. You will see (as in Figure 3) that along with the bidding option comes a buy-it-now price. If the buy-it-now price suits you, you may click to buy the item immediately.

eBay BUSINESS DESK REFERENCE for Dummies SIGNED Collier
Item number: 4625205020

Over 650 pages of eBay Selling Savvy direct from Author

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



Stock Photo

[View larger picture](#)

Starting bid:
US \$23.99
Place Bid >

Buy It Now price:
US \$25.99
Buy It Now >

End time:
Apr 02-06 14:44:51 PDT (2 days 21 hours)

Shipping costs:
US \$4.99
US Postal Service Priority Mail®

Ships to:
United States

Item location:
Los Angeles, United States

History:
0 bids

Meet the seller

Seller:
marsha_c (4474 ☆)

Feedback:
100% Positive

Member:
since Jan-05-97 in United States

- [Read feedback comments](#)
- [Ask seller a question](#)
- [Add to Favorite Sellers](#)
- [View seller's other items:](#) [Store](#) | [List](#)
- [Visit seller's Store:](#)
[Marsha Collier's Fabulous Finds](#)

Buy safely

1. Check the seller's reputation

Figure 3

If you think that perhaps you might get a better deal in an auction, you can place a bid on the item. Once a bid is placed, the Buy-It-Now option disappears and the item goes into auction format.

All aboard the eBay Express

eBay Express is a new shopping venue for eBay (see Figure 4). To compete with the other big shopping sites like Amazon and Overstock, eBay's top sellers put items on the Express site for shopping-cart types of sales. You can go from item to item and put any that you decide to purchase in your Express shopping cart. When you're ready to check out and pay, eBay will — behind the scenes — contact the various sellers you've bought from and have them send your items. This new format makes for an easy, timesaving eBay shopping experience.

Announcement

Choose A Topic

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- [Optional Feature Fee Changes](#)
- [Optional Subscription Fee Changes](#)
- [Feature Packs](#)
- [eBay Express](#)
- [Store Inventory In Search](#)
- [Canada's Fee Changes](#)

Related Links

- [General FAQ's](#)

Coming Soon to eBay

A New Specialty Site

eBay express

- **Get it new**
- **Get it now**
- **Fill your shopping cart**
- **Buy with confidence**

eBay Express

At eBay, we know that it's our job to help you grow your business by continuing to attract new customers for your products. After talking with thousands of real-life shoppers, we've found that many customers are looking to buy new, fixed price goods in a more conventional e-commerce experience. To meet their needs, we are building a new specialty site— eBay Express.

Designed from the inside out to attract and satisfy today's busy shoppers, eBay Express will streamline access to your products.

With eBay Express buyers will:

- **Get it now.** Shop our vast inventory of brand new, brand name, and hard-to-find products.
- **Get it now.** Everything on eBay Express is offered at a fixed price by experienced, motivated

Figure 4

Welcome to eBay Stores

In contrast to the locally owned, small retail shops of yesteryear, the mom-and-pop stores of today can be found in eBay Stores. Independent sellers hang their “open for business” signs on eBay through their stores. Check out some of my favorite eBay Stores in the store section (at the back of the book). I'll bet you'll find something very unique and — at the very least — something at high discount! Figure 5 shows you my little eBay Store.



Figure 5

What other shopping sites are worth looking at?

Well, to tell you the truth, the answer to the question in the above heading could become an entire other book! But since my editor insisted that I trim down my response, I will. I have to admit that although I love eBay dearly, I have been known to check out some other online vendors on a regular basis.

Just as eBay excels at auctions, other online vendors have their own areas of expertise. Some offer deep discounts; others have amazing variety and exclusive items. And most offer some sort of special benefits for repeat customers. In any case, you can't go wrong by checking out the following retailers online:

- ✱ **Overstock.com.** Wow, do I love Overstock? You bet I do! I was redecorating recently and trolled the Overstock pages on a regular basis. You won't find a wider selection of discount bedding and linens — for example, top-quality, high-thread-count sheets and heavy Turkish towels at a fraction of what you'd pay in the brick-and-mortar world.



Although many other sites have auctions, eBay is untouchable in that shopping venue. If you want to try your hand at auction-bargain-hunting — go no farther than eBay.

I hit the Overstock.com furniture department pretty heavily, getting some outstanding dining room chairs, lamps, and outdoor furniture at huge discounts. This vendor also has outrageous discounts on jewelry and fashion. Its Web site (see Figure 6) contains so much great stuff, you really have to contain yourself!

