

Crack the eBay Store Traffic Code

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SEO for Your eBay Store

"My online store is on eBay," you say. "I get all my traffic from eBay, so I don't have to worry about search engines."

It's true you can ignore your eBay store's relationship with search engines and you might do fine on eBay. But what might happen if you didn't ignore them? Search engines can bring you more customers, and for free. What if someone looking for widgets just like yours doesn't happen to think of looking on eBay? Wouldn't you like this customer to find your eBay store when they search Google, Yahoo or MSN?

Many of the stores on eBay have names similar to those you'll find hung on shops downtown or at the mall. These eBay stores might have catchy graphic designs and could be stocked with wonderful products, but customers are only going to find these stores through links the owners have placed in emails, on other websites, or in listings on eBay.

Bring up any eBay store in your browser. If you can't think of one off hand, try periodpaper.com (a very successful eBay store). In the page title (at the very top of your browser) what are the first words after "eBay Store"? The name of the store is first. Did you know that page title is one of the most common ways pages are indexed by search engines like Google?

What if you named your store something like "Gold Plated Handmade Family Widgets"? eBay gives you 35 spaces for your name, so what if you fill that entire space with the words your customer is going to use looking for widgets like yours? Think of words you would type into a search engine if you were shopping for a product like your own. You might include a brand name, or some feature you need, and of course you would type in the name of the item. These search words are the same words to include in your eBay store's name.

These search words are called "keywords". Do you think people will search for the keyword "Bob"? If not, don't call your store "Bob's Widgets". Will potential customers use the word "cheap" or "economy" when they're looking for widgets like yours? If so, include these words proudly in your eBay store name.

For the best placement in search engine results, pack keywords into all of the 35 spaces eBay allows for your store name. In the long run, you'll reach more new customers than ever would find an eBay store with a clever name.

But it doesn't stop there. Let's go back to our example eBay Store and click on any of the store categories (usually in the left hand column of the store page). What's directly after the store's name in the page title? The category is next. So categories are the next important element in optimizing an eBay store for search engine placement.

If you think it's important to use a descriptive title for your eBay listing (and it is), in some ways your store title and the name of the category within your eBay store is just as, or more important. A listing's title help you within eBay (it's what makes people click on your listing), but your store name and the names of your categories are important outside of eBay.

Choose descriptive names for your categories, packed with keywords people will type into search engines. At last count, eBay provides 30 spaces to name your categories. How many descriptive keywords can you pack into those 30 spaces?

But Let's Take a Little Side Road

Now before we go any further, there is a preparation step I recommend you take. It will help you create short, easy to remember links you can use in the optimization techniques I'm going to explain below.

But just as importantly, this extra step could directly bring you more money from every item you sell. Did you know eBay will actually pay you to promote your store?

eBay collects what it calls a final value fee from every item sold on the site. This fee is on top of the listing fee, and is based on a percentage of the item's final price. You might think of this as eBay's commission (Yes, I know they've already collected a listing fee, but this is eBay we're talking about; we won't even get started on the fees they collect on top of everything else through their PayPal

service!). But what eBay doesn't promote much is the fact that they'll credit back to you 75% of this final value fee if a store inventory item is sold through a special link.

If you place a link to your store anywhere off eBay, and the link includes a special extension, any purchases made through that link will qualify for the final value fee refund. eBay calls this a Store Referral Credit. You can link to your store's main page, your About Me page, your internal search page, a store category page within your store, a search results page within your store based on keywords you've set, a custom or landing page you have created within your store. To qualify you must add a referral code to the end of the URL (?refid=store or &refid=store, depending on which part of your Store you direct buyers to).

Now that makes for a fairly long web address. Wouldn't you like to have something shorter that still gives you the store referral credits?

Register a short domain (that would be something like "wigets.com") and redirect this domain to "stores.ebay.com/YOURSTORENAME/?refid=store", and each time someone types your domain in the browser to visit your store you'll get the Store Referral Credit for their purchases. So you can use this short new domain to create links in emails, on web pages, blogs, in forum signatures or anywhere else.

You can setup a redirect of your domain to any web address. This is accomplished in the control panel of the domain registration service you select. Since every domain registrar will have different steps for setting up a redirect, the directions are beyond the scope of this report. Refer to your registrar's website for instructions.

Now Back to the Topic at Hand

Now as we come back to optimizing your store, remember this: the search engines will think your eBay store is only as important as the number of relevant websites who link back to it (these links are called "backlinks"). Search engines want to provide their customers with links to the best sites, and if lots of people are linking to a site then it must be good. Right?

Aside from optimizing your store so search engines will index it in a way that benefits you, building backlinks might be the most important thing you can do to increase the number of visitors delivered by these search engines.

Here are some ideas for building backlinks to your eBay store:

- Promote your store by creating its own blog. Consider using one of the free blogs at wordpress.com or blogger.com, since your blog at one of these sites will get much more attention than you would be likely to generate from a self-hosted option. Google owns Blogger, so you can rest assured they are going to love their own blogs the best! Make sure to give your blog a name that refers to your store's primary product so the search engines treat your page titles more favorably. You could try eBay's internal blog system (check the Community link at eBay), but last I checked these blogs weren't really a way to get much exposure. The most important element of a store blog is the links back to your eBay store (using your domain name with the referral code!).
- Write short articles (250-500 words) about a topic related to the merchandise you sell in your store and submit them to a free article directory. These directories allow you to place a link to your site in the author information area on each article. Your article will be indexed by search engines and borrow some of the page ranking power of the article directory you've used (page rank is a link's placement on the search results page). Your article could also be picked up by another website or an ezine, thereby spreading your link to a whole new audience. Submit your articles to goarticles.com and ezinearticles.com. Not only will your articles directly bring in visitors to your eBay store, but the backlinks (remember those?) will help your store's search engine placement.
- Submit these same articles to eBay's internal system of Reviews and Guides. This helps build your reputation and establish your expertise among eBay users. Check this out at reviews.ebay.com. Again, you're also building backlinks.
- Use a software solution to submit your store link to directories. There are thousands of such directories, and like I said about other links, these backlinks to your store will improve your search engine placement at Google, Yahoo and MSN. Automated software will make the submission task much more efficient. Try this one, it's free and the best I've found: marketersos.com/directory-submitter/Directory-Submitter.zip.

Issues like "page ranking" and "backlinks" may not be the most exciting part of running an eBay store. These issues aren't the least bit glamorous and they have nothing to do with customer service (except making a shorter web address your customers can more easily remember). However, they could be the most important elements of building traffic to your store, increasing your sales and building your profits.

If these techniques are ignored, your customers won't know the difference. But if these techniques are ignored, you will have fewer customers to worry about anyway. Isn't it expensive enough to run an eBay store to make this little extra effort worthwhile?

Here's to your success,

Terry Heath

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"Words, Images, and What Makes Them Work"