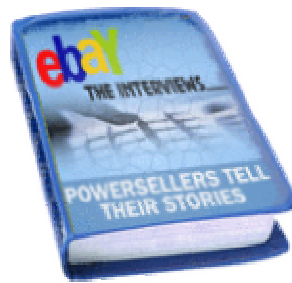


EBAY – THE INTERVIEWS

PowerSellers tell their stories



By Richard Grady

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Introduction (and my story)

My name is Richard Grady and I started working online in 1998. Like many, my first 'taste' of trading on the Internet came from using the largest online auction site in the world – eBay.com.

I first heard about eBay from a newspaper article and decided to take a look. I live in the UK and at the time, there was only one eBay site – eBay.com – so most members were based in the USA. Despite this, I could still see a huge potential and started to sell on a part-time basis to make a bit of 'pocket-money'.

eBay wasn't my full-time job and I was doing the '9–5' working in a 17 year career in corporate finance, but I enjoyed it and it was profitable. In fact, eBay never became a full-time business for me as I drifted into other things, however, I traded enough to realize that it is possible to earn a full-time income through selling on eBay alone.

Over the years, I sold all sorts of things from vintage computers (such as the Sinclair range), to DVD's, to mobile phone accessories and more. eBay was profitable and generally enjoyable. However, as I started to sell more and more products, I found that the increasing workload was becoming less and less enjoyable! Spending my evenings and weekends packing goods and dealing with emails became more and more of an 'effort' and I would often just stop selling for a couple of months to give myself a break.

Looking back, I wasn't actually selling that many items, maybe 20 or 30 a week, but I suppose it seemed like a lot because I was working full-time as well.

In fact, despite spending almost 4 years selling on eBay, I only built up a feedback rating of just under 900 comments – admittedly not everyone leaves feedback, but it goes to show that I wasn't a 'huge' seller, certainly nowhere near PowerSeller status! (I would like to add at this point that I never received one negative feedback comment in all my time selling – my feedback profile is still unblemished today ☺)

I always had a certain respect for PowerSellers, I suppose because at the time this was something I would have like to have been myself. Unfortunately, I didn't seem to have enough hours in the day to manage this!

The reason I eventually 'moved away' from eBay was because of the fact that I wrote my first eBook. This was a directory of UK wholesalers that could be used by new eBay sellers in order to find suppliers and contacts. I wrote the guide in response to the numerous emails I was receiving each week asking where I bought my stock from. The directory was a massive success and I went on to write a similar guide for the US.

In the end, I just didn't have the time to spend selling on eBay as I was concentrating my efforts on building up my 'info-products' business. In 2001 I was able to give up my career in finance and work full-time online.

I still keep up to date with eBay and from time to time I can't resist doing a bit of trading – especially at Christmas. If I am honest, I don't think I could ever have been a PowerSeller for any period of time as I simply disliked the packing and shipping aspect of the 'job' too much! I do however think that it is fantastic that the eBay website has allowed so many people to give up jobs that they hated and spend their time doing something they enjoy, as well as earning a good living.

Many people visit eBay and consider starting their own online auction business. I wanted to write this eBook to show that you can earn your living on eBay and that many 'ordinary' people are doing just that. It will be hard work and it will involve long hours, but it CAN be done.

Selling on eBay is not an easy road to riches, I know this from my own experiences, but with a bit of effort it is possible to earn an excellent income from selling online. In addition, you may benefit from an improved quality of life – no boss, more leisure time, more quality time with your family?

The stories in this eBook may inspire you or they may put you off selling online forever – either way, I hope you enjoy reading them.

I have thoroughly enjoyed putting this collection of interviews together and I would like to say a huge 'thank-you' to everyone that has contributed – I appreciate the time that each of you has taken to answer my questions.

By the way, if you are reading this eBook in any country other than the UK, please bear in mind that we spell some things differently over here - no emails telling me I can't spell please!☺

Best regards

Richard

rich@thetraderonline.com

If you are thinking about selling on eBay yourself, you may be interested in my wholesale directories – further details can be found using the web links below:

['The UK-Trader's UK Wholesale Guide'](#)

['The US-Trader's US Wholesale Guide'](#)

For more information about making money online, please visit my website devoted to this very subject.

You can also subscribe to my free newsletter and catch up with other online entrepreneurs in my online forum:

www.thetraderonline.com

MYRNA PETSCHKE
eBay user name: 'grndkdsrok'



'TheWarehouse'

PowerSeller since: 1999
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 5750
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 7227

Q. Myrna, can you start by telling me a bit about yourself?

A. I am 61 years of age and I live in Maricopa County, Arizona USA.

Q. I've got to ask you, your eBay user name, 'grndkdsrok', what does it mean?

A. Markus (8), Monika (6) and Stefan (4) are my grandkids and they are the most wonderful grandkids in the world and they rock!!! So the user name is a shortened version of 'Grand Kids Rock'. Original huh?

Q. When did you start trading on eBay and what else were you doing at the time?

A. I first started to trade on eBay in March 1999. At the time I was working for Charles Schwab & Co as an executive administrator. At first, I was a buyer, not a seller – I wanted to complete a set of china that I had. Using eBay, I managed to do just that.

Q. So what made you convert to selling then?

A. Well, I ended up buying too much china, so I decided to sell some of the extra pieces. That was how it all started. Within a month I had made my first \$1,000 and from that point, things have just grown and grown.

Q. Wow, \$1,000 profit within a month is a great start – I can see why you got hooked. Tell me what happened next?

A. From auctioning the surplus china, I moved on to selling other items in my house that I no longer wanted and then, when I had done that, I started shopping for more. I bought collectors books so that I would know the value of items and so that I would not be listing them for nothing as many sellers do. Right from the start I decided to buy quality and sell quality. My prices are a little higher than other sellers, but that is fine. I am proud of what I sell and ship and with the business that I have developed.

Q. You mentioned that you started off selling china, what do you sell on eBay now?

A. Still china, but also electronic products, collectibles and some toys.

Q. And how many auctions do you have running at any one time?

A. Usually between 1200 and 1400 auctions at a time. Many of these will also be Dutch Auctions.

Q. How long did it take for you to go from being an 'ordinary' eBay to a 'PowerSeller'?

A. From memory, it was around 6 months. I can't remember exactly, but it was fast.

Q. Making the transfer from selling a few bits of china to PowerSeller status in just 6 months is a great achievement. Did you have any idea when you started selling online that it would be so successful?

A. This all started because I enjoyed it so much. Years and years ago I owned 2 thrift stores and I had a blast with those, so eBay is an offshoot of the same business, but done in a different way. Originally selling online was just something to supplement my income and to fill empty hours rather than watching television or doing other things that wasted my time. Once I saw how good it could be, I knew that some day it would be a supplement to my retirement. What I didn't know was that it would be so good that it would enable me to live very well, long before retirement.

Q. Running over 1000 auctions at a time must take up a lot of time, what sort of hours do you work?

A. On average, at least 10 hours a day, 7 days a week. This time is split between working on the computer, packing orders and shopping.

Q. So this is your full-time 'job' now then?

A. Yes. I no longer work for Schwab and haven't done for over a year. eBay is my full-time business.

Q. Do you have any assistance with the business or do you do everything yourself?

A. I have no staff, YET, although my son Brent does look after the electronics sales as I have no clue about those items. In addition, I do get help now and then to help pack and sometimes shop with me.

Q. You mentioned packing, this is obviously a major part of the business, do you have any systems to make the task easier? Do you ever use drop-shippers?

A. I pack all my own boxes and make all my own labels etc. This is done every morning and I have daily UPS and Airborne pickups at 9am each morning. Drop-shippers are way too expensive to use for my customers and I refuse to do so. I am not lazy and I enjoy packing and shipping myself, to save the customer money on their purchase. I always ship within 24 hours of payment.

Q. Am I correct in my belief that you don't just sell to the US?

A. Yes, I sell internationally – all over the place - Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, Mexico, Canada, Ireland, Great Britain, Indonesia and many other countries.

Q. What about the other side of the business – listing auctions and keeping track of emails, payments etc – do you use any specific software to help with this?

A. I use nothing but eBay and my own systems to list and track. I have the time and knowledge of the computer to do that, without having to pay the extra monthly fees for any programs that may assist in doing this.

Q. Obviously your business started at home, do you still manage to run it from your own property or have you had to invest in storage/office space?

