

*“Increase bids and final values
with great photos for your
eBay auctions”*

eBay and Online Auction Photo Secrets

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Introduction

You have all heard the saying “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Well, on eBay and other online auctions, “a picture can be worth a thousand dollars.”

I am continually amazed at eBay sellers of expensive merchandise who are attempting to get high bids with poor photos. What is more amazing is that it is not really that difficult or time consuming to take better photos. That is the genesis for this book.

With a little knowledge, some inexpensive equipment, and a little practice, we are going to show you how to take great photos that will **increase the number of bids and help you realize higher final bids in your auctions.**

Digital cameras have completely revolutionized picture taking and uploading. When I first started selling on eBay I was taking photos with my film camera, getting them developed at a 1-hour photo store, and then scanning them into my computer so I could upload them to my auctions. A little later the camera stores added the ability to burn the photos to a CD. That made life a little easier but once digital cameras became readily available the whole game changed. There was now no excuse for not having great photos in your auctions. As I was able to add more and better quality images, I saw my bids increase dramatically.

The other big challenge for eBay sellers is image management and storage. A lot of sellers new to eBay are surprised to learn that an even larger challenge can be cataloging and managing their images. Fortunately, there are both software and online solutions available to help you every step of the way.

This book will deal with four main topics:

- **Choosing the right camera, equipment, and accessories.**
- **Taking great photos.**
- **Software and systems to edit, store, manage and upload your images.**
- **How to make your photos “sell.”**

The first three topics are somewhat technical in nature, but we have tried very hard to keep the explanations simple and use a minimum of jargon and technical language. When we do use jargon we will explain it as we go.

We have also provided a glossary of the terms used in this book in the appendix.

If you are interested in learning more about selling on eBay please visit my web site at www.skipmcgrath.com where we have tons of free information and resources for eBay sellers as well as our best-selling eBay Success Books.

As a special offer to readers of this book, you can receive \$20 off of my best selling eBay course, **The Complete eBay Marketing System**.

Here is how you get your discount:

1. [Click here](#) or paste this link (<http://www.skipmcgrath.com/products/ebaypackage.shtml>) into your browser to read about the course –BUT DO NOT PURCHASE FROM THIS LINK !!!

2. If you decide to purchase, please [click here](#) to get the payment page with the \$20 discount. If that doesn't work you can paste this link into your browser:

<http://www.skipmcgrath.com/products/niche/cemsBONUS.shtml>

I also publish the largest and oldest FREE monthly newsletter for professional eBay sellers. You can [read the current issue here](#) or go to [this page to subscribe](#).

If you subscribe be sure and look for the confirmation message in your inbox. If you don't see it, just check your spam filter as these automated messages sometime end up there.

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The first task in taking good auction photos is selecting a good digital camera with all the features you will need. There are hundreds of digital cameras on the market, and new models are coming out virtually every week. The trend today is toward higher and higher image quality. This is expressed in the number of pixels (or megapixels) a camera can resolve. In general, the more megapixels, the more expensive the camera will be. Fortunately you don't need extremely high-resolution for your auction and website photography. In fact, high resolution (or large photos) is undesirable because they take a long time to download when someone opens an auction.

The first feature you need to look for is a low resolution or email setting.

eBay recommends that photo file sizes be limited to 50 kilobytes (kb). Actually you can go up to 75kb with no problem. Most digital cameras today have the ability to select low, medium, and high resolution settings. Some of the better (more expensive) camera offer up to six levels of resolution. On many cameras the lowest setting is often called the *email setting* –and is typically set at 64kb. So the first feature you need to look for when buying a camera is a low resolution or email setting.

The email/low resolution setting is okay for most digital photos if you are not going to crop them (We will cover how and why to crop photos later.) When you crop a photo, you lose detail.

If you are selling a product where detail is important, then you will want to shoot at a higher resolution. I usually use the medium (at least 1 mp) and crop or resize the photo using imaging software to lower the resolution to 64 to 75 kb. Shooting at this higher resolution will preserve the detail when you crop or resize.

Camera Features

Here are other important features you should look for, along with an explanation of why they are necessary. Use this checklist when you are shopping for a camera.

- ***Tripod mount-*** Almost all cameras have a standard tripod screw mount in the bottom. It is very important to use a tripod when

taking auction photos to avoid blurred images that occur when you handhold a camera.

- **Macro setting-** Macro is the photographic term for the ability to focus very close to an object. Typically the macro feature will allow you to focus as close as 3 or 4 inches from the subject. This is important when photographing small objects or getting up close to important details such as the maker's mark on silver or potters, an artist's signature, or small flaws and imperfections that you might want to point out to the prospective bidder. When I am shooting new merchandise, I always like to show a close up of the original price tag.
- **White balance adjustment-** We will talk about white balance in detail later. Basically this is how you adjust a camera to account for different color temperatures of light. Almost all cameras have an automatic white balance, but you want to make sure you select a camera that allows you to manually select the white balance between daylight, fluorescent, and incandescent.
- **Manual focus-** The auto focus on digital cameras is easily and often fooled by reflections, unusual shapes and objects with high contrast, so you need to be able to manually focus on an object or part of an object.
- **Exposure adjustment-** The light meter in a camera can be fooled by bright backgrounds and high-contrast objects. Because eBay sellers often shoot against a white background, especially when using a lighting tent, you need a camera that allows you to adjust the exposure setting.
- **Optical zoom-** Digital cameras come with both optical zoom and digital zoom. Digital zoom is very restrictive and difficult to work with. Make sure your camera has a basic optical zoom feature. You can tell if it does by pushing the zoom button and seeing if the lens actually moves in and out. If not, the camera is using digital zoom. Do not buy a camera that only has digital zoom.
- **Aperture priority setting-** The ability to select a small lens opening (aperture) enables you to achieve what is called depth of field. These means those objects both close to you and far away are both in focus.