The best part of Overstock.com is that you're charged only \$2.95 shipping for your entire order — no matter how big it is! You can also join its Club O, which gives you tons of benefits, including 5 percent more off your order and only \$1 shipping!! (Club O membership costs \$29.95 a year.)

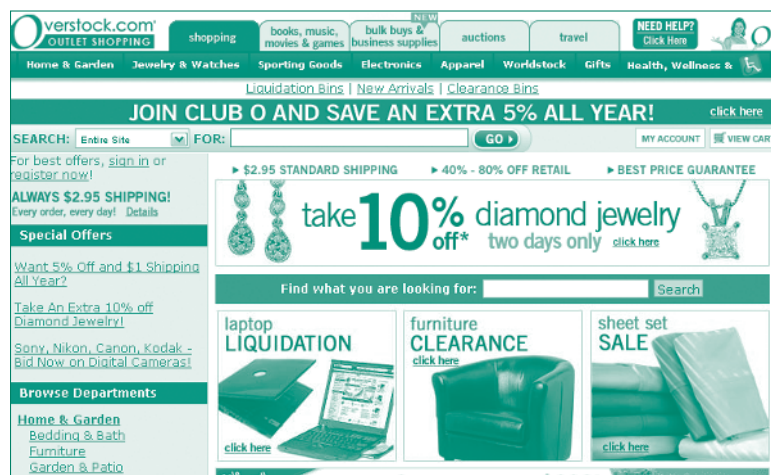


Figure 6

- * **Amazon.com.** Here's another Web site that I can't seem to live without. If it's the latest in books, music, or movies — it's here! But Amazon is not just media anymore. You'll find a huge selection of electronics, kitchen items, and at least a zillion (okay, maybe only 56) categories of stuff to buy.

One of the outstanding features of Amazon is the fact that its customers review the items sold on the site (eBay just instituted this feature as well). By reading the reviews, you can often get a really good idea of just how good an item will be — or if it's even the type of item you want.



Amazon often has videos and custom content that's written just for the site. I even have a few articles available on there for under a dollar!

The more you buy, the more Amazon's computers know you and, each time you log on, make merchandise suggestions to you based on your previous purchases, as shown in Figure 7. (My purchases are so *all over the boards* that their computer still hasn't gotten me down to a science yet!)

Amazon doesn't carry everything — and its prices are not always the cheapest. But it's a convenient and easy-to-navigate site. It also has a special club: Amazon Prime (yes, I'm a member there, too). For \$79 a year, everything (no matter how large the item or how many orders) gets sent to you via 2-day shipping at no extra charge.



Once you're a registered member of Amazon, you see a small icon — a tiny gold shopping bag — in the upper-right corner of each page. Be sure to click this icon to see 10 items of interest at deep discount prices.

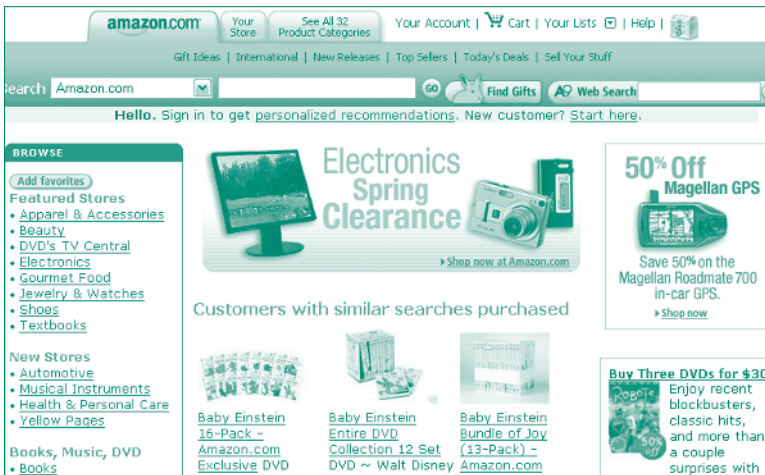


Figure 7

Just keep in mind that if you have a favorite brick-and-mortar store, odds are it will have its own Web site. I know that my favorites do (see the following list) — and I frequent these sites, too.

www.RestorationHardware.com
 www.PotteryBarn.com
 www.CrateandBarrel.com
 www.CB2.com
 www.Starbucks.com
 www.Peets.com

I'd keep going, but I think you've got the message. All reputable retailers have a home online. Why not visit them in your pajamas tonight?