A. I was able to buy a brand new 4 bedroom house a year ago and I now have an office and the entire garage as my warehouse (see pics above). It works very, very well.

Q. What do you like best about running an online auction business?

A. It is exciting to see what an item ends up selling for and to see how many bids it gets etc. I also enjoy being home and being my own boss. Being able to do some of the work from anywhere in the world is great too. It is only the packing and shipping that has to be done at home. It is however great to be gone for a day of shopping and still have ongoing sales and payments coming in.

Q. And the worst thing?

A. Dealing with people who are very rude, who do not understand how eBay works and who do not take the time to READ what the descriptions say or what eBay instructs. Those who want something for nothing and don't stop to think that the items listed for sale all have a cost behind them to the seller - purchase, listing fees, commission fees, packing supplies, car expense to shop, time involved for all of this, overhead for the storage and office, etc. And those people who leave adverse feedbacks without first trying to work it out with the seller or those angry hotheads who just leave the feedbacks first and then think later. It is impossible to please everyone all the time but I try my very hardest to give good, fast service and to sell great items. Because of what I know I do with my business, I refuse to let the abusive feedbacks go by unchecked without a response back to those who leave them. It may prevent another seller from being verbally attacked by that same unprofessional buyer in the future."

Q. If you had to start over again tomorrow, would you do anything differently?

A. Yes, I would have quit my job sooner and done this full-time longer ago. And I would shop more to have more to sell.

Q. Finally, if you don't mind me asking, from a business that started just 3 years ago selling a few pieces of china, how much income are you generating now?

A. I am grossing about \$150,000 a year.

That's excellent – well done! Myrna, thank you so much for taking the time to provide this interview, it is very much appreciated and I am sure that many people will enjoy reading your story. I know I have.

MYRNA'S TOP THREE POWERSELLER TIPS

- **Ship quickly.**
- **Describe each item fully, with all defects listed, if any.**
- **Ensure you know the value of the items you are selling, so that you are no undercutting your competition needlessly.**
- **Be friendly.**

Q. But that's 4 tips Myrna?

A. I already told you, I like to offer a quality service!

I can't argue with that!

You can see Myrna's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit Myrna's eBay store by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW EBAY STORE](#)

DENNIS WINSPEAR
eBay user name: 'smed789'



Just another day of packing and shipping.....

PowerSeller?: Yes
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 3182
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 3816

Q. Dennis, can you start by telling me a bit about yourself?

A. My full name is Dennis Winspear, I am 38 years old and live in Clayton, North Carolina, USA.

Q. When did you start trading on eBay and what experience had you of computers and the Internet before then?

A. I've been selling (and learning) on eBay since September 23rd 1999. Selling on eBay consistently is an art form, a career course no different than being a mechanic or another skilled worker. I'm moderately intelligent but without a college education and although I had considerable marketing experience from my former work, I started with no computer training whatsoever and I still possess very little computer knowledge. You don't need to be a computer expert to make a success of selling on eBay, what you need is desire and to love what you do. Anyone can succeed eventually with these two ingredients.

Q. What products do you think make good sellers on online auctions?

A. I can't make this point strongly enough: SELL WHAT YOU LOVE! I recommend smaller items, with a perceived value of at least \$20.00. Avoid 'fragiles' if possible. Best-sellers include unusual items, old items and collectibles – they all sell easily!

Q. How many items to you have listed on eBay at any one time?

A. Currently about 100 continuous auctions a week.

Q. How much of your time does working on eBay take up?

A. I work at it everyday, with sporadic days off if my eyes burn out from looking at the computer monitor. It is deceptive for me to say how much time it takes to sell on eBay consistently as each person is different and will work to their own speed and skill level.

Q. Tell me about how you started out selling online and how things have grown from those early days.

A. I always wanted to do my own thing, always...only what? I started out by learning where to buy stuff cheap. As I mentioned earlier, I already had some marketing knowledge from my work experience, class courses and extensive library reading.

I started selling part-time and worked as a truck driver full-time. First thing I sold on eBay was 30 duck decoys! They had been under my porch for 3 years and I sold them for \$225. I sell on eBay full-time now, but I still have not 'arrived' yet. I can see my eBay future and it is full of promise as I finally possess all of the tools for success.

Selling on eBay is fun, just like Christmas at times. Newbies are afraid to make mistakes and this is the wrong approach. My advice is, dive right in, don't stop to test the water temperature! Hanging onto the eBay ride is like riding a bucking horse at times!

Since starting to sell online myself, I have taught my dad and sister to sell on eBay too and now my brother is showing some desire also. We all sell different products and network with each other on what worked etc.

One thing is certain, I know that I couldn't work for someone else now, at least not without disliking it!

Q. How does your business differ now compared to in the beginning?

A. Well, at one point, I thought that spending \$300 on product a month was a lot, but now \$3,000 a month is not a lot for me. I found (as new sellers will) that your base camp (house) will fill up with stuff and you will laugh if you don't sell the stuff you love, as it just stacks up on you. I am amazed at the long learning curve that it took me to finally get where I am – that is not to say that a new sellers trail will be as long. Things are now probably as big as I'm gonna get.....for the next few years anyways.

Q. Looking after multiple auctions can be a tough job if you are not organized. Do you use any particular software or systems to help you run things day to day?

A. When you start shipping 30 packages or more a week, you will NEED auction management software. Do not fool yourself into thinking that you will save money by not using auction management. If you try, you'll just be shooting yourself in the foot.

When choosing auction management software, be sure to avoid anything that installs itself into your computer. Why? because eBay discourages non-authorized programmers by changing the keys to access auction info from time to time. Then you get stuck waiting for the programmer to post a downloadable fix. I've been there – 50 auctions ending and bam, your software doesn't work (it's called stress!)

You are much better off using eBays Auction Assistant, as at least they keep the thing working for you. I also use www.auctionworks.com and love it completely. It is an excellent service and pays for itself in time savings alone. It has every tool a seller will need and it works 24/7. I recommend AuctionWorks from day one – people do not think that auction selling is time consuming, but it is. Start with the principle that you want to automate as many of the selling features as you can. You'll need to do this to become successful as the eye strain will get to you!

Q. Do you use drop-shippers to save you time with packing and shipping?

A. I seldom use drop-shipping and when I do it is only via trusted sources. Basically, if you use a drop-shipper, you are trusting someone else to do what you care about and they really have a very small interest in the outcome (customer satisfaction). I discourage any new seller from thinking that this works very well and in my opinion, drop-shipping should be avoided. It is deceptive to the customer and customers are not stupid. Whilst on the subject of shipping, I do

not recommend international shipping for new sellers either – by all means try it, you may like it.... but I doubt it.

Q. What do you like best about running your own online auction business?

A. I am me. I get to be me everyday, without office politics and back-stabbers running amuck. I've worked at some big companies – UPS, Georgia-Pacific and Caterpillar – now I live my life according to Smed (Smed is my nickname). I work for Smed and Smed only....lol. I spend the time in my life as I want to spend it. I have learned to love work again, instead of dreading it. Money is not my motivation in life, life is my motivation and excitement....the way it should be for everyone! Love what you do! I make enough money on eBay to live on but more importantly, I have no limits based on my knowledge to finally achieve financial success, eBay is a vehicle that will work!

Q. And what do you like least about running your business?

A. Nothing.

Q. If you had to start all over again tomorrow, would you do anything differently?

A. Lol, I'd teach myself what I know now! I am not like you and you are not like me and this is what makes each persons business different. I have experimented with every sales strategy and feature on eBay™ and learned first hand what flops, what works better and what works best. I am just beginning to grasp the whole picture of selling on eBay and see great promise in my future. Being successful means having a willingness to fail and worse yet, 'look stupid' doing it. If you are prepared for this, then you'll have what it takes.

Q. People are always interested in reading about people's success, particularly if they get some hard financial information. Can you give me some hard facts about your business?

A. You are right, people always want to weigh the pro's and con's of an eBay business (how much can I make?). These people I do not care to teach, as their focus and motivation is wrong. If I showed you what it takes to succeed on eBay, how much knowledge you'll need to learn, most people would (and do) quit. If you don't like auctions, think it's easy and only want the money, you won't last. Sellers that stick with it are unique and make eBay a great place. The people that ask 'How much can I make?' make the worst sellers. These sellers make me cringe, as they drive good bidders away from the site. To make a living wage, you have to be good at it, in a lot of areas, all at once for consistent sales.