- ***Turn off automatic flash-*** Most new cameras now have this option as standard, but if you are buying a used camera be sure to check this feature. We will discuss why it is necessary in the following chapter.

When you go shopping for a camera, print out the information above and take it to the camera store. Use this as a checklist. Ask a salesperson if the camera you are interested in has these features.

Camera Models

I have written articles on photography for our newsletter, *The eBay Sellers News*, where I recommended a certain camera. I end up having to answer

There is nothing wrong with an older model camera if it has all the features you need.

so many emails from people who disagree that I have learned my lesson. We don't have room in this book to list all the models available, and they change so fast anyway, so we will only name a few of the more popular models. You also might notice that I mention some models that are already out-of-date or have been replaced by new models. The reason I do this is that there is nothing wrong with an older model if it has all the features you need and many of these models, such as the Nikon 3100, mentioned below are available from overstock dealers and even on eBay at hugely discounted prices from when they sold new.

In addition to famous camera manufacturers, such as Kodak, Nikon, Fuji, Olympus, Sony, and Cannon, there are many other players. I recently bought a no-name camera from China that was excellent. It had all the features I was looking for and worked very well. The only shortcoming was the lack of an understandable instruction manual, so if you are considering a non-branded camera, make sure it has genuine English instructions (not an attempted translation).

Here is a list of several cameras that work well for eBay and online auctions in three different price ranges. As I mentioned, camera makers update their models frequently. So if you want more up-to-date information, I have posted a review of current model cameras at:

<http://astore.amazon.com/skips-ebay-recommended-cameras09-20>

Low Cost Cameras – under \$200

Almost all manufacturers make fairly low cost cameras that fit the criteria we listed above. I have found that the Nikon 3100 and the Nikon 5100 work very well. They are both available in the \$90 to \$200 range. A later model is the Coolpix 4600 which is just under \$200.

The Canon PowerShot A70 & A75 are great cameras for shooting product shots intended for the eBay or the web. The A70 sells for as little as \$150 and you can find the A75 for around \$200.

Sony sells several cameras in their CyberShot line that have all the features listed above if you go up to the higher end of the price range. The DSC S-40 and S-60 can be found for under \$200 if you search carefully.

Mid-Range Cameras (\$200 to \$500)

Once you get over \$200 there are a lot more choices. The Kodak Easy Share cameras are popular for their USB docking station that allows quick and easy uploads. The Z740 is popular and starting to come down in price. I have seen them on eBay for around \$300. If you want something small and slim in that price range look at the Canon Powershot, SD400.

The Fuji Finepix S5200 is a favorite of serious photographers and is now selling in the \$400 + range.

Right at the top of this price range is the Sony CyberShot DSC-H1 at \$500. I do not recommend spending this kind of money unless you also plan to use the camera outside your auctions. With this in mind, the DSC-H1 has some really useful features for general photography (such as *super steady shot* to minimize blurs from hand movement if you are shooting without a tripod).

Advanced Cameras (over \$500)

When you get over \$500 you start getting into the range of cameras used by professionals and serious photography hobbyists. Nikon and Canon pretty much control the market in this range although many other manufacturers (including Sony and Olympus) also make excellent high-end cameras. Most of the better cameras in the over \$500 range include interchangeable lenses.

Probably the two most popular models are the Nikon D70 and D80 and the Canon Digital Rebel EOS 350D. These cameras range in price from around \$600 to \$995.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, the cameras mentioned are by no means the only good cameras for product photography. There are lots of great cameras on the market. A great place to shop and compare digital cameras is a DealTime (www.dealtime.com). You can search by manufacturer, price range, and Megapixel level. They also provide links to reviews for each camera listing.

A final thought about Megapixels: As I pointed out above, you do not need a high-Megapixel camera to take photos for eBay. However, most people also use their cameras for other things such as family and vacation shots. So as long as you are buying a camera, you may wish to consider buying a larger Megapixel camera anyway.

The higher the Megapixel (MP) rating of the camera, the larger you will be able to print photos. For example if you have a 2 MP camera you can print very nice 5 x 7 photos but if you tried to print an 8 x 10 or larger, the print will not be very sharp. With a 6 MP or higher camera you can print really large photos –even as large as 16 x 20. Some new cameras are now on the market with MP capacity of 9 or 10 MP and even higher. When you get up to this range you are getting into professional cameras. They are very expensive and usually appeal to hobbyists or the pros. But what they can do is amazing. We have a gallery here in our town that sells digital photographs by local art photographers. I was looking at a landscape print the other day that was 24 x 36 inches and the quality of the print was amazing. I am sure this photographer used a 9 MP or higher camera.

