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STARTING A BUSINESS ON EBAY AND AMAZON

As my readers know, I travel the country talking to people who make a living selling stuff on eBay, Amazon, Etsy and the other online e-commerce platforms.

As a lawyer and business consultant, I'm not always able to answer the more technical questions people have about starting and maintaining their online accounts on eBay and Amazon. But, as we used to say in the Bronx when I was a kid growing up, "I know a guy, who knows a guy, who knows a guy. . ."

Here are some of the best guys (and gals) I know who can help you get your online retail business off to a solid start, and who will be there for you when the going gets rough.

How Do I Get Started on eBay?

The eBay website offers an excellent online tutorial for "newbie" eBay sellers that walks you step by step through the process of setting up an account and listing items. You can find it here: <https://www.ebay.com/help/selling/selling/start-selling-ebay?id=4081>.

eBay also offers a weekly podcast for sellers, hosted by Jim Griffith, one of its senior executives, which you can find here: https://community.ebay.com/t5/eBay-Podcast/ct-p/eBay_podcast. Keep in mind that the show, being hosted by eBay, will offer only the "official" position on topics of interest to the seller community, and may be too basic for more advanced sellers.

For help with specific topics, new eBay sellers should bookmark the "Seller Central" page on eBay, https://pages.ebay.com/seller-center/index.html?utm_source=gf&utm_medium=onsite, for an index of numerous articles and FAQ pages, arranged in alphabetical order. Another very useful page on the eBay website worth bookmarking is one listing, again in alphabetical order, items you cannot legally sell online: <https://www.ebay.com/help/policies/prohibited-restricted-items/prohibited-restricted-items?id=4207>.

If you are not a "do it yourself" sort of person and want human help in setting up your accounts, your best bet is to join a "meetup group" of eBay sellers. There are lots of these throughout the United States and Canada, offering monthly meetings and personalized "one on one" help and support for both newbie and experienced sellers. To find the group nearest you, go to <https://www.meetup.com/topics/ebaysell> or search online for "ebay seller meetup group [your state]".

Finally, if you need one-on-one help from a professional eBay seller, search online for "ebay consultant [your state]". You will pay by the hour, but the job will be done right. Some of my favorites are Stephanie Inge (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephanieinge>), Kathy Terrill (<https://ilovetobeselling.com>), Deena Quilty (deenaq@gmail.com) and Danna Crawford (<https://powersellingmom.com/ebay-consignment-selling>).

How Do I Get Started on Amazon?

Selling on Amazon is a much different experience than selling on eBay. On the plus side, Amazon is a MUCH bigger marketplace than eBay, with more automated service and warehouses throughout the country, and offers small “Mom and Pop” sellers a “Fulfillment By Amazon” (FBA) service where they handle shipping/fulfillment of your merchandise from their warehouses. On the negative side, Amazon is more controlling of its sellers’ activities, charges higher fees, does not offer an auction format (so less desirable for antiques, collectibles and other “one of a kind” items), may expose you to sales and other taxes in states other than where you’re located, makes it harder to develop a brand identity, and (this one’s a biggie folks) THEY COMPETE WITH YOU by offering their own merchandise, often right next to your listings.

Like eBay, Amazon offers an online tutorial for newbie sellers, which you can find here: <https://services.amazon.com/selling/getting-started.html>. As part of the startup process, you will need to decide between Amazon’s “Fulfillment by Amazon” (FBA) and “Fulfillment by Merchant” (FBM) programs. For help in deciding which is right for your business, check out <https://feedvisor.com/university/fbm-or-fba>.

Next, sign up for Skip McGrath’s weekly Amazon sellers’ blog at <https://www.skipmcgrath.com/blog1>. Skip is a top-ranked Amazon seller who has been offering advice and resources for Amazon sellers since the very beginning on topics ranging from product sourcing in China to new software solutions to navigating Amazon’s often Byzantine seller support team.

If you’re looking for more personalized help in getting started on Amazon, go to <https://www.meetup.com/topics/amazon-seller> or <https://amzsummits.com/amazon-seller-meetups>, or search for “amazon seller consultant [your state]”. Some of my favorites are Bob Willey (www.sellercoaching.com), Karen Locker (www.solutions4ecommerce.com), and Chris Green (www.amazon.com/Mr.-Chris-Green/e/B005PPUPX2).

What If I Get Into Trouble?

Ebay and Amazon each have their own rules and regulations for sellers, and it’s easy to make mistakes. Sooner or later, your account is likely to be “suspended” because someone (usually a competitor) thinks you are selling counterfeit merchandise or are selling trademarked merchandise without authorization from the manufacturer.

For a listing of eBay’s rules, go to <https://www.ebay.com/help/policies/member-behaviour-policies/user-agreement?id=4259>.

For Amazon’s rules, go to https://sellercentral.amazon.com/gp/help/external/G521?language=en_US.

If your account is suspended or shut down, it’s best to get expert advice before you deal with eBay’s or Amazon’s customer service personnel. A “cottage industry” of people has sprouted up in recent years offering to help suspended eBay and Amazon sellers get back on track: my favorites are Cynthia Stine (www.egrowthpartners.com) and attorney C.J. Rosenbaum (www.amazonsellerslawyer.com).

How Do I Deal with Sales Taxes When I Sell Online?

First of all, as a newbie online seller, you are legally required to register for sales tax in your home state. Search online for “[your state] Department of Revenue” to find the website for your state tax authority. Many local accountants will help you register for sales taxes free of charge if you ask them nicely for help (and offer to help them clean out their attics ☺).

A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision may require you to pay sales taxes in other states if you have a

significant volume of sales there (generally \$50,000 to \$100,000). For an up-to-date listing of each state's rules, check out <https://www.avalara.com/us/en/blog/category/sales-and-use-tax.html>. If you find you need to register for sales taxes in multiple states, Taxjar (www.taxjar.com) has a number of resources that will help you keep track of returns and payments.

Keep in mind that if you sell internationally, you may be subject to laws in other countries requiring you to protect data you receive about your customers there, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (see <https://gdpr-info.eu>). Also, things you can sell legally in the United States may not be legal to sell in other countries with different laws and cultural traditions. As with any business, knowing a good lawyer, and keeping him or her informed as your business grows, is the best way to stay out of legal trouble..

For general advice on your legal and tax responsibilities as an online seller, check out my popular book "The eBay Seller's Tax and Legal Handbook" (available anywhere, even on Amazon (☺)) or any of my YouTube videos on the subject (www.youtube.com, search for "Cliff Ennico").

For more information on how to get started on eBay, Amazon and other online platforms, take an hour out of your life and listen to my free on-demand webinar "Using Mega-Retail Platforms" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8X_Auk9jDjc&feature=youtu.be).

CLIFF ENNICO, best known as the host of the PBS television series "MoneyHunt", is the author of the nationally syndicated newspaper column "Succeeding in Your Business"(www.succeedinginyourbusiness.com) and the author of 16 books for entrepreneurs and business owners of all types. His latest books are "Small Business Survival Guide" (Adams, \$12.95) and "The Crowdfunding Handbook" (HarperCollins, \$19.95).