I have sold 1000 flash cameras in a week, 600 calculators in a week, suppliers addresses for \$100, 700dz sunglasses, tons of knives5000 I bet. (Keep in mind that only about 20% of buyers post feedback unless you push them). My postage bill is around \$1200 a month. Word of warning – watch your postage costs when listing your items – good idea is to get a scale).

Q. Anything else you would like to add?

A. If you want to be a success on eBay or elsewhere, it will depend on you, you, you! I agreed to this interview because I know it isn't easy to be successful – think about it. Everyone wants success in life and it is up to you and you alone if you achieve it. You define your business, you are the business and the business is you. Your outlook and personality will very much define your success. That is why it is so important to love what you do. Sellers that stick with it are a unique bunch – if you are only after the money, then you will fail. Love of the 'job' and desire are the key ingredients to success and you are only fooling yourself to think otherwise.

☺ Peace. Dennis Winspear!

Dennis, thank-you so much for agreeing to provide this interview – your enthusiasm for your work is infectious and I am sure it will encourage many new sellers.

DENNIS'S TOP THREE POWER SELLER TIPS

- Sell something immediately – today...NOW! Most people will not do this....do it NOW!
- If you find you like selling on eBay, go out and buy a digital camera. I spent \$200 for my first one but it didn't have a digital zoom (stupid mistake). I then spent \$900 for the top of the line camera. You can now buy a better camera for just \$300! I recommend Adobe Photoshop software for cropping pics.
- Plant yourself on www.auctionworks.com (like a tree). Why immediately? Because it is a program that needs plenty of time to learn and by the time you understand it, you will be glad you started from day one.

You can see Dennis's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit Dennis's Auctionworks storefront by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW STOREFRONT](#)

JOHN COLLINS Jr.
eBay user name: 'radkonut'



'I think we're gonna have to get another tree....'

PowerSeller since: 2000
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 2862
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 6084

Q. Can you start by telling me a bit about yourself?

A. My name is John Collins Jr., I am 40 years old and I live in Spring Hill, Florida, USA.

Q. How long have you been selling on eBay and what did you do before you started trading online?

A. I originally started selling on eBay part-time in January 2000. At the time, I had worked full-time as a customer service manager for a medical distributor for 13 years.

Q. What do you sell on eBay?

A. 99% of all our auctions are for Christopher Radko ornaments.

Q. Christopher Radko ornaments? I don't think I have ever come across those (maybe because I am in the UK), can you tell me a bit more about them?

A. Sure, Christopher Radko ornaments are mouth-blown glass ornaments. They are hand painted, take a week to make and they are designed for holidays and special occasions. They are also very collectible.

Q. So how many of these ornaments do you have listed for sale on eBay at any one time?

A. I usually have between 500-1000 auctions running at any one time.

Q. That must take an awful lot of work to keep on top of that many auctions?

A. Most weeks I spend between 8 and 11 hours per day, 7 days a week working, so most of my time is devoted to selling on eBay. I couldn't do everything myself and I have three wonderful people that work with me.

The work starts with purchasing the ornaments – I try to locate items that collectors are looking for and then put them up for auction. After each item is purchased, it must be put in the inventory and inspected for imperfections. Any ornament with even the slightest flaw is rejected and not put on auction. With sometimes having over 1000 items for sale, it is very time-consuming carrying out the above, as well as pulling and packing the items once sold. The reward comes when I receive an email from someone thanking me for having the item available that they have been trying to find for the past year. If anyone is looking for a particular item, just email our product finders – www.treasure-gallery.com

Q. Can you tell me a bit more about how you got started selling online?

A. In 1996 I came across a story on television where the host was talking with Christopher Radko about his ornaments. It caught my interest and I quickly ran to the store to view these incredible mouth-blown, hand painted glass ornaments.

On Christmas I opened a gift from a friend and there started my Radko collection. The ornament that I received was the Virgin Mary and I went and placed her on the tree with great care. A few days later I went back to the store and bought a few more ornaments and some stands to display these works of arts. I then heard that Mr. Radko was coming to a book signing and I wanted to meet the designer of these great ornaments. He had talked about looking at a particular ornament and remembering who gave it to you or when you bought it and how long you have owned it. He was correct. Every time I look at my collection I can tell you where each and every one came from or who gave it to me.

Christopher Radko ornaments are #1. They are truly stunning ornaments. Mr. Radko revived the all-but-forgotten European tradition of mouth-blown, hand painted glass ornaments. Christopher Radko's ornaments have so much detail and beauty that they are breathtaking!

My collection quickly started to grow and I found that I had an extra Radko catalog. I had bid on ornaments on eBay, but never thought of selling so I thought I would list my spare catalog and see what happened. I thought it would be a fun hobby and might earn a little extra money. What actually happened was that the catalog received a bid and then another and yet another. The spare catalog that I had sold for \$25.00. I then started selling some of my duplicate ornaments and they also sold very quickly. Being a collector myself, I started to search stores for retired or sold out ornaments and would purchase them to sell on eBay. I found that almost everything I listed was receiving bids!

I continued to search for discounts or hard-to-find ornaments and what started with a catalog has now grown to a full time job. I quickly achieved the PowerSeller status on eBay in just 6 months.

I had an English instructor who once told the class "Whatever you do in life, make sure that it is something that you love and it will not be like work". I guess I never understood what she really meant until I started my eBay business dealing with ornaments, talking with the best online customers that anyone could possibly have, meeting new people and sharing our passion for Radko ornaments. Even though the days are long, I love the ornaments and the customers and enjoy each and everyday on eBay!

Q. Tell me about your business now – how have things grown or changed?

A. The business now has grown more than I could have ever imagined. The number of items has grown, but the product has stayed the same RADKO... RADKO... RADKO.

I can remember in the early days watching 10 items that I had listed and getting excited when there was a bid. Now I do not usually get the chance to check what was bid on and only see the final result when I receive the notice from eBay that the auction has closed.

I also have three of the best people working with me now! I have my roommate, my mother and my father, who all help full-time with the business. My roommate is the accountant, inventory

controller and my right hand man and my Mom and Dad pack the orders and help run to the Post Office to drop off packages. They also do anything else that I need help with. I could not do this without the three of them!

Q. Do you have your own premises?

A. On September 16 2001, I decided that I would open a store and call it Special Gifts & Collectibles. I can now go to work everyday and display Radko ornaments for all to see! We have many different Radko trees displayed and have them up all year. Even though I have the retail store, I will still continue to sell on eBay.

Q. Are you surprised at how things have grown or did you expect this?

A. I had high expectations but never imagined that it would grow to the level that it has. It would not have been as successful as it is without all the wonderful repeat customers that we have. I love meeting new collectors and helping them to find items on their "wish list" - we sell internationally and have in the past shipped to Belgium, Canada, Germany and Japan.

Q. How do you manage your business when you go on vacation?

A. I have taken one vacation in the last year. We send a notice stating that the order will be shipped the week of It gives the buyer advance notice that if they win they know that we have taken our vacation. Also, while on vacation I can always log in on any computer to answer questions that buyers might have. The rest of the year our orders ship within 24-48 hours after payment. What I did not know is that my mailbox could not hold more than 1000 messages and that it maxed out while I was traveling back from vacation!

Q. Do you use any particular software to help you manage your auctions?

A. I use Channel Advisor (www.channeladvisor.com). This means that at night I can schedule my auctions to be listed at a certain time – for example when I am working at the store. Once an auction is closed it is entered into the system using the bidder eBay name and auction number. We have an Excel program that we enter all the payments and shipments in. We keep a hard copy of everything, filed by the bidders last name. This is very useful when there is a question on an auction. Being very organized is absolutely vital in order to keep our customers happy. All our orders are shipped within 48 hours of receiving payment.

Q. What about packing and shipping – do you have any systems in place to help here?

A. Once an auction is paid for, we create the packing label and pull the item. We take extra care in packing as all of our items are glass. These must be wrapped well and packed in packaging popcorn/peanuts when boxed. We have shipped thousands of orders and always use United States Priority mail. Recently we have started having the Post Office collect our packages, in order to save us valuable time.

Q. What do you like best about running an online auction business?

A. The best thing about running an online auction business is that you have a potential that can never end. Anyone that has a computer can log on, see your item and buy it. We can have payment within minutes via an online payment service, such as Billpoint or Paypal and the item is shipped on its way to its destination.