Once you have chosen a camera, selecting the right equipment and accessories is the next step. All digital cameras come with a built-in flash. In general, however, **flash does not work out well for most product photography**. It creates shadows, reflections, and hotspots. Also when you shoot with flash the lighting is very flat. It makes your objects appear not to have any depth. Therefore, you will need to turn the automatic flash off and use some type of lighting. Another important accessory is a tripod to insure you get sharp photos. Lastly there is the issue of backdrops and props.

Lighting

Digital cameras prefer static light rather than flash. Static lighting also gives you more control over the look of your photos. The cheapest solution is either the simple student gooseneck desk lamp or the clamp-on reflectors you can buy at most hardware stores for about \$5 each. Better solutions however, are light stands. These give you greater flexibility. You can shorten them up to place on a table, or completely elevated to shoot larger objects.



Figure 2.1 –Clamp reflector and gooseneck lamp

There are several types of bulbs you may want to consider.

I would stay away from halogen as a lot of digital cameras don't have a white balance setting for halogen. Also, halogen gets quite hot.

Some of the larger light manufacturers such as Sylvania and GE make daylight-balanced incandescent bulbs –but they are not truly daylight balanced and I find I don't get great results as my white balance is always a little off. The best solution is a daylight-balanced fluorescent photo-bulb. A 30-watt bulb of this type puts out as much light as a normal 100 watt bulb and they stay cool. They are a bit expensive at around \$10 each, but they last forever. I have had mine for three years and they are still going strong. You can buy daylight balanced bulbs at www.warehousephoto.com. Click on the link to *Bulbs and Lamps* in the category navigation.



Figure 2.2 –Daylight balanced light bulb

Tripods

Digital cameras are biased towards slow shutter speeds in the automatic mode. Also, as you will learn later, there will be many times you will want to shoot through a small lens opening. This will also result in slower shutter speeds. Slow shutter speeds require a camera to be held perfectly still or you will get a blurred or un-sharp image.

I suggest you buy two tripods –a small tabletop model for close-ups and a floor model for most of your shooting needs. Stay away from the cheap lightweight models or the very lightweight travel models. What you want is sturdiness. A sturdy tripod is more expensive but there are plenty of secondhand tripods around. You can find them in the used section of large camera stores and I often see them at garage sales. I bought the Slik 6600 tripod shown in Figure 2.3 at a garage sale a number of years ago for \$10 when they retailed at over \$60. You can now get the earlier model for under \$30 at www.BHphotovideo.com.

Another nice feature of the Slik tripod is a quick-release head. This is a piece that screws into the tripod mounting screw on the camera and clicks into the tripod head. You just push a button to release the camera from the tripod instead of having to unscrew it all of the time.

Some eBay sellers specialize in high-quality used photo equipment. Check out the photography discussion board and note the usernames of the regular experts, then take a look at their auctions. They have some good deals on quality products. I searched the term *tripod* on eBay and there were over 1400 auction listings.

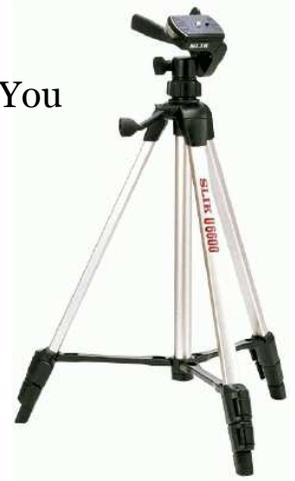


Figure 2.3 –Slik floor-tripod (model 6600)

Backdrops and Reflectors

Let's deal with reflectors first. In later chapters we will show you how to use a reflector to bounce light back into your images to eliminate shadows. Other ways to do this are with fill lights and light tents.

We will cover both of those options as well.

You can buy a pre-made reflector, but over

the years I have found that a piece of white foam core board works just fine. If your object is lit from the side, simply hold up the foam core board on the opposite side and it will bounce light back into the shadows of your photo.

You can buy a pre-made reflector, but a piece of white foam core board works just fine.

Backdrops are used to eliminate clutter, diffuse shadows, and give your photos a more professional look. For small objects that will fit on a table top, a backdrop is nothing more than a curved piece of cloth or poster board attached to the front of the table and curved and tacked against a wall. For shooting larger objects, you can hang up a sheet, plain colored blanket or any colored cloth. The idea is to neutralize the background so all of the attention is focused on your photo.

Another useful piece of hardware is a copy stand. This is for shooting flat objects such as sports cards, stamps, and autographs and so on. Of course you can always use a scanner, but the copy stand has the advantage of being much cheaper and ultimately reliable –there is nothing to break.

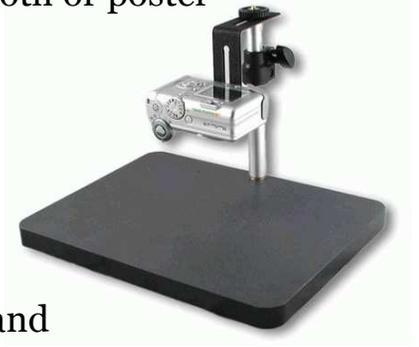


Figure 2.4 –copy stand

Table top studio

There are several types of table top studios on the market. A popular model is the Cloud Dome. The Cloud Dome is a plastic sphere with a hole in the top for shooting through. It works great for fairly small objects but I have always found it somewhat limiting to use.