Q. And what's the worst thing?

A. The only thing that I do not like is that I do not always get to meet the customer face-to-face. I have so many wonderful people buying from me on eBay, that I wish I could meet all of them. You start to have online friends that you never see. I call them my 'UNSEEN FRIENDS' ☺

Q. If you had to start over again tomorrow, what would you do differently?

A. I would not change anything.

Q. So from a business that started from the sale of a \$25 spare catalog, what level of sales are you now achieving?

A. We will gross well over six figures this year.

That's excellent John, a great achievement – well done and many thanks for agreeing to take the time to participate in this interview.

JOHN'S TOP THREE POWER SELLER TIPS

- **Start slow – don't run out and spend a lot of money on inventory that you may not be able to sell.**
- **Customer service is what will make or break your business. Be better and ship faster than the 'other guy'. You will have to answer emails promptly and address concerns immediately.**
- **Honesty. Make sure you inspect your products for imperfections. We offer a 100% customer satisfaction guarantee – we only want happy customers.**

You can see John's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit John's website by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW WEBSITE](#)

**If you are looking for a particular Radko ornament and are in the US, you can call John,
Toll Free on 1-866-RADKO-11**

Outside the US, call on 1-352-688-7690

AL & RITA CHILDRESS
eBay user name: 'arc112884@aol.com'



Al, Rita and Chelsea ☺

PowerSeller?: Yes
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 6012
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 6453

Q. Can we start with a bit of background information please?

A. Sure, my name is Rita Childress and I am 63 years old. I run my eBay business with my husband Al who is 70 and we live in Villisca, Iowa, USA.

Q. And how long have you both been trading on eBay?

A. We started selling on eBay in January 1999 – before that we did antique and collectible shows all over the US. During our last year of shows, we did 36 shows from April to December!

Q. That's a lot of shows! So do you sell similar products on eBay as you did at the shows?

A. Yes and more. We sell everything...including primitives, antiques, collectibles, paper items, advertising, period clothing – there isn't anything that we do not sell.

Q. I know that your eBay business is now a full-time venture – roughly how much of your time does it consume?

A. Well, we work an average of 5 to 6 hours a day and most of the time we work 7 days a week. We try to keep 100 to 120 items on eBay every week, so if we are not listing items, we have other things to keep us busy – taking pictures, emails etc.

Q. So what made you stop the shows and start selling online?

A. When we were traveling around the States we did some trading with a dealer and we ended up with a Web computer. In Jan of 1999 I decided to try eBay as it was the talk of the dealers all over. We started selling books, as this was our passion, but we had found that books do not sell great at shows. We had an Anne Rice Advance copy, in mint condition which we had tried to sell it for \$35.00 at shows (without any luck). We placed this one item on eBay and it went for \$94.00 - needless to say we were hooked!

For the first 4 months or so we kept listing books as we did not have any knowledge of picture taking and we felt we could sell these without pictures. We did extremely well and moved a lot of items. Then the challenge came - we needed a 'real' computer, but we had no knowledge of what to buy or what we needed etc. So we contacted a local firm and had them build a computer

to our suit our needs. When this was done we took on the challenge of picture taking. After talking to many people, (our daughter included as she also sold on eBay), we purchased a simple system called Snappy and hooked it to our camcorder and off we went....

It was so much fun that we couldn't wait to get up each morning to check our auctions. Remember we are both retired Senior Citizen's and this was an opportunity to make additional income. My husband did not want to travel too much anymore as the shows were hard in regard to packing and unpacking, so we decided we would limit our shows to 3-4 a year and continue on eBay.

Q. That's great, so how has your business grown since those early days in 1999?

A. Our business has exceeded our expectations and has allowed us to do many things we would not otherwise have been able to do. Although we do work hard at this and we do it all by ourselves, it is something that we love. We often talk about maybe cutting back but we get so involved in buying that I think that is a long way off.

As the business grew so did our need to keep our supply up. Garage sales and auctions are great, but as more people joined eBay, the higher the prices got and we didn't feel we could do as well. So we ran an ad in a local newspaper offering cash for collectibles, jewelry, books etc. It took a while but from that one ad grew the best opportunity to purchase items at a price that we can make some money. We are very honest with the people we buy from and pay a good price and word of mouth has given us the contacts that we need, as we are always fair. An example is we purchased a large quantity of items from a lady and it brought more then we ever expected, so I called her and told her I was sending her a check because we made more then expected. Needless to say, word of mouth pays off - she has been the best advertising we could ever get.

We now sell internationally and that has been a wonderful experience. Also, just selling has been great as we have made some wonderful friends and acquaintances doing this. Our routine is hectic - when we buy out small estates (no furniture), my husband does all the cleaning, then we take pictures together, I usually do the listing and the emails while he is busy packing and shipping (which by the way is hard job). We have shipped over 14,000 items and our record is outstanding. Al is an excellent packer and we have only had 4 items break in all this time! We also are the biggest shippers in our small community and our Post Office has won awards for the amount of Priority mail that has gone thru our little town of 1000.

We have often talked about hiring a person to give us a hand, but in the end decided that this is 'our baby' and we would like to keep it that way.

We made PowerSellers in just three years and are very proud of our achievement. Our record proves that we acknowledge the peoples needs and service our customers as if they were the only one we had. We now have over 6200 feedbacks and only 2 negatives....

We operate out of our home and at one time we used to say, 'What will we do with this big house?', now we ask ourselves, 'Where are we going to put everything?' The house is full, the garage is full and we have rented a storage shed and that is full.....but we wouldn't change anything. As most people know when you sell in volume on eBay, your house is always 'trashed' - you walk among boxes, climb over boxes and sometimes you even have to sit on them.

Q. Running an eBay business is, as you have already stated, a time-consuming affair, do you use any particular systems or software to help run things day to day?

A. You know, there are many different systems and software but we keep ours simple. We do everything ourselves and manage our auctions with just index cards and a notebook for shipping. Yes, you do have to stay organized and on top of things, but when I pull up an item on eBay that I am interested in, I get annoyed waiting for all the fancy things to load - the music to play etc. I am here to purchase an item and I want it simple - I don't want all the dancing flowers and butterflies.

We do have our 'congratulations' letter already typed and we cut and paste this. We also make sure we answer every bit of email from our customers, even just to take time to thank them for checking our auctions. When people write for additional pictures we always oblige - we do everything we can to accommodate the buyer.

Q. How do you manage with packing & shipping, do you have any tips to share?

A. Living in a small town has its advantages. We can package our items and in the morning and my husband takes them to the post office and drops them off, then we go back in the afternoon and pay for them. Or if we are going to be out of town for that day we just leave them a check. Shipping supplies are the biggest problem as they do get costly and we have to travel 80 miles to pick them up. But we do not charge the customer for this nor do we charge them a handling fee. Our customers pay the actual shipping charges (with the exception of books as we have a set rate for these items, anywhere from \$1.00 to \$2.00 to ship in a bubble wrap envelope).

One thing Al does when he wraps each item is to wrap it in tissue paper first, and then bubble wrap and then the boxes are filled with packing peanuts. So along with all our eBay items the supplies also overrun our house!

We do not have a UPS office near us so we have to drop packages off at the grocery store and then UPS pick them up from there. It costs us \$1.75 per package to do this, so we try to use USPS as much as possible and only the extremely heavy items ship UPS.

Q. What do you like best about running your own online auction business?

A. The thrill! The thrill of the buy, the thrill of the bid and just the excitement of what sells and what it brings. After all this time it is still a morning routine to get up, get coffee and then we both go and check our auctions and email. Of course, we can't rule out the income, but the surprise of what sells and what doesn't is still exciting. This also allows us the opportunity to do things that we would probably never have been able to do on a limited income - travel, remodel our house, build a new porch and to keep buying.....

Q. And what do you like least?

A. Sometimes we do get burnt out as our lives evolve around eBay. When this happens, we schedule 'get away time' and take off for a few days and go to casinos, shop, stay at a hotel or just kick back.

The only other thing we dislike is every once in a while when you get 'that' customer - no matter what you do they cannot be satisfied!

Q. What do you do in respect of your business when you go away on vacation or do you just 'close' for the time?

A. Usually we plan in advance and limit our listings to a smaller number per day. If we are visiting family, we take items with us to list or we do re-lists. If we are trying to take a relaxing vacation we take our laptop and just keep up with the email. Also, we always place a 'Please Note' in our descriptions advising that we are out of town and shipping could be delayed.

Q. If you had to start all over again tomorrow, would you do anything differently?

A. There isn't much we would do differently. I don't think we were prepared for the amount of time it would take or that it would be as successful as it is. But I think I would have tried to learn a little more about computers - that was a big challenge for us. In addition, we probably would have started to try to buy privately a long time ago.

Q. So you have swapped from 36 antique shows a year to 120 online auctions a week – the number of items you have sold must have increased considerably since you started selling on eBay – what sort of money is your business grossing nowadays?

A. We average approximately \$3,000 to \$3,500 a month and have had a few months where we have exceeded \$5,000 (which is my goal). Some months are lower but our yearly average is over \$36,000 of gross sales.

That's a great achievement – thank-you Al and Rita for taking the time to participate in this interview and I wish you every success for the future.

AL & RITA'S TOP THREE POWER SELLER TIPS

- **The old adage – the customer is always right. I don't care what a customer's complaint is – we offer a 100% customer satisfaction guarantee. Sometimes I have told them to keep the item and I will return the money anyway – now that brings in the praise like nothing else!**
- **Be honest – list any problems and tell people in the description if you do not know about a particular item. Take lots of pictures – they cost nothing and will help you to make sales.**
- **Offer many ways to pay – not all customers have access to credit cards. Money orders are an added expense to some people, so take checks. We have only had one bad check in four years and the customer made it good immediately. Also, sell internationally. The more you offer a customer, the more reason they have to bid on your auctions.**

You can see Al and Rita's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit Al and Rita's website by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW WEBSITE](#)

BRIAN & KATHY HAGEMANN
eBay user name: 'dreamlife90'



PowerSeller since: 2001
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 3170
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 5793

Q. Can you start by telling me a bit about yourself?

A. We are Brian and Kathy Hagemann, both 37 years old and we live in Acworth, Georgia USA – just outside of Atlanta.

Q. How long have you been selling on eBay and what was your background before?

A. We have been selling on eBay since 1999. My (Brian) background and education is in the food, beverage and hospitality industry. I have always been a collector and an entrepreneur – I had my own mail-order Presidential Button business when I was in High School. Kathy has a history degree and has been the front office manager for a few firms. Her organizational skills are great – I'm the 'salesman' and run the front end of the business and Kathy is the administrator – we make a great team.

Q. And what do you sell?

A. Mainly Pez dispensers. We sell all American issue Pez dispensers as they are released, as well as European and International Pez dispensers that aren't available for retail sale in the US. In addition, we occasionally sell Presidential Political Buttons, video games, DVD's and music CD's. At Christmas, we try to stock the hot, hard-to-find gift items – this year it is the Zip Zaps Micro radio controlled cars. Ideally, products we sell have to be small and lightweight – this makes them easy to ship.

Q. So, how many Pez dispensers do you have for sale at any one time?

A. In a normal week, we will list around 75 items on eBay and we always have 10-15 'Buy it Now' items available in our eBay store. There are normally over 150 dispensers available from our websites though.

Q. And how many hours a week do you devote to your eBay business?

A. Between the two of us, we probably spend about 20 hours per week on eBay and our websites. The majority of that time is at the weekends, with a few hours in the week to keep up to date with emails.

Q. Can you tell me a bit about how you got started selling online?

A. I've always been a collector – of all sorts of things – from pennies to beer cans! I started collecting Pez dispensers in 1994 and my collection grew steadily until 1998 when a friend of

mine introduced me to eBay. eBay allowed me the opportunity to purchase Pez dispensers from people all over the world and turned out to be a great way to add to my collection.

As our Pez collection grew, my desire to start selling on eBay increased. I decided to try and find an item that was in high demand, relatively inexpensive, small and easy to ship, with a high profit margin. I travelled quite a bit with my regular job (sales), and was in airports and hotels on a weekly basis. Beanie Babies were very popular at the time and I would stop in the airport and hotel gift shops during my travels, to try and buy the 'hot' Beanie Babies of the time. This turned into a very lucrative business, spending \$5-\$6 on each Beanie Baby and being able to sell them on eBay for \$20-\$50. The Beanie Babies were selling great and I had a friend who was selling Pokemon cards on eBay. Pokemon cards were very hard to come by so I began to search out places that sold them. I found out when they got their weekly shipments, and purchased packs on a weekly basis. Pokemon 'Holofoil' cards were distributed in 1 out of 3 packs of cards. The Holofoils sold for \$10-\$100 each, depending on which character it was. There were also 'First Edition' cards that sold very well. It was amazing how successful the Pokemon card market was for quite some time.

As my Pez interest continued, it finally dawned on us that instead of buying Pez on eBay, we should be selling them! It took us quite a while, but we established a great Pez distribution network, securing regular suppliers in 5 different countries. My wife really became entrenched in the business once we started selling Pez. Pez now represents over 95% of our total sales. So what started as a hobby turned into a nice little side business. We did not achieve PowerSeller Status until December, 2001. Being a PowerSeller really gives us a lot of credibility. We are proud of our positive feedback rating of 3000+, although we do have 2 negatives which proves you can't please all of the people all of the time. Our business mission statement is quite simple, "To achieve 100% customer satisfaction."

Q. And how has your business changed since those early days?

A. The business has really grown in the past two years. Our customer base keeps increasing and we have dozens of repeat customers who order on a weekly basis. Our sales have doubled every year since 2000.

We have now opened two websites to gain incremental sales. The first one, www.allaboutpez.com, opened in 2001 and was a great 'learning exercise'. I created it myself using a very basic Yahoo web format. Our monthly fees for this website are \$19.99. This site is still active although it is nowhere near as powerful as our second website, www.dreamlife90pez.com. This site was opened in early 2002 and our monthly fee for dreamlife90pez.com is \$49.99. The site is based on the Yahoo Stores concept, which is great to use and easy to manage. Yahoo and Google drive quite a bit of traffic to the store and it is doing great. Being able to accept credit cards has made a real difference and has really increased our business. We just recently opened an 'eBay Store' through eBay, which integrates our auctions and allows us to sell items with a 'Buy It Now' option. The eBay Store monthly fees are \$9.99. The eBay Store also offers great merchandising relationships with other items we sell. We can 'link' three Buy It Now items from our eBay Store to any auction item we sell and anyone who bids on one of our items will be directed to these three items. It's a great system, and has increased our impulse purchases.

We do not currently employ any staff other than ourselves and our children. Our kids love to sort the Pez when it arrives, so it really is a family owned and operated business. We work out of our home and have a small 'eBay office' and storage facility in the basement. We max out at Pez storage in the 10,000 piece range, but we move so many pieces that we rarely get to that level. We are pleasantly surprised at the success and growth we have experienced in the past few years. It is really a dream come true to have a passion and a hobby that we can both enjoy and that allows us to involve our kids and make a little money on the side. This second business allows my wife to stay at home with our kids, which is truly a blessing.

Q. Looking after multiple auctions is a time-consuming task, do you use any specific software or systems to help you?

A. eBay and Paypal both offer great software to help automate auctions. eBay has recently added a feature which allows the seller to list his item whenever he wants and give it a 'pending' start date and time. Whilst it costs \$0.10 per auction to use this feature, it is well worth the time saved for the listing. We can now reduce the time spent listing auctions from twice a week to twice a month!

Paypal also offers a great tool which instantly emails the winning bidder with all of the pertinent information relating to the end of auction. We used to have to do this manually and quite frankly, we wouldn't be able to keep up with our business now if the end of auction emails were not automated.

We are also in the process of looking at software to help manage our customer database.

Q. What about packing and shipping – how do you deal with that side of the business?

A. Our packaging and shipping has really evolved over the years and we are always on the search for sturdier, cheaper methods of shipping and obtaining shipping supplies. Traditionally we shipped our Pez items wrapped in bubble wrap and then sent them in a sturdy bubble-wrap mailer. However, we have recently discovered www.uline.com and they offer sturdy boxes in all sizes, cheaper than we can buy bubble-wrap mailers. Boxes provide the best protection and we are in the process of converting our shipping methods to go 100% with boxes.

The USPS also provides, free of charge, various sized boxes for Priority Mailing. Anytime we have a shipment that weighs over 1 pound, we ship it via USPS Priority Mail in a Priority Mail box. We bought a Pitney Bowes stamp machine this year and it has really become a time saver. The rental fee is \$20 per month, along with some minor usage fees. It is definitely worth the money. We also buy full Avery 'sticker' sheets and cut our own stamp stickers. This saves a lot of money, as the Pitney Bowes stamp stickers run close to \$0.06 each. Also, we buy our Pitney Bowes ink refills on Ebay in the \$20 range, as opposed to \$38 at Staples. eBay is a great tool not only to sell, but to buy items and save money in the process. If you think about it, if you need an item to conduct Internet sales, then someone is selling that item on eBay right now! We have never used a drop-shipper, although we have had some huge Pez special order opportunities arise lately, in the 3000-5000 piece order range. Should those orders materialize, we will drop-ship.