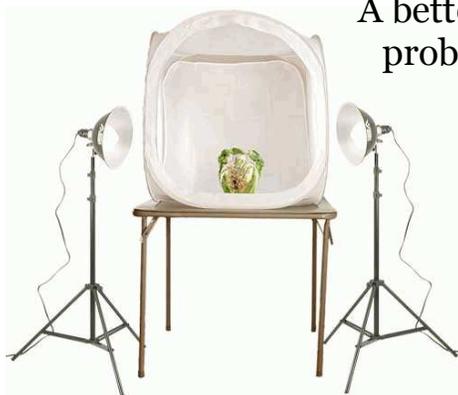


Figure 2.6 - EZ Cube Table Top Photo Studios

A better option is the EZ Cube light tent. The EZ Cube is probably the most widely used system by eBay sellers. It makes taking great photos easy. You simply place an object inside the light tent, shine the lights on the outside, and you get very nice diffused light. This eliminates glare and reflection from shiny objects. It comes with a white seamless background, and you can place different colored paper or cloth in the background to get different background colors and effects. With about 1 hour of practice,

anyone can take professional-looking photos.



The EZ Cube tents are available at www.ezauctiontools.com. They come in several sizes. You can just buy the light tents alone, or complete setups with lights, stands, and background sweeps. They even make a large 55 inch model for large objects and special kits for photographing jewelry and glassware.

Tool & Props for Shooting Specific Items

If you are shooting apparel, you should invest in a dress form or mannequin. Then place the mannequin against a wall draped with cloth to contrast the color and diffuse any shadows. For small pieces of apparel, instead of a mannequin, you could use an adjustable dress form or dressmakers dummy.



to
you



If you are shooting jewelry, you might want to invest in jewelry display pieces hold rings, necklaces and bracelets like see in a jewelry store. A great source



Figure 2.8 - Whale Tail Earring Display & Neck Bust Combo

for these supplies is www.jewelrystools.com

I also find uses for clothes pins and stationary clips to hold things in place. Another great product available at www.ezauctiontools.com is Quakehold Gel. This is a clear gel you can use to hold objects in position such as standing a coin up on edge or keeping a cup from rolling if you lay it on its side.

Another standard for the photo studio is a can of Dustoff spray. Dust and dirt are enemies of cameras and good photographs. A can of Dustoff will really come in handy.

Save Time and Get Better Photos With a Monitor

Finally, you might want to consider purchasing an old TV set or monitor. I find that so often a photo that looks good on the 2-inch LCD screen on the camera doesn't look so great once I upload it to my computer. A TV can help fix this problem.

Most digital cameras come with a *video out* port. You run the wire from the *video out* on the camera to the *video in* on the TV set. Now, when you turn on both your camera and the TV, whatever is displayed on the camera's small LCD screen will be shown on the much larger TV screen. This allows you to check the lighting and spot any reflections, shadows or hot spots before you take the picture and you can look at the finished photograph to check for sharpness and correct exposure before you upload it to your computer. Make sure the TV screen is not in a position to produce reflections or glare on your photos.

I have intentionally tried to keep this book short and to the point. Rather than try and give you a three week course on digital photography, I have organized the most important information as a series of short and easy-to-understand subjects.

Immediately improve your eBay and website photos so you can make more money.

Take your time going through these. They may seem simple but are really very important.

If you want to read more about digital photography there are several books on the market that span the gamut from beginner to advanced. My goal here is to immediately improve your eBay and website photos so you can make more money.

If you follow these next steps you will see immediate improvement in your photographs.

Use a tripod

Unless you are shooting outdoors or using a flash, digital cameras tend to use a very slow shutter speed. With a slow shutter speed, typically under $1/125^{\text{th}}$ of a second, most people cannot hold a camera steady enough to prevent blur.



Putting your camera on a good sturdy tripod will enable you to shoot all the way down to $1/10^{\text{th}}$ of a second with good results. As I have said before, make sure your tripod is sturdy and has an adjustable head that will rotate the camera both horizontally and vertically. A sturdy tripod can cost as much as \$75, but as I mentioned earlier, you can buy professional quality- tripods second-hand on eBay or at a garage sale for as little as \$20 to \$30. I have also seen decent new tripods selling on eBay in this same price range.

Focus carefully and correctly

I see out-of-focus pictures on eBay every day. This is usually attributed to one of two things: autofocus malfunction or lack of depth of field. Most digital cameras project a laser or infrared beam onto the object being photographed and measure the reflection to determine the focus. This

beam can often be fooled by large objects that allow the beam to spread out or something reflective on the object that fools the beam.

The other issue is depth of field. Depth of field is the focal distance the camera will cover. The aperture (or lens opening) on a camera adjusts to allow more or less light into the camera. When the lens opening is large, the camera has a very narrow range of focus. When the opening is small, the focal length is longer.

Shooting an object close up, I typically use the highest aperture number available.