Q. How do you manage your business when you go on vacation?

A. We have a laptop, so as long as we can get to a phone line, we can connect and receive our emails. All customers are notified if we go on vacation so that they know their order will be shipped when we return. We went on a cruise this past Fall and the cruise line had an Internet Café – we purchased a block of 250 minutes and this enabled us to keep up with our sales and customer correspondence – it was great!

Q. What do you like best about running your own online auction business?

A. We love the freedom of the hours that we can conduct our business. Our business allows us to spend great quality time together as a family. This business also allows us to share our faith in Christianity with our customers. We will occasionally add bible scriptures at the end of our auctions and we advertise our business as a 'Christian-based company'. The positive response we get from customers is a reward in itself and we donate 10% of all website sales to local charities associated with our church and our community.

Our business is very rewarding, both emotionally and financially. At the end of the day, we make a profit, and hopefully make someone smile along the way. People often ask us what "dreamlife90" means. Kathy came up with our company name - we were married in 1990 and it

has been a 'dreamlife' ever since. It may sound corny, but God has truly blessed us with each other.

Q. And what do you like least?

A. Unorganized customers. It is very frustrating to have a customer send you payment but not include any item number or description of their purchase. We sell over 500 items per month and have a hard time matching up payments with no information. The other part we don't like about eBay auctions is the bidders who don't pay for items. At least eBay has a great system to remove these people from their system. Aside from the occasional 'problem customers', we love our online business.

Q. If you had to start over again tomorrow, would you do anything differently?

A. No, we wouldn't change a thing – we have learned from every mistake.

Q. Just to finish off, can you give me some idea of how much you gross from your online businesses?

A. Our eBay business grosses approximately \$35,000 per year and our websites add another \$15,000 a year.

Brian and Kathy, many thanks for allowing me to interview you – it is an achievement indeed to have built a home-based business based solely on candy dispensers – well done☺!

BRIAN & KATHY'S TOP THREE POWERSELLER TIPS

- **The customer is always right – treat your customers as you would like to be treated. You may lose small, insignificant amounts of time & money, but you will build a faithful and loyal customer base.**
- **Sell something you are passionate about. You are more likely to be successful if you sell something that interests you.**
- **Always leave feedback. eBayers live and die by their feedback rating. The more you leave, the more you will receive. Don't be afraid to leave negative comments if warranted.**

You can see Brian & Kathy's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit Brian & Kathy's websites by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW ALLABOUTPEZ WEBSITE](#)

[VIEW DREAMLIFE90PEZ WEBSITE](#)

JACQUELINE
eBay user name: 'at-home-mom-wannabe'



Jacqueline and her reason for being a stay at home mom ☺

PowerSeller since: 2001
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 2902
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 4594

Q. Jackie, can you start by telling me a bit about yourself?

A. I am 37 years old and I live in Texas, United States.

Q. So, tell me, how long have you been selling on eBay and what was your background before you started trading online?

A. I have been trading on eBay for 2 years and before that I was a Registered Nurse!!

Q. Well, that's a bit of a change! What sort of thing do you sell on eBay and how many auctions do you run at any one time?

A. Mainly apparel – children's pajamas and t-shirts for adults and kids. Normally, I have between 200 and 300 auctions going.

Q. That obviously keeps you busy – am I right in guessing that eBay is now your full-time 'job'?

A. It certainly is – I usually spend 6 hours per day, every day online!

Q. Tell me a bit about how you first found out about the eBay website and started your new business selling online.

A. I had a baby who was born 5 weeks premature and who was very ill. When he was 6 months old I went back to work, but I just couldn't stand to be away from him. Around the same time, a friend told me about eBay and I started selling on a part-time basis – garage sale stuff etc. Within 3 months I had quit my job as Assistant Director of Nurses and started selling on eBay full-time selling clothing. Just 1 month later I had achieved PowerSeller status and I have been going non-

stop ever since. When I started selling on eBay I had never even used a computer, but I was VERY motivated to stay at home with my baby.

Q. And how has the business grown or changed since those early days?

A. Well, I still work from home and I still do all the work myself – I don't employ any staff. I must admit that I didn't expect to grow as fast as I have, but I am thrilled with my success. As well as selling on eBay, I have now set up a website, which you can visit by [clicking here](#) and my company is called Noah's Ark.

Q. Do you use any specific software or tools to help with running your auctions and how do you cope if you go on vacation?

A. If I go on vacation, I always take my laptop so that I can keep in contact and the only auction software that I use is eBay's Basic Sellers Assistant package.

Q. What about the packing and shipping – do you have any particular methods or services that you use to help with that aspect of the job?

A. Not really – I pack and ship all my own stuff via the Post Office and simply buy 9x12 manilla envelopes (about \$4.50 for 100) and ship everything 1st class mail. I have never used drop-shippers.

Q. What do you like best about running your own online auction business?

A. That I can work on it whenever I want to and still have lots of time left for my family.

Q. And what do you like least about it?

A. The fact that I am now VERY busy on the weekends!

Q. If you had to start over again tomorrow, would you do anything differently?

A. Yes, I would get the merchandise BEFORE I quit my full-time job – that way I would have had lots of stock to sell when I first started. Money is usually very tight initially, at least 'til you get your numbers up on eBay and payments start coming in.

Q. Finally, I know that your original motivation to start an eBay business was so that you could spend more time with your family, but I guess you also had a needed to generate an income – how successful have you found your eBay business from a financial point of view?

A. My income obviously varies depending upon eBay's traffic, but I have recently been awarded Silver PowerSeller status which requires a minimum sales level of \$3,000 per month ☺

Thank-you so much for agreeing to provide this interview Jackie – yours is a great story and I think it is wonderful that working online has given you the opportunity to do exactly what you wanted and be a stay at home mom.

JACKIE'S TOP THREE POWER SELLER TIPS

- Spend lots of time researching what sells well on eBay.
- Then spend lots of time researching how to find those items wholesale.
- Use a software program like sellers assistant to list. Using software such as this will save you a lot of time and energy.

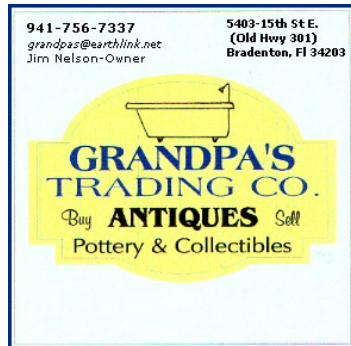
You can see Jackie's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit Jackie's website by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW WEBSITE](#)

JIM NELSON
eBay user name: 'grandpas'



Exclusive – A VERY RARE moment of relaxation away from eBay!

PowerSeller?: Yes
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 5546
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 6507

Q. Can we start with a bit of background information please?

A. My name is Jim Nelson and I am 59 years of age. I live in Bradenton – 'The Friendly City', Florida USA.

Q. How long have you been selling on eBay and what do you sell?

A. I have been an eBay seller since the summer of 1997. Prior to that, my field was retail sales and management. I have owned an antiques shop in Bradenton, FL since 1987 – I still own it today. My online business sells dishes and kitchen accessories (both old and new).

Q. Can you give me some idea of how many items you might have for sale on eBay at any one time and how long does it take you each day to handle your auctions?

A. I try to have 400-500 items for sale at any given time between my auctions and eBay store listings.

I usually spend 10-12 hours a day online and another 4-5 hours wrapping, shipping and photographing my merchandise. I do this whilst working my regular business hours at my antique shop. This is normally 6 days a week – I reserve the other day for something 'fun' like searching for more stock, doing my paperwork, mowing the yard or home repairs!! ☺

Q. Wow, that is a lot of hours every week! How did you get into the online auction business in the first place?

A. Well,..... I heard about eBay soon after they had started up from some of my 'show' customers. Besides having the antiques shop, at that time, I was doing approximately 42 to 46 antiques shows a year, all along the eastern seaboard of the US. I had employees running my antiques shop while I was away, (which is not and WAS not an ideal situation, as unsupervised employees never quite run your business as you would.) Initially I was a bit skeptical about eBay being a viable selling venue so I just 'watched' it for a few months and purchased a few things.

During this time, I had some VERY bad purchasing experiences running the gamut from BAD descriptions (damaged merchandise), to BAD packing and receiving broken antiques!

The first thing I actually SOLD was a Maxwell House coffee pot that had been hanging around in my garage. I decided to try selling some stuff I would normally have given to Goodwill or thrown out, to see if eBay really did work! I believe I received about \$45 for a 1970's Maxwell House coffee pot in the original box and \$35 for some old computer parts and that began to make me a believer in the 'power' of eBay!

I was not going for PowerSeller status at all (there was no such thing at that time anyway), I just decided to try selling a few things that had been sitting in my antiques shop and not selling at the shows I was setting up at. My aim was simply to 'turn' some merchandise and recoup my investments. For the first year or two, I just sold 20-40 items a week and that was plenty for me. They were antiques, mostly dishes and art pottery. I began to cut back on the number of shows I was doing as I was pretty tired of driving so far to set up at some antiques show every weekend! Also, my three grandchildren were getting tired of Grandpa and Grandma being away all the time and missing their concerts, school programs and recitals etc. Grandma and I had a 'heart-to-heart' talk and we decided I could just stop traveling and doing shows, let the employees go and run the antiques shop myself while selling on eBay at the same time. It would allow us to be here for our children and grandchildren and after 10 years of life on the road traveling from show to show, as well as running the shop, we were plenty ready to settle down.

Q. He he – I am not sure that working 12+ hours a day, 6 days a week is everyone's idea of 'settling down' Jim ☺! How has your business changed since those first few months?

A. I still have the antiques shop and I do all my wrapping, packing, storage and shipping from that location. I also pick out the items I'd like to sell from the store and I use the store for my paper work associated with eBay as well as talking with my customers during the day. I usually do my editing and listing in the evenings and on Sunday and Monday, (the store is closed those days) and I do that from my home computer. My eBay business has also enhanced my antiques store business as local folks who did not know I was here in my store location for the past 15 years, see my auctions on eBay and come into the store to see what else I might have available. I now only sell to the USA. Originally I was doing international sales but lots of forms, shipping differences, calculations and mailing problems all equaled a loss of my time (and time IS money), so during the last 2 years, I have localized my sales to USA only.

My eBay business has allowed me to stop traveling and setting up at antiques shows, I now spend more time with my children and grandchildren and I have cut store expenses by being my only employee.

Q. How do you manage your business if you decide to take a vacation?

A. I knew that my wife and I wanted to travel and be able to sell and transact business anywhere, anytime. So a couple of years ago, I purchased a new travel trailer, a laptop computer and special cell phone (technology that was totally new and mostly undiscovered at that time), that was both analogue and digital. This allowed me to hook up via the cell phone to a battery-powered laptop. So I have been in a cow field in the middle of Delaware farm country, in a state park in central Florida, in Wal-Mart parking lot, camping in the North Carolina mountains in a remote area without electricity and driving down the road sitting in the passenger seat all the while listing, answering email and selling as I travel. Vacations in a more normal style can (and have been) done without a hitch by planning 10 day trips (or less) and using 10 day auction listings. You just have your listings start the day you leave, returning in no longer than 10 days time. You can pull off without headaches or problems and your customers do not even know you are away! You cannot use 'buy-it-now' auctions for the time period you will be gone, but other than that, it works like a charm!

Q. As you said a moment ago, time is money and you clearly spend an awful lot of time looking after your customers and the auctions – do you use any particular software or systems to help you?

A. I do not use any software or online 'systems' to run things day to day. I prefer to rely on myself to keep things perking. I have tried using Mr. Lister and Auction Watch but found they were often down and out of sync and the time it takes to learn all these quirks of the 'new' systems just put me more and more behind. I do all my own bookwork and paperwork by hand I might add, not in any computer software system like Quicken, etc. My long-time accountant for the past 30 years says I am the only one of her clients who still keeps his books 'by hand'. I am just an old-fashioned kind of guy when it comes to a system and feel, 'if it is not broken, don't fix it'. I had never used a computer until I started selling on eBay, but I took some computer college courses when I wanted to get online and was ready to go!

Q. What about packing and shipping? Do you have any methods to help make these tasks easier?

A. I do all my own packing and shipping at my store. I have UPS pick up 4 days a week and that saves me a LOT of time! I ship USPS once a week and that is where I receive my mail, so I go there daily anyway. The UPS pick ups from my store save me a lot of driving and waiting in line time and it is well worth the \$15 a week for the pick up service (this is probably my only concession to my usual do-it-yourself/hands-on approach). I only use recycled materials for packing and I pack VERY well. This includes using unprinted newspaper, bubble wrap and boxes. I took the time early on to find good sources of sturdy boxes that I could acquire free as well as packing materials. As a buyer on eBay, I refuse to purchase from sellers who charge a materials or packing fee and so of course, I charge no fees like that and take the time to discover free boxes and packing materials, both to keep my services at no cost to my customers and also, to help save the environment by not introducing new peanuts or bubble wrap to our already overflowing landfills. Take a look at my feedback and you will see that I get lots of comments on my promptness of shipping and my packing ability. I ship lots of breakables but I had a china matching service before I was selling on eBay so was pretty well acquainted with safe packing and shipping techniques.

Q. What do you like best about running an online auction business?

A. Even though it is a lot of work and requires time and patience - nearly 24/7 dedication to answering emails in an efficient manner - you ARE your own boss and if you want to 'play' during the day, you can.....of course knowing full well that you will then be performing 'catch-up' by working later that night or the next day! It allows me the freedom to come and go as I please, to attend my grandchildren's school programs and recitals, and choose my working hours.

Q. And what's the worst thing about it?

A. The hours you must invest in keeping everything timely and running smoothly. The unbelievable amount of emails that must be answered and frankly, packing and shipping is not my favorite activity either! You MUST answer ALL emails and in a timely manner as an auction may be ending in the next hour and a last minute bidder might have a question that....unanswered.....might cost you a sale or a higher bid price. It is VERY important to be courteous (even though you may be rushed or under stress) and thorough. You MUST treat your customers as well or BETTER than you would like to be treated!

Q. If you had to start all over again tomorrow, would you do anything differently?

A. The only thing I might do differently, in hindsight, would have been to sell more items on eBay in it's early stages, as the selling prices were much greater than at the present time with SO many more sellers now, thus cutting down the final auction prices you realize.

JIM'S TOP THREE POWER SELLER TIPS

- First and foremost I'd stress customer service. It is just like a brick and mortar business and you MUST put your customer first, realize they are 'always' right and treat them as well or better than you would like to be treated. I get many, many repeat and return customers and have established relationships with my online customers just like the ones who frequent my antiques shop. Word of mouth is everything and referrals are VERY important.
- Secondly - commitment and dedication. Be committed to answering every email that comes your way. Do so in a timely manner. Be courteous. Thank them for their interest in your auction items.
- Finally, GOOD Descriptions, CLEAR photos. Invest in a GREAT camera! You want your photo sessions to be NO hassle and yet have great, detailed and impressive photos available for your buyers. They can't touch or see the merchandise, the photo must say it all. I recommend a Mavica, hands down, it will be the BEST investment one could possibly make in a good, long-term eBay selling program. EASY and for the newbie, pretty much hassle-free and comes with an easy photo editing program as well! DO detailed and accurate descriptions of your merchandise. State the measurements, the sizes, the condition. Be VERY critical of the condition of your merchandise. Better to OVER describe any flaws in what you are listing, then the buyers will give you feedback like, "better than described". If you understate chips or a minor flaw, it will come back to haunt you, believe me! The time you take in your initial description to cover everything folks could want to know will save you time in the long run.

You can see Jim's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit Jim's eBay store by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW EBAY STORE](#)

SAM DICKINSON
eBay user name: 'samitis'



PowerSeller?: Yes
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 6553
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 9779

Q. Can we start with a bit of background information please?

A. I am Sam Dickinson and I live in Sorrento, Florida USA. I am 29 yrs old.

Q. How long have you been selling on eBay and what was your background before you started trading on online auctions?

A. I have been selling on Ebay since 1998, before that I was a Manager in a grocery store, and going to college. Newly married.

Q. Now I know that you mainly sell silver rounds – I have never heard of these items, can you tell me a bit more about them?