The aperture can be set manually on most of the digital cameras I listed earlier. Lens openings are marketed as a series of numbers that range from f/3.5 to f/16. The higher the number, the more depth of field the camera has. This is critical when shooting up close with the macro function, as the macro function also limits the depth of field. If I am shooting an object close up, I typically use the highest aperture number available on the camera. In Figure 3.1 below, you can see that only a very narrow range of the newsprint is in focus because the aperture on this shot is set with the lens to a low number which correlates to a very wide lens opening. If you took this same shot with the lens opening set at the highest setting, all of the newsprint would be in focus.

In addition to the manual setting, most cameras have a setting called aperture priority. This is where you manually set the aperture and the camera sets the corresponding shutter speed automatically.

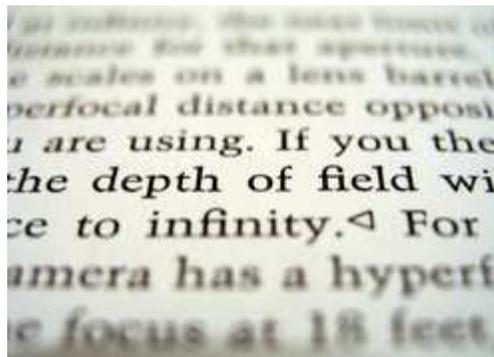


Fig. 3.1 - Example of depth of field when the lens opening is set very wide, i.e. to a low number

If you would like a more complete explanation of depth of field with illustrations and examples, just type that term into the online encyclopedia at www.wikipedia.com.

Use soft lighting

Sunlight or direct light from a bulb or a flash will create hot spots and reflections in your photos. If you are shooting outside, you want to shoot in bright shade or on a cloudy day. If you are shooting inside, a north-facing

window can often produce very nice diffused light. If you are using artificial light, you can either purchase white plastic light covers to diffuse the light or use a light tent such as the EZ Cube (see Chapter 2).

Avoid clutter

Try to photograph only the object you are shooting. Placing an object on a table with other clutter in the background will detract from your subject. If you are shooting a computer for example, remove everything from the desk it's on and hide the wires and any other distracting objects. If you are shooting a car, drive the car to a park where you can shoot it with lawn and trees in the background, instead of your garage or driveway.

While I was working on this book I saw a photo for an eBay auction for a small table top tripod. The seller put the tripod on his dining room table and took a photograph of it. The photo was in focus which is about the only good thing I could say about the picture. He must have taken the shot just after lunch because the dirty dishes were visible in the background.

The best way to avoid clutter is with a background cloth, poster board or something behind the object you are shooting. A very simple solution for small objects is a piece of poster board clamped to a chair (as discussed in chapter 2).

Avoid underexposure

If you are shooting objects on a white or bright background or shooting outside in bright light, your camera's automatic light meter can often be fooled by trying to adjust to the surrounding bright light rather than the object.

You're underexposing if a white background appears grey in the photo.

Most good digital cameras have over/under exposure compensation adjustment. If you are shooting on a white background such as in an EZ Cube, try setting your camera's exposure setting to +1. This will increase the amount of light on the subject. One way you can tell you are underexposing is if a white background appears grey in the photo. If this happens, or if your objects are just too dark, try adjusting the exposure compensation until the white looks white.

Use the correct white balance

Different types of light have different wavelengths. Without getting into a discussion of physics, this means you have to set up the camera for the type of light you are using. If your camera is set on daylight and you shoot with an ordinary household light bulb (also known as tungsten), your photos will appear yellow. If you shoot with a fluorescent light, your photos will appear blue-grey. You can purchase daylight bulbs at most camera stores- these are fluorescent light bulbs that have the same wavelength as daylight.

Incandescent and Tungsten are the same thing—common household light bulbs

Most cameras will have white balance settings such as daylight, incandescent, fluorescent and so on. Some cameras have an automatic white balance setting. This allows you to push a button on the camera to tell it “this is the light you are using.” The camera will then adjust for the correct white balance.

Get close to your subject

Getting close to your subject will produce a better photo. It is easier to focus accurately when you are close, and the image will show more of the object without the distracting clutter. If you are shooting with the *macro* (close-up) setting on your camera, I find it easier to get more depth of field (so all of the item is in focus) by backing off so the object fill about 1/2 of the frame, then cropping the photo later.

If you find your photos are not sharp after cropping, try setting the *image quality* setting on your camera a little higher –at least one higher than the smallest or *email* setting. This will preserve the quality. The photos in figure 3.2 were shot at the medium setting on a 2.0 Megapixel camera.



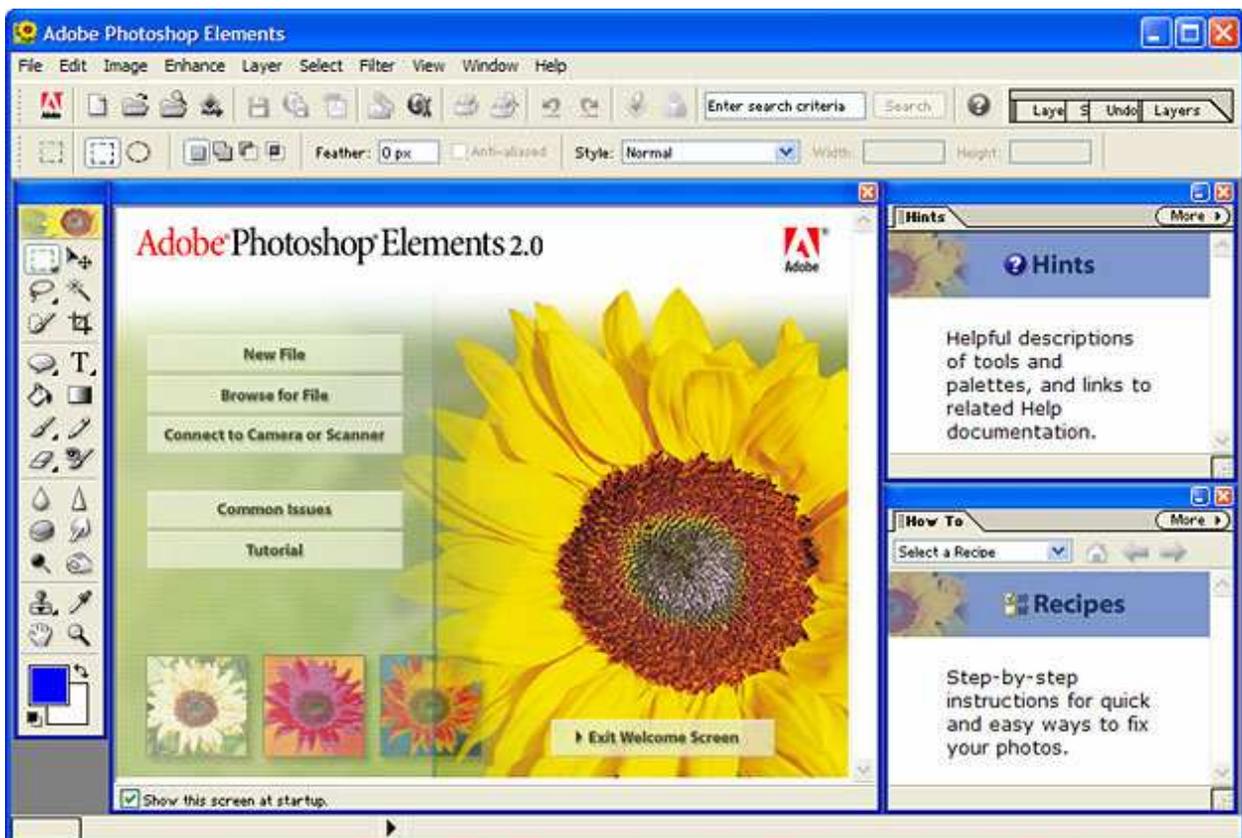
Figure 3.2 – Example of a before and after cropped photo

Editing your photos refers to the ability to crop, resize, and adjust the color balance, contrast, and brightness of your photos. These tasks are accomplished with photo editing software. Probably the most well known photo editing software is Photoshop by Adobe. Photoshop is fairly expensive and is probably overkill for the needs of the auction or website photographer.

Most digital cameras come with software that you can use to upload, name, catalog, and edit your photos. The software from Kodak, Nikon, and Canon are excellent. Sony has the most limited photo editing software. It is designed more for making albums and slide shows for relatives and friends than actual editing.

If you own a Macintosh, the iPhoto program that comes pre-installed your system is excellent. It is very easy to use. You can crop, rotate, resize, adjust contrast and brightness, and reduce red eye. Best of all, you can create product files by category and sort them before you start uploading, which saves a lot of time.

In 2005 Adobe came out with a scaled down program called PhotoShop



Elements. It sells for less than \$100 and will do almost everything an auction photographer will need to do.

This software allows you to easily rotate, crop and resize your photos. If you take photos of people or animals it will also give you a way to get rid of the red eye effect that happens when you use flash. Other features are increase or decrease contrast, clean up unsightly backgrounds and enhance colors.

Another easy to use and inexpensive program is Microsoft's *Digital Image Suite 2006*. This program is also available for under \$100 with a \$40 rebate from Microsoft. It does everything that elements can do and more.

Finally there are several free programs available from the popular download sites such as www.tucows.com and www.download.com. Two of the most popular are Advanced Photo Editor and Turbo Photo. I recently tried a program called PhotoMeister Professional that did almost everything iPhoto does. It is free to download for one month; after that you must pay \$39.95 if you want to keep it. I have not tried it but Google has a free download for a program called Picasa at: <http://picasa.google.com>.

Storing your photos

When you upload photos from a camera they come with file names such as 12345.jpg. This is not very helpful when you are trying to find a certain product photo. So, as you are editing your photos, you will want to save them to a file with a descriptive name. But, don't forget to leave the file type which is the letters after the dot, such as .jpg, .gif, .tif and so on.

Most photo editing software gives you the option of how to save the file. If you are going to upload photos to your eBay auctions, the only two file types eBay will accept are .jpg and .gif. However, if you are going to put a photo in the eBay gallery, it must be .jpg.