A. Sure – a silver round is usually an ounce (though can be smaller or larger) of .999% fine silver that has been minted to represent a specific design or theme. There are all sorts of designs available including special occasion rounds and themes such as cars or famous people.

In addition, I also sell art bars and collectible coin items.

Q. And how many auctions do you normally have running?

A. At any given time I will have 300 – 500 items listed on eBay and hundreds more on my website.

Q. That's a lot of auctions – how long does it take you to manage them all each day?

A. I usually work for about 3 – 4 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Q. So, going back to 1998, how did you originally hear about eBay and what got you interested in selling online?

A. I was just becoming interested in computers and heard about eBay from a friend. I was looking for a graphing calculator for a class I was taking. I browsed through eBay and found one and placed a bid. I got into a fierce bidding war with a couple of other people, but finally won the item! It was a rush. I was explaining it to my father-in-law when the idea hit us both. He was a reputable coin dealer of 25 years. We both wondered how some cheaply priced novelty coins would sell. I scanned one and listed it. These soon began to sell like crazy - multiple bids on

Page down for Sam's top 3 PowerSeller tips>>>>>>>

SAM'S TOP THREE POWER SELLER TIPS

- Give great customer service
- Accept as many forms of payment as you can
- Find a reliable and trusted auction management software program – this is essential!

You can see Sam's current eBay auctions by clicking on the following link:

[VIEW CURRENT AUCTIONS](#)

You can visit Sam's website by clicking on the link below:

WWW.SILVERROUNDS.COM

JOHN
eBay user name: 'censored'

My intention when preparing this eBook was to gain an insight into the world of the 'professional' eBay PowerSeller. However, one of the things that kept coming back to me whilst putting the various interview articles together was how much hard work selling on eBay actually is.

Therefore, I have added a short final interview with a very good friend of mine. His name isn't really John and I have censored his eBay user name for reasons that will become obvious as you read the article.

A couple of years ago (around the time that I was selling on eBay myself), John decided that online auctions were the way to make an easy fortune. It didn't turn out that way and he discovered the hard way just how difficult it can be making money online.

He reluctantly agreed to allow me to tell his story in this eBook, as an example of how not to sell online.

Please note that all of the situations detailed below are completely true. I would also add that it was never John's intention to let any buyer down during his short time on eBay and no one lost any money as a result of his 'errors'.

PowerSeller?: Absolutely NOT!
Unique Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 126
Total Positive Feedback comments as at November 2002: 143

Q. Can we start with a bit of background information please?

A. I am John aged 38 and I live somewhere in the UK.

Q. How long have you been selling on eBay and what do you sell?

A. I started selling on eBay in January 2000 and my eBay career ended in June of the same year. I used to sell anything that I thought might make a bit of money.

Q. Can you give me some idea of how many items you might have had for sale on eBay at any one time and how long did it take you each day to handle your auctions?

A. The most auctions that I ever had going at once was 60 and it would take me all day (literally) to manage these auctions when they ended. I am not the most organized person in the world and it got to the stage where waking up to 40 emails each morning was making me feel physically sick.

Q. How did you get into the online auction business in the first place?

A. A friend of mine was selling on eBay and making some good money part-time. He was buying what I can only consider to be junk at second-hand sales etc and selling it for double the price on the auction. Apparently it was collectible junk. I figured it couldn't be that hard to do, so I started selling too.

Q. So what sort of things were you buying then?

A. All sorts of stuff – china, pottery, toys – you name it, I tried to sell it.

Q. I see, so you obviously have some knowledge of the above items then and what is and isn't collectible?

A. Not exactly. Initially I would have a quick look on the auction site to see what was selling and for how much, but with millions of items on eBay, it was pretty hard to get lucky and spot the same items for sale at whichever second-hand sale you went to later that day. Because of this, I got bored trawling through the eBay site and decided to just work on instinct and buy things that I thought looked good value for money.

Q. And did that work?

A. No.

Q. Oh. Well, I notice that you managed to achieve over 140 positive feedback comments, so you must have made some money?

A. Yes I did, in fact, I made some good profit on quite a few items. Unfortunately I also had quite a few losses and there always seemed to be some sort of problem to sort out.

Q. What do you mean by 'problems'?

A. Well, for example, I once sold a Dinky toy car to a buyer in the USA and they emailed me to say, 'Thank you for the car, it's great, but what should we do with the teacup and saucer that we received the next day?'

Q. You mean you sent someone else's purchase to them?

A. Yes – I told you I wasn't very organized. Fortunately I sent them some money and they forwarded it on to the right person.

Q. But that is only one mistake – surely that's to be expected from time to time?

A. There were more – loads of them. One time I purchased a military cap for £10 (about \$15) and I put it on eBay with a start price of £3 – no reserve. I figured that it would easily go for more than £10.

Q. And what happened?

A. The auction closed with a single bid for £3. This was a learning experience in terms of start prices, purchase prices and reserve prices! I really thought it would go for more.

Q. So what did you do?

A. I told the buyer that my dog had chewed the cap up and it was ruined. I just couldn't bear to take a loss on the item – I know it was only a small amount, but I didn't have a lot of money at the time.

Q. And what was the buyer's response?

A. He was very good about it and accepted my excuse - I think he even left me positive feedback in the end.

Q. Have you even got a dog?

A. No.

Q. Let's talk about packing and shipping, how did you cope with that?

A. I hated that part of the job and I wasn't very good at it.

Q. I don't understand, what can be so hard about packing stuff and taking it to the post office?

A. Where do you want me to start? Let me give you an example. I didn't have any weighing scales so I would take my items to the post office to weigh them. One time I had bought a set of three china tortoises to sell. The buyer already had the set, but one of her tortoises had a chip on its leg. She wanted to buy the whole set of three from me just so she could replace her chipped tortoise with the perfect one.

I took the tortoises to the post office to weigh them and on the way back, I dropped them. Typically the two tortoises that the buyer didn't want were fine, but the one that she really wanted now had a broken leg.

Q. Please don't tell me that you told the buyer your dog had eaten the tortoise?

A. No, I told her the truth and she was very understanding. In the end, I sent her the set of tortoises for a much reduced price and I believe she glued the leg back on as it still looked better than the tortoise she already had.

Q. So, trying to be a bit more positive, what did you like best about running an online auction business?

A. I liked receiving money from people.

Q. Ok....what didn't you like about it?

A. I didn't like going out and buying stock, preparing auction descriptions, uploading auctions, dealing with email enquiries, packing items, going to the post office and remembering to leave feedback.

Q. So, if you had to start all over again tomorrow, would you do anything differently?

A. Yes, I wouldn't start at all.

Q. And what would you say to someone that was thinking about starting up an eBay business?

A. It is hard work, you need to be VERY organized and if you are anything like me, it will be the most stressful 'job' you have ever had.

JOHN'S TOP THREE SELLER TIPS

- If you have to sell on eBay, make sure you sell something you know about. On more than one occasion, I ended up selling an item for a fraction of what I had purchased it for.
- Don't guess at shipping costs. I still have a huge china serving platter in the attic that I sold on eBay and guessed the shipping cost to the US would be \$20. When I took it to the post office, I found out it was nearer \$50. I sent the buyer their money back and told them I had dropped the platter and smashed it.
- Don't send goods without getting the payment first. I sent some juggling clubs to someone who told me he had sent the payment. That was in March 2000 and I am still waiting to receive it.

John doesn't sell on eBay anymore, so I am afraid he has no auctions for you to visit – as if you would want to!! ☺

Finally...

I hope you have enjoyed reading the interviews in this eBook and if they have encouraged you to start your own eBay business, then I wish you the very best of luck.

Remember, you might find my wholesale directories of use – further details can be obtained from the links below:

UK-Trader's UK Wholesale Guide
www.thetraderonline.com/ukwholesale.html

US-Trader's US Wholesale Guide
www.thetraderonline.com/uswholesale.html

In addition, please take a look at my website www.thetraderonline.com, devoted to helping you earn online.

Interested in making money online?

Click on the link below to join my free online forum – talk to other online entrepreneurs and discuss your experiences and pick up tips.

www.thetraderonline.com/forum.html

GOT A STORY TO TELL?

If you are an eBay PowerSeller and would like to be included in future updates of this eBook, please email me at info@thetraderonline.com and I will forward you some interview questions.

And remember....

You are free to pass this eBook on to your friends, customers and colleagues as you wish – just don't break the law and don't 'spam' anyone.

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