Since digital cameras are all set to shoot in .jpg as the default setting, I recommend you just stick with .jpg for all of your eBay and Internet photos. Other file types such as .tif are usually used by publishing companies where a very high quality printed image is required.

Storing, managing, and inserting images into your auctions are critical functions, but you can waste a lot of time on these tasks if you don't have a good management system in place. There are basically three ways to host and manage your photos: You can use eBay picture services, host them on your auction management service, or host them on a website. Let's look at each in turn.

eBay Picture Services

eBay offers two ways to manage your images. You can insert images from your computer's hard drive into your auctions one at a time using *Basic Picture Services* or *Enhanced Picture Services*. The latter allows some minor editing functions, but is only available for PC users. On either system, the first photo is free, and each additional photo costs 15¢, so if you used four photos in an auction it would cost you 45¢ for every auction whether the item sold or not. This is obviously too expensive if you are running dozens of auctions a week.



Figure 5.1 –eBay Picture Services

Powerseller Tip

Props, props, props. If you sell clothes, buy a mannequin. If you sell Barbie Dolls, buy bubblegum pink cloth for a backdrop or just lay it next to the dolls. If you sell wooden ducks, buy some greenery at a local craft store and use it in your photo layout.

- eBay Powerseller,
TheCabanagirl

eBay also offers a subscription hosting program based on the total file size you host. The cost is \$9.95 for 50MB, \$19.95 for 125MB, and \$39.95 for 300MB. Free editing software is included in the price, but it's pretty basic and not all that much of a bonus because there are dozens of free shareware editing programs you can download from www.tucows.com or www.download.com.

eBay does offer a couple of nice features with their picture service. One is supersize, where clicking on the photo will enlarge it for easier viewing. The other is slide show, where your photos rotate through the

auction one after the other. Of course, eBay charges extra fees for these services. Supersize is 75¢ for all photos in the auction and slide show is an additional 25¢.

You can get a better deal by using the picture pack which gives you 6 photos, slideshow, gallery insertion (which is usually 35¢) and supersize for \$1.00. A la Carte, these services would cost you \$2.00 total. If you have a lot of pictures, the 12 picture pack is \$1.50.

As for photo management, eBay offers very little. Basically you will have to manage your images in folders on your hard drive.

The only reason I can think of to use eBay's picture services is if you are using eBay Selling Manager Pro as your auction management tool and you want a service that easily integrates with it. The service is just not powerful and automated enough for the busy Powerseller.

Auction Management Image Services

Almost all of the popular auction management services, such as Auctiva ChannelAdvisor, Vendio, and Marketworks, include image storage as part of their service. Most include image storage as part of their basic fee while a few charge separately for this. Not all the services, however, include a management function.

In Vendio (<http://tinyurl.com/r6ew3>), for example, I can create my inventory items by category, such as men's apparel, women's apparel, and children's apparel. Then I can create image folders with those same category names and associate the image folders with the product folders. This way, when I am creating an auction I don't have to hunt through hundreds of unrelated images to find the one I am looking for. This is a major timesaving feature and one that you should look for when selecting an auction management service.

The images are stored on the website of the auction management service. When you create an auction, you simply select the photo you want to use with a mouse click. The service inserts the URL of the particular image into your auction. When the auction launches, eBay locates the images and displays them in your auction. If you select a gallery image, that URL is fed constantly to eBay's website so it is always visible when members are searching or browsing the gallery.

Most of the auction management services do not offer image editing on the site, so you do have to crop, rotate, and resize your images before uploading them.

Besides hosting and editing your photos, Vendio (<http://tinyurl.com/r6ew3>) offers a whole suite of services that will save you time launching auctions and handling payment, feedback posting and more.

Storing Images on a Website

You can also store images on a website. If you already own a website it doesn't cost anything more to store your images. Of course you will have to be versed in the use of File Transfer Protocol (FTP) programs to upload your images, and you will have to configure a way to locate and manage all your images. Every time you want to launch an auction, you will have to navigate to your website, open the image, and copy the URL to paste into your auction description or auction management program.

I think the cost savings is outweighed by the time involved.

Frankly this is a real pain, and I think the cost savings is outweighed by the time involved. The only advantage I can see of hosting your own photos is the availability of some specialized programs, such as JPEG Magic at <http://tinyurl.com/ycnrre> which can compress large photos for fast loading. These programs enable you to load lots of photos and very large photos very quickly. So if you are selling products that require the use of a lot of images, such as automobiles, this might be something you want to explore.

Third-Party Image Hosting Services

The final option is to use a third-party image hosting service. I won't bother to name all the various services here because there are way too many. If you type image hosting into the Google or Yahoo! search bar, you will get dozens of listings.

Most of the paid services cost as little as \$5 a month

Some of the services are free, but are often slow, not very secure, and peppered with advertising banners. Most of the paid services cost as little as \$5 a month. This will get you enough storage to host over 1,000 images, and many of the sites include management tools such as folders, editing software, and the ability to email photos right from the site.

Two sites that I have had good experiences with are www.photobucket.com (free) and www.inkfrog.com (plans start at \$4.95/month).

Having reviewed all the possibilities, I strongly favor hosting your images on an auction management service. The various services such as Auctiva, Andale, Vendio, and Marketworks are inexpensive and offer a degree of automation and convenience that you simply cannot duplicate with offline

I strongly favor hosting images on an auction management service.

management system.

software or the eBay launching tools. You may wonder about the cost, but if you think about it, what you save on eBay photo hosting will usually cover the monthly cost of an auction

Here are nine tips for using photos in your auctions. Follow these tips and you will get more and higher bids on your auctions.

Follow the instructions in this book to take good photos. Blurry or overexposed images and photos with junk or distraction in the background really turn off bidders and will hurt your auction results. Take the time to go through your camera's instruction manual and become familiar with the features and controls.

Compose your photo and use a clean background. One of the most famous photo stories on eBay is a fellow who used to like working at home in the nude. He was selling a silver teapot which is highly reflective. When he put the photo on eBay, if you looked carefully at the teapot you could see a perfect reflection of a naked man holding a camera. Although this may be an urban myth, I can't tell you the number of times I have seen photos with distractions in the background.

Keep your images small so they download quickly. Bidders hate waiting for large (high pixel count) images to load and they will often click away from your auction. Keep your images under 75KB.

Use enough photographs to show all the details a bidder would want to see. This does require a balance. If your auction has too many photos they will take a long time to load (see #2). Too few, and the bidder does not get enough information. Three to four photos is about right.

Be sure to show close ups of the object and always reveal any flaws if you are selling a used item, an antique or collectible, or anything where the condition of the item is important. If a seller finds out later the item had a flaw, they may want to return the item or leave you negative feedback.

Make your item stand out. Use a neutral or contrasting background. Avoid pattern on the background because they will distract from the image. Rich colors can often add drama to a photo. If you are shooting silver, try a purple or royal blue background. Bright yellow or bright red works well for some items too.

Add a scale if the size of an item is not commonly known. You can show a ruler or put a common item everyone knows the size of such as a coin or book of matches next to an item so people can tell how large it is.

Don't use photos that you copy from the web or other sources.

For one thing they are usually copyrighted and that can get you in trouble through eBay's VeRO (Verified Rights Owner) program. The other issue is that buyers want to see an actual photo of the item they are about to buy, not a stock one from the manufacturer's website.

Protect your photos. You have taken the time to take a great photo, and some other lazy eBay seller sees it, right clicks on it, and copies it to his hard drive. The best way to protect your photos is to watermark them. Once again if you go to Download.com or Tucows.com and type *watermark photo* into the search box, you will find several free programs that will create a watermark on the bottom of your photo. I use Vendio to launch my auctions which provides a free watermarking service.

Glossary of Terms

Aperture – Another name for the lens opening. This adjusts to allow more or less light into the camera which adjusts the range of focus. When the lens opening is large, it has a very narrow range of focus. When the opening is small, the range of focus is longer.

Aperture Priority – A camera setting which adjusts the shutter speed to match whatever manual aperture setting you use.

Depth of Field – The area around the subject that appears to be in focus.

Exposure – The amount of light that is allowed into the camera. This is identified by the EV (exposure value) setting which can be a positive or a negative number. If you get grey backgrounds instead of white, you should adjust the EV setting. Some cameras call this the Auto-Exposure setting. There will usually be a menu item or a setting on the camera where you see a series of + and – numbers, for example: -.5, -1, -1.5, +.5, +1 and +1.5

f/3.5 – f/16 – Lens openings are marked as a series of numbers from f/3.5 to f/16. The higher the number, the smaller the lens opening and the more Depth of Field the camera has. Use the highest aperture number when shooting up close with the Macro setting.

Incandescent – A type of light bulb. This is also known as Tungsten. It is just a common household light bulb.

Macro – A setting which adjusts the focal length for close up photography.

Megapixel – The measurement of resolution for a digital camera. The higher the megapixels, the better the resolution (and larger the file size). One Megapixel is one million pixels.

Tungsten – A type of light bulb. This is also known as Incandescent. It is just a common household light bulb.

White Balance – Adjusts the color temperature based upon the lighting source used. Options usually include Incandescent/Tungsten, Daylight, Fluorescent, and Halogen. If you are using regular household light bulbs, choose the Incandescent/Tungsten option (symbol usually looks like a light bulb).

Zoom- Optical – The lens physically moves in and out as you adjust the zoom. You do not lose resolution quality with Optical Zoom.

Zoom- Digital – The image on the screen gets bigger or smaller, but the lens does not move. You lose resolution quality using Digital Zoom. It is just like enlarging a picture in your photo editing program. It is much better to use Optical Zoom when shooting up close, or get as close to the object as possible so you don't need to use the Digital Zoom.

Common Camera Icons



Automatic white balance setting for tungsten/incandescent household bulbs



Automatic white balance setting for cloudy day



Automatic white balance setting for fluorescent lighting



Automatic white balance setting for shaded outdoors



Automatic white balance setting for daylight



Custom white balance setting



Delete image from camera



Exposure compensation



Flash is on



Flash is off



Automatic setting for taking pictures of landscapes



Automatic setting for taking portrait pictures



Automatic setting for night-time photography



Macro setting for close up photography



Red-eye reduction



Self-timer



Auto setting (usually found on dial on top of camera)



Manual setting

About the Authors